

WV Conference of The United Methodist Church

ADVENT DEVOTIONS 2022

Advent Devotions
preparing for new life...



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Welcome to Advent 2022

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Throughout our Conference, we have spent time talking about Building Bridges and Making Connections over the past couple of years. Now it's time to prepare for something new. What will come of those bridges and connections? With prayer and discernment, some kind of new life!

As we journey through the Advent season and prepare for the arrival of baby Jesus, let us also ponder what else may be beginning. Where else do you see new life? Perhaps a new program to reach new people in new places. Perhaps there is renewal within your church and vitality is emerging. Perhaps we shared the Good News with others and they now have new life in Christ because of the connections we made with them as Christians.

You'll see this theme of Preparing for New Life emerge from time to time throughout these Advent devotionals, and I invite you explore and pray about your own calling. We are all called to be disciples and servants of our Lord – how is your calling taking on new life right now?

I am grateful that so many laity of the West Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church once again responded to a call to share a message and meditation for the seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. Many of those writing devotionals have answered their own personal calling to become Certified Lay Ministers, Certified Lay Speakers, or Certified Lay Servants, or are serving in ministry in a number of other ways. Whatever journey you are being called to, I pray you will respond with a resounding “YES!”

Thank you for walking with us throughout this Advent season. Please feel free to share this opportunity with others so that they might also have an opportunity to celebrate Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany with us.

Wishing you a season of abundant blessings,

Kristi Wilkerson
Conference Lay Leader



November 27, 2022 – First Sunday of Advent

Getting Prepared

[Isaiah 40:3-5](#) (NRSV-UE)

³ A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.⁵ Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Today's scripture speaks to preparation.

A year ago, Elizabeth Memorial UMC set out on a focused and deliberate time of discernment and preparation for the future. As we emerged from Covid restrictions we wanted to continue useful practices implemented during Covid, e.g., live streaming of worship. We recognized that the global church has been changed by the pandemic; in-person attendance has significantly declined. Finally, as a largely "Boomer" church, we know that we are not getting any younger and that we needed to grow the church that we love to insure its future.

This effort was rooted in a prayer (see the prayer below) that we say at every worship service, every small group meeting, and at home. A core group of about 15 people led this effort assisted by coach Ellis Conley. The entire congregation was involved and engaged by surveys, congregational meetings, interviews and so on. We allowed ourselves time to dream and kick around ideas without rushing to a decision.

A year later, we are seeing breakthroughs in our church and in the faith journey of people in our congregation. The vision for the future of our church is not totally known but is becoming clearer. The time of preparation is working.

We still have a lot of work to do and the glimpses of the future are not yet a complete picture, but we are well on the way to making a highway for God's will in our church and in our individual lives.

Prayer: *God, please break through and open doors to new hopes, dreams and possibilities for our church and in our lives... and we will surrender and faithfully follow Christ onto the open road adventure of Your new and unknown future. We are listening Lord. May your will be done. Amen.*

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November 28, 2022

Preparing for New Life

[Isaiah 2:1-5](#)

*He shall judge between the nations
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation;
neither shall they learn war any more.*

*⁵ O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the LORD!*

These words of Isaiah's prophecy start with "In the days to come." In the days to come, things will be different. In the days to come, things will change. In the days to come, we will not be the same. How do we prepare for the days to come, for New Life? What is this New Life? Is it here on earth, or do we speak of what comes after this life on earth?

Isaiah spoke of life here on earth, a future when conflicts would be resolved--not by war--but by God's arbitration and judgments. At least that is one interpretation of this passage. And that can be a very hope-filled vision.

But what does this passage mean for me in this time of Advent, this time of preparation for the coming birth of a Savior? What does it mean to prepare for new life? Or even, what is this new life I am to prepare for?

I have accepted a call to be the Potomac Highlands District Lay Leader. That is certainly a call to a new life for me. I am now walking a new path, but yet an old path. I have never been in such a position, so it is new to me. But it is a path of God's calling, and She has prepared this path, and walks it with me.

I prepared for this by prayer and supplication, and with the prayers of friends, old and new. I took with me on my journey the words of Isaiah: to look for God's instruction and to walk by the light of the Lord.

As I write these words it sounds so simple and straight forward. But sometimes the "instruction" is not as clear as I would like and the answers to questions seem hidden in the dark.

As I am vigilant, dedicated in my spiritual disciplines (and how hard that can be sometimes!) I will hear God's voice more clearly. My "preparing" will be acknowledged: the plowshares will make ready the ground; the pruning of unproductive branches will happen as I "walk by the light of the Lord."

Prayer: *Lord God, may we walk by Your Light and so be strengthened for the days to come. Amen.*

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November 29, 2022

I Just Can't Wait!

[Psalm 122:3-5](#)

*Jerusalem—built as a city
that is bound firmly together.*

*⁴ To it the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.*

*⁵ For there the thrones for judgment were set up,
the thrones of the house of David.*

Have you ever waited for something good so long that you just didn't think you could wait any longer? I have! When I was in elementary school, it was September and since my birthday is in September, my parents said that if I started school and maintained good grades, I would get a "fancy, brand new, super style, and fast" bicycle for my birthday! I was so excited that I could hardly contain myself!

As the days went by, my birthday came and that evening -- there sat my bicycle. Of course, I had to ride it to show my friends and was so excited and proud of that bike UNTIL I rode it over a board that went across an open sewer. I was showing off and then the tire flipped and dumped both me and the brand-new bike into that sewer! I will let you imagine what my mother's shock was when I approached the house; it wasn't pretty!

As I look back, I realize how much attention and desire we can have for nice, materialistic things instead of looking for the heavenly things. I just couldn't wait to get that bike, but when I did and something happened to it, I was dejected. My "gift" was not as attractive as it used to be.

We also long to see Jesus and Heaven; we long for peace and joy to the point that some days we just can't wait. Then something happens, and it just isn't as joyful as it seemed earlier. In the Psalms, David had encountered many trials and disappointments, but he still felt the grand protection and love of the Father. Specifically, he solidified this belief in stating that "Jerusalem is built like a city that is compacted together...the tribes of the Lord—to praise the name of the Lord..."

Peace was there! What joy to know this! What joy that God has provided a gift for us as Advent comes closer. What joy knowing that one day we too will stand at the thrones of God and see Him face to face. All of this we renew each year as we await, even when we just can't wait, for the King of Kings to come again! Even so Lord Jesus, Come.

Prayer: *Jesus, as we again celebrate this season of waiting, may our eyes see your glory and majesty during these days in a new, wonderful way. May we be willing to share with others this joy so they too will know your salvation. Amen.*

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November 30, 2022

Get Ready!
1 Samuel 1:21 - 2:10

For this child I have prayed, and the Lord has granted the desires of my heart. 1 Samuel 1:27

Twenty days ago on November 10 we celebrated my son Grant's fifth birthday. As some know, we are an adoptive family. Much like Advent, our season of preparation for Grant's arrival five years ago was filled with great hope, joy, love, and anticipation.

For a dozen years or more, before Grant arrived, I frequently leaned on this passage of scripture detailing the story of Hannah and Samuel, and especially on 1 Samuel 1:27. When Grant joined our family, at two days old, a great peace came to my heart.

And, oh the joy – deep, wondrous joy – that Grant has brought to me and my entire family!

As we approach Christmas, I wonder how we are all preparing for the arrival of the Christ-child. Are we praying for hope, peace, love, and joy? Are we truly anticipating with excitement the arrival of the Messiah?

Unlike preparations for a new baby in our lives, we do not have a baby shower to plan, a crib to assemble, diapers to gather, or gender reveal parties to attend. However, there is still much to do. We have to get ourselves ready for the celebration and coming of the Prince of Peace!

I pray you have entered into Advent with a heart, mind, and spirit ready to receive the hope, peace, love, and joy of Jesus, our Savior. In the midst of trimming the Christmas tree, baking cookies, wrapping presents, and singing carols, find some time to pray and ponder the arrival of this baby.

There is Good News to share with the world and a celebration coming in just a few weeks. Are we ready to welcome the incredible gift we are about to receive, the Son of God, the word made flesh?

Prayer: *Almighty God, as Hannah said, we know “There is none holy like [you], there is none besides you, and there is no rock like [you].” This Advent season, grant us a sense of great wonder like young children awaiting Christmas morning. Thank you for giving your Son to our world, and it is in His name we pray, Amen.*

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December 1, 2022

On Having Christ's Attitude

[Philippians 2:6-11](#)

⁵ *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, Philippians 2:5*

Winston Churchill once said, "Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference." When the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church in Philippi, he was suffering from some sort of physical disability and chained in a Roman prison. Yet, even in these bleak circumstances, Paul's example and joyful teaching is one of keeping Christ's attitude of humility, love, and service.

There is no season of the year in which this attitude of Christ is more universal than that of Advent and Christmas!

This is what it says in the comment section for today's scripture on page 1495 in my *Wesley Study Bible*: "The mind (attitude) of Christ is both the gift of God's spirit ...and the life of love for God and neighbor that the Spirit produces... In taking the form of a slave (servant) to serve others' interests rather than his own, Christ 'emptied himself of all but love'" [as John Wesley wrote]. Paul calls the people of Philippi – and us – to adopt Christ's same attitude.

For many years at Ruble Church in Wheeling, a bridge has been built with a local primary school. Every December, in what has become a traditional Advent way of preparing for the celebration of Jesus' birth, disadvantaged children from this school are adopted by the congregation, and the requests of each child are fulfilled.

This is but one way that the Ruble congregation adopts and maintains the "**attitude that was in Christ Jesus**" of humility, service, and love. What is done here is but a drop-in-the-bucket – a "little thing," but oh what a "big difference" the attitude of Christ makes in the lives of these few children and their families!

In this Advent season, may our Christ-like and joyful attitudes also be such as Paul writes, that "...at the name of Jesus [may] everyone ... bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Prayer: *Holy God, Father of the Humble One, help us to "empty ourselves of all but love" as we prepare for new life in Jesus in his coming to us in human form. Help us to always adopt and maintain the "attitude that was in Christ Jesus" – in the example of his life, death, and resurrection – of humility, service, and love. And help us, even through our little things, to make big differences for others in this Advent season and always. Amen.*

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December 2, 2022

The Bread of Life, our Bridge of Faith

[John 6: 35-40](#)

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. (John 6:35)

It had been a typical week this past April (2022), and Sharon had just picked me up at the Pittsburgh Airport after a week of working in several cities around the US. We had gotten in the car and headed to Moundsville with dinner plans along the way. She put her hand on mine and said pull over here. There's something I want to talk to you about.

Pieces of the conversation are still a bit of a blur; however, I do remember Stage 4 Pancreatic Cancer has metastasized to the Liver. Eleven (11) months to live. Of course, various emotions and thoughts go through your head when your wife shares this with you.

However, I want to share the faith of the strongest and most intelligent women I know. In January, before this, I had been sharing with Sharon that I wanted to desire God in my life every day in the good times as we do in the tough times. I had started studying the word looking for how to create this desire in my heart, and prayer kept coming up as the solution to desiring God.

After Chemo in June, Sharon looked over at me and said, "You know I am going to be healed." "Yes, I believe that," was my reply.

She said to me, "I am not sure you understand." Sharon reminded me that Christ promised us he would not abandon us. If not here, I will be healed in Heaven when I get there. He is my all, my everything, and I will be ok because he has promised that he will not forsake me. So we are not going to worry about the how or when. We will wait on the Lord."

The Lord's Supper is described in much greater detail in the other Gospels. John shares that when we accept Christ (the bread), it is sufficient forever as our faith endures. The bread has historically sustained man in life and built bridges between cultures via trade and commerce. With this bread that John describes here, we find the bridge based on our faith that will sustain us forever in Christ, provided by the greatest love we've ever known.

Prayer: Lord: *Help us desire you in our lives every day. Not only during advent or times of hardship, but each day. We have taken of the bread of life; now, oh Lord, help us seek ways to expand it in our walk with you every day. Amen.*

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December 3, 2022

“Everyone is Searching for You”

[Mark 1: 35-39](#)

³⁵ In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷ When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” ³⁸ He answered, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I came out to do.” ³⁹ And he went throughout all Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Have you ever lost something and struggled to think where you put it? I often put things in a place that I’ll be sure to find them later. Of course, when I want it, I can’t remember where I put it. I search and search. . . I only seem to find it when I am looking for something else.

Mark 1 describes Jesus’s early healings and teachings. The disciples were newly chosen and still pretty clueless about their roles and about the work they were being asking to do. As they went from town to town, Christ was building relationships – bridges -- to introduce the world to the new life that would be offered to us all.

During those early days of his ministry, he often went to the “wilderness” (a deserted place) to pray and recharge his battery. Oddly, the disciples apparently didn’t know where he was and they ***hunted for him***. The *New Interpreter’s Study Bible* notes that the phrase “hunted him down” is from the Greek verb for **pursued** and is a strong word choice. When we have lost that thing we were looking for, we often panic a bit.

The disciples may have been a little panicked when they lost the Lord! When they did find him, they told him ***“everyone is searching for you.”*** Jesus didn’t want or need fame, but he was likely pleased that people were searching for him and that they wanted to hear what he had to say.

Even today, he wants us to search for him. When we are looking for him, we must keep our eyes and attention on him. I think I lose things because my attention is all over the place. Social media, 24/7 news on TV –there are so many things to steal my attention from my Savior.

As we lean into the Advent Season this year, let’s try to keep our eyes on Jesus and focus our attention on how we can be his hands and feet in the communities we serve. How can we use the Christmas season to teach others about his unending love? How can we help the poor and lost who need Christ to give them hope for the future? How can I keep searching for him every day?

Prayer: Good and Loving God: Help us to search for the poor and least of these so they will see you through our churches. Help us build bridges to our communities and the world. Thank you for helping us feel the need to search for you each day. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

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December 4, 2022 – Second Sunday of Advent

Won't It Be Wonderful There?

[Isaiah 11: 1-10](#)

*⁶ The wolf shall live with the lamb;
the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the lion will feed^[a] together,
and a little child shall lead them.*

Growing up in a small West Virginia community in Gilmer County in the late 50's, 60's and early 70's, I felt safe, loved, and cared about. It was a wonderful place to grow up because you didn't have to worry too much about being harmed. We didn't lock our doors or take our keys out of the vehicles. Your belongings were safe outside and inside your home.

Rarely did I hear of anyone being robbed, assaulted, or even murdered. People treated each other with respect and dignity, regardless of their position in society. As a young person who was not well traveled, I assumed this was the way everyone lived.

Once I joined the Army and left the safety of my small community, I soon realized how safe my small community was and how naive I was to the real world.

I soon realized that I had to be on consistent guard to protect myself and my belongings. I was exposed to prejudice because of the way I spoke and my country mannerisms. I witnessed how cruel people could be to each other and how life itself was not valued. I soon became very homesick to return to the safety of my community.

In our current 24-hour availability of news and information, we are so aware of the evil in our world today. We are exposed to the horrors of evil that come in all shapes. It's enough to depress any person.

For believers of the word of God, we are told in Isaiah 11:1-10 that a person is coming to rectify the injustice of the world. We are promised that we will live in harmony with those who we would normally fear and that all persons will be treated fairly and equally.

The thought of living in such a place reminds me of the old hymn "Won't It Be Wonderful There?" The lyrics say, "having no burdens to share, joyously singing with heart bells are ringing, oh won't it be wonderful there.?"

For this small-town West Virginia boy who naively believed this place already existed, I am once again homesick for such a place. Let us start practicing now to treat others with understanding, respect, love, and kindness. Let us remove hate for one another based on age, sex, race, religious beliefs, politics, and social standing.

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for your promise of peace and harmony among all people. Help us to love our neighbors and to care for those less fortunate than ourselves. Amen.*

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December 5, 2022

Be Attentive to His Leading

[Psalm 72:1-7](#)

- ¹ Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king's son.
² May he judge your people with righteousness
and your poor with justice.
³ May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.
⁴ May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor.
⁵ May he live^[a] while the sun endures
and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.
⁶ May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,
like showers that water the earth.
⁷ In his days may righteousness flourish
and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

In today's scripture lesson, King Solomon lays down a lengthy list of petitions to God in prayer. He prays for wisdom, so that he can judge the people with justice. He particularly uplifts his role in defending the poor and needy. He asks God for peace and prosperity in the land until the moon is no more.

King Solomon surely sought the best for God's people in his prayer, didn't he? Isn't what King Solomon asked for in his prayer what God asks of us?

Doesn't God want us to show justice and help those in need?

Doesn't he encourage us to be peacemakers in this world even when those around us are in strife? All those attributes King Solomon prayed for the people of Israel during his reign are modeled through the life of Jesus. We should certainly follow Jesus' lead.

The season of Advent can overwhelm us with worldly distractions and busyness as we prepare for the birth of Christ. We lose track of what is truly of value to God. Let's put down the wrapping paper and baking sheets for a moment and redirect our attention to what matters to God.

Spend some time in prayer with God. Ask him to direct your attention to someone in your life to whom you can help bring justice and peace. If you are attentive to his leading, he will guide your work.

Prayer: *God of Justice and Mercy, we humble ourselves before you. Lead us to whom we may show your saving grace in our lives. Guide our steps as we follow your call. Amen.*

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December 6, 2022

Who's Right?
[Romans 15: 4-13](#)

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you..."

While reading the backstory of today's scripture, it reminded me of a struggle that likely occurs in many families.

To a person, my family members must be "right." Some of our more animated "disagreements" have occurred when all participants were absolutely positive that they were "right" and would stop at nothing to convince others of that fact. No matter the relative unimportance of the topic, being "right" became the goal at the peril of family harmony and peace.

In Romans, Paul is writing to the Church in Rome to assure them that his message is of God through Jesus. At that time, Rome was in the midst of internal conflict between Roman Jews and Gentiles, both asserting their perceived favor from God or their inclusion in God's kingdom, respectively.

Paul reminds the Romans that all have equally failed to follow the law and, by God's grace, all have an equal opportunity to get "right" with God by willful obedience. In the specific scripture for today, Paul emphasizes the need for acceptance of each other's frailties and unity among all when the focus of all is on Jesus Christ. Paul cites several Old Testament scriptures which validate these truths as a guide for their present day.

As we are now in the midst of this Advent season, let us take Paul's words to heart. While the holidays are steeped in beloved **tradition**, let us look to the scriptures for divine guidance for our tomorrow. As we are gathered together to reminisce about the treasured **experiences**, let us not dwell on our pasts, but look toward the Word of God as a living template for today.

And in this era where **reason** is more elusive and deceptive than ever, let us look to the truth that is the *Holy Bible* for the voice of reason that originates from our Creator. John Wesley knew it almost 400 years ago. Struggles will come. Whether it is within a family, a church, a country or a world. **Scripture** should be at the foundation of any solution, always. And knowing that, Paul tells us in this letter to the Roman Church in these verses to not be consumed by who is "right," rather let us accept each other with the love of Christ and let us be unified by our steadfast faith in God.

Prayer: *Father God. My prayer on this day is that you help me to discard my need to be on the right side of worldly things and guide me to the one simple truth above all else: that You are the one true God who asks me only to love You and my neighbor. Nothing else will please You any more than this. Amen.*

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December 7, 2022

Now is the Time

[Isaiah 61:1-4](#)

¹*The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives
and release to the prisoners,
²to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,*

"Come one, come all! See this exciting new vision God has for us. Step right up! All are welcome!" This is what I hear Isaiah saying. Salvation is available to all. Accept God's grace and you obtain salvation. Your ticket into heaven. Right??

Isaiah's call is a little more than that. Isaiah is challenging us to name salvation as a quality of life here and now that reflects God's desire for human community. He is challenging us to live the good news, provide healing, liberty, release, and comfort.

He invites us to participate in ushering in this view of salvation by being more missional, by being more proactive, and by being more outwardly focused.

Like the mighty oaks standing tall in the sun, Isaiah is calling us to stand arm in arm with our brothers and sisters in Christ to rebuild, restore, and renew our vision of the church.

Now is the time to act. Now is the prime opportunity to do this as we are winding down and coming close to post pandemic stages. The global pandemic has provided us with opportunities that we wouldn't have identified with for years, if ever.

We had to rethink our approach to church. Now is the time to continue that "rethinking," that imagining of how we reach the unchurched. Now is the time to step up and step out into the real world rather than seek shelter behind the brick and mortar of our church buildings. Put your imaginations to the test. What can you and your church do to take our church in a new direction?

Prayer: *O Lord, we thank you for the words from Isaiah that encourage us to think outside the box. Guide us to live according to your desire. Flood us with ideas and opportunities to share good news, healing, liberty, release, and comfort. In the precious name of Jesus. Amen.*

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December 8, 2022

I See the Light!

[John 8:12](#)

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

As a little girl my biggest fear was the dark and being alone. I remember crying to Mom about how the monsters would get me and that she needed to stay.

The dark to me was evil and cruel; the light gave promise that the dark is not scary when you know who or what is there. Waking up in the morning was a relief to me because I knew the sun had risen. I knew it was a new day, and I would not be alone.

The sun gives us many nutrients we need in our bodies. Getting sun every day is just like having the Lord in our life. We shall not fear the dark when we know there will always be light. John 8:12 gives us the promise that if we walk with Jesus, we will always have the light of life.

We shall never be alone in the dark when we have Jesus in our life. In the season of Advent, we see light everywhere in various forms. You may see lights on your Christmas tree, through fireworks, or maybe you see light in a person.

When you see these lights, you feel joy and happiness. You do not fear the dark when we have these lights in our life that bring so much joy. In this season of Advent, I challenge you to build a connection with someone in your community and be the light they may need in their own life.

We often get in cycles where we get used to people, and we do not reach out to people whom we do not talk to every day. Reach out. I wish I knew sooner what it was like to have God all the time and not just when things are bad.

Build connections with people who need the light in their life all the time.

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, in this season of Advent I pray we see the lights in our life in new ways. That people who may not know about the light you promise get to learn about your light and they shall never fear the dark. Amen*

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December 9, 2022

A Glory Beyond All Comparison

[2 Corinthians 4:16-18](#)

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our slight, momentary affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸ because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen, for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

Notice the many contrasts in these verses: outside and inside, breaking down and renewed, temporary and eternal, seen and unseen. The pandemic has influenced our lives over the past several years with similar contrasts. We've experienced highs and lows, elation and sorrow, in-person school and virtual school, and in-person worship and online worship just to highlight a few.

For me, it began with hearing aids. The audiologist said my tests showed mild to moderate hearing loss. Then, the ophthalmologist recommended the removal of a cataract to clear up my vision. More recently, the surgeon reviewed the MRI and said my rotator cuff was not repairable. I would need a shoulder replacement.

Paul writes that our physical bodies are breaking down. It is true we are in the process of dying each day. We don't normally think about this until we are growing old and, as in my life, body parts begin to wear out.

Paul experienced various levels of suffering and danger. These included beatings, imprisonments, perils at sea and in the wilderness, hunger, and thirst. While these would be very serious to us, he called them minor and momentary. Paul's perspective allowed him to say, "we aren't depressed." How could he do this?

He did not dwell on the present minor problems. Through faith he knew he was being made more like Christ each day. His inner renewal was preparing him for the unseen future, an eternal glory with no comparison.

Prayer: *O Lord, help us to fix our eyes on You and not on our daily problems. May we know these are preparing us for something great. Renew us daily so that we can live with You in the eternal kingdom and share in the wondrous glory beyond all comparison. Amen.*

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December 10, 2022

Almost Heaven

[Matthew 6:10](#)

*¹⁰May your kingdom come.
May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

Almost Heaven, West Virginia. The phrase is on welcome signs and license plates. It is used in television ads and sung after sporting events. It is truly ubiquitous throughout the Mountain State.

And yet, as we prepare for Christmas, the words take on renewed meaning.

When Christ prayed “your kingdom come, your will be done – on earth as it is in Heaven” – the words are a prayer to God, but the challenge is to the one praying.

Truly making God’s will be done on earth starts with each of us purposefully choosing to take the same actions we will be expected to do in heaven.

Many of us struggle with that. And almost all of us fall far short.

If Christ came to West Virginia today, would he see our efforts as Christians as Almost Heaven? Sometimes, answering “what could we do” is much easier than answering “what could I do?” Or, more directly, “what will I do?”

Christmas is a time of birth and rebirth. It is a time to prepare for a new year and new life. And as we spend time with our family, friends, and neighbors, perhaps we can look to see how to make our place here on earth more like it is in heaven for all our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Not just this Christmas season, but all year long, as a church and as individual Christians, we can all work for God’s will to be done in our part of Almost Heaven, just as it is in Heaven.

Each of us can help someone hungrier or poorer than we are. We can comfort those we know who are mourning. We can visit those who are sick.

We can show mercy to those in jail or prison. We can help make peace and sooth old wounds. We can strive to be pure in heart. We can pray without ceasing. And we can love without exceptions.

Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name. Help us see the way for your will to be carried out here in West Virginia just as you would have us do it in heaven. Amen.*

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December 11, 2022 – Third Sunday of Advent

I Hope!
[Psalm 146:5-10](#)

*Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God,
6 who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever;
7 who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry.*

Think about how many times we say “I hope” throughout the year, not even realizing or claiming the spiritual promises of the hope that is promised to us as followers of Christ. *I hope I get this new job. I hope you feel better soon. I hope I can sleep tonight. I hope our church starts growing. I hope next year is better. I hope I win the lottery.*

Every day we see people who are hoping for something. Some are hoping for material things of this world, but most are simply hoping for peace, love, and joy. This Psalm reminds us of the first promise of Advent, *hope*.

People were facing the same things in the days of King David as they are today. People are *oppressed* by various addictions, worries, and stresses. Many are *hungry* and in need of basic food from day to day. There are those who are *imprisoned*, whether physically or spiritually, and in need of freedom from guilt, hurt, and sin.

Blindness afflicts the masses (churched and unchurched) as we are conditioned to *turn a blind eye* to Biblical truth. When you see most people today, their heads are *bowed down*, usually because they are immersed in nothing but their cell phones instead of being engaged with those around them.

Foreigners, the fatherless and the widows are all about us, but what do we really ever do personally to be the hands and feet of Christ to them -- rather than passing them by, hoping that they get help and support from someone else?

The good news from this Psalm reminds us that all is not lost and that there is hope! Whatever the affliction or human condition, the God of Jacob blesses and perfects those whose hope is in the Lord. So, the next time we say “I hope,” let’s not do so callously or carelessly. Instead, say it as a follower of Christ with the conviction and belief that the power of God almighty will be revealed!

Prayer: *God, help me to remember that you are the Maker of heaven and earth and that You knew me in the womb even before I was born. I have no need to worry or to hope in vain, because my hope and victory is in you! Thank you for my purpose in this world as a child of God! Amen.*

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December 12, 2022

Giving Praise
[Luke 1: 46b-55](#)

⁴⁶ And Mary^[a] said,
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name;

When I think of Mary's young age and her response to the message Gabriel brought her, I am in awe.

After the shock wore off, a million questions would have been running through my mind. What would have been my response? How can this be? What are my parents going to say? How is Joseph going to react? Will I be stoned, die, or cast out? These are just a few of the questions that would be running through my mind.

I am sure Mary had questions too, but we are not privy to them. Instead, we learn of Mary's response: she sang praises to God and exulted him.

During this season of Advent let us take time to sing praises to God for all that he does for us on every day, every hour, and every minute of every day.

I so often find myself taking for granted the little things that God provides every day: the sound of rain falling, birds singing, the beauty that surrounds my home, and that God gives me another day to enjoy it all.

This summer I was diagnosed with a tear in my retina that was impacting my central vision in one eye. Praise God that it was successfully treated and healing nicely. Another reminder that God is taking care of my life.

Praise God just not only for the life-altering things in your life but for all the daily events that we take for granted.

Our job is to sing God's praises for all that he does, so that each new generation knows that He is always there and waiting to bless us.

Prayer: *Precious Father, help me to be like Mary and sing my praises to you for your blessings in my ever-evolving life. Thank you for each valley and mountain event that shapes my life. Help me to always praise you. Amen.*

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December 13, 2022

New Life in Jesus

[James 5: 7-10](#)

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.^[a] ⁹ Brothers and sisters, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

It is true that a farmer is at the constant mercy of God to provide the proper amount of rain and sun. It is a constant test of faith.

My husband and I are raising our two daughters on a farm. My children have a multitude of animals such as rabbits and chickens.

Every year, my girls insist on hatching out baby chickens in an incubator. This is always a long, arduous process. This requires a warm, moist environment with constant moving back and forth. At the start of this process, the eggshell is frail and easily broken. The yolk contained in the eggshell is mushy with no ability to maintain form on its own. With time and patience, a new life emerges forth and breaks free from the confines of the frail shell.

This is similar to a new Christian. Before we are saved through the blood of Jesus Christ, we are weak and easily broken. We are trapped within a shell of sin and worldly expectations. Inside, we are filled with mush and yuck rather than with the Holy Spirit.

Once we accept the saving Grace, God showers us with his warm love. He shoves us back and forth as we grow in our faith to teach us right from wrong. Through patience, we break free from the shell of sin that has kept us captive and have a new life in salvation.

We are no longer filled with sin but filled with the Holy Spirit. The time on earth draws short, and now is the time for all of us to emerge in our new life and be the active disciples of Jesus Christ, spreading the good news and standing firm against the sins of the world.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, please fill us with your Grace. Help us discern between right and wrong. Guide us along our path of faith. We give all praise and glory. Amen.*

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December 14, 2022

Steppingstone or Stumbling Block

[Matthew 11-2:3](#)

² When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

I wondered why John the Baptist sent disciples to Jesus asking: "Are you the expected one or do we look for another?"

I had grown up with the story of my own birth, which took place in St. Joseph's Hospital, my parents' third son and the first one born in a hospital. I assume John had grown up hearing family stories of his own birth as well, which was far more eventful than mine.

His father's angelic visitor while in the "Holy of Holies" leaving his father subsequently speechless. Or his mother's late life "Miracle" baby, even his own reaction at his first encounter with Jesus. "He leapt inside his mother's womb."

Charles Spurgeon's preaching shed a new light on this for me. He believed John sent his disciples to Jesus for their own welfare, not due to any doubts that John may have had. Spurgeon conceded that John may have had doubts seeing, as even Elijah became disillusioned at times. He felt John wanted them to meet the man whose sandals he was not worthy to untie.

Pastor Mehaffie said his uncle's catchphrase was "I do not want to be a stumbling block." He did not want to hinder anyone's relationship with Jesus, and John the Baptist knew it was time for his followers to turn and follow Jesus.

John felt Jesus himself would answer in such a way that his disciples would turn from him and become followers of Christ. When Jesus answered with the words the prophet Isaiah spoke concerning the coming Messiah, He was saying "I may not be acting in the way you expected, but I am fulfilling God's promises."

Jesus said do not let the fact that I am accused of being friends with tax collectors and sinners stand in the way of the truth of My miracles. Jesus Himself did not want to be a stumbling block to anyone. We need to remember that even today, Jesus may not act the way we expect, but He is always acting on our behalf.

John was removing himself as an obstacle for his followers in their pursuit of God, and I had never thought of it like that.

Prayer: Dear God, empower us with Your Holy Spirit that we become "stepping stones" in place of stumbling blocks. Enlightening your pathway for others we encounter on our journey of faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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December 15, 2022

Let Your Light Shine

[Matthew 5:14-16](#)

¹⁴You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

While we are not boastful about what we do in the name of Jesus Christ, we do show our light in the things we do to help others. Our shining light gives those around us the opportunity to see us doing what God has asked of us. It inspires others to participate with us or even do something on their own that shows they are followers of Jesus.

Many years ago, I was able to participate in a Volunteers in Mission trip to Israel. We worked with a priest who was building a pre-kindergarten school onto his church. Father Abuna was a kind man who saw a vision. We were able to help make that vision become reality.

Each evening during our trip, one person was responsible for the devotion. When it came to be my turn, I was worried because I just didn't know what to do. I hadn't really done any devotions, especially in front of a group of people who, in my eyes, were biblical scholars. Our group consisted of pastors, lay speakers, and others that were smarter than me in their faith journey.

I set my Bible on the table on its spine. I let it drop open to wherever it may. It opened to Matthew chapter 5.

I read the chapter over and over and finally let God have his way with me. I prayed, "God, none of this makes sense to me. Help me understand what you are telling me." He placed my focus on verse 16. We were there to let our light shine and do good work giving glory to God our Father.

This scripture has meant so much to me ever since. I am reminded of it when I take my youth on mission trips or mission activities as they are learning how to let their light shine without being boastful.

Prayer: *God, help us to remember that our good works encourages others to do the same. Watch over us as we do these good works so that we are not boastful but a blessing to someone in need. In Jesus name I pray. Amen*

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December 16, 2022

We Are Called to Remember Unity

[Ephesians 2: 11-22](#)

¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us,

There are signs that the pandemic may be over for most of us. But why are we not a more united people and country as a result of surviving such a terrible disease in the history of mankind? There was so much indecision on the part of many as to whether to get vaccinated, wear a mask, go to school, go to the office. All these issues seemed to divide us, which was a real concern. We were driven apart by personality differences, strategic differences, even racial differences.

What can be done about this division and separation?

In this scripture, Paul focuses on the fact that “in Christ, both Jew and Gentile are united; there is racial reconciliation across all nations.” Paul tells us to “remember” that Christ has created unity and racial reconciliation.

We are not called to establish our unity, but we are called to reflect the unity that Christ has established. We need to remember this fact when we are faced with the conflicts that challenge us and which try to divide us. Remember, Christ’s blood on the cross has made us one. He has destroyed the barrier.

Paul affirms that unity is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” It has been said that “unity is encouraged through increasingly thinking as Christ thinks,” which can come about through our Bible study taught by God’s messengers. Paul is focused on Christ as the chief cornerstone.

If we focus on Christ and elevate Him, we find that instances of difference fade into insignificance beside the majesty of the Lord. All people are drawn to Christ when the Son of man is lifted up by us.

Notice Paul’s graphic phrase, “You too are being built to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” If we rely upon the Spirit, it could be that our sharp tongues will be softened, our minds sharpened, and our hearts tempered, so we may then be formed more after the image of Christ, and more united to one another in Christ.

Therefore, all reconciliation is further encouraged by the gospel. If we remember the gospel and that we are united, we should use language that reflects our unity. It means a constant focus upon Christ. It also means the empowering presence of the Spirit. At this time of Advent and the celebration of the birth of Christ, let us remember that Christ has united us which should help eliminate our differences.

Prayer: *Almighty God, who through your prophets foretold a day when we would be united, and who then united us with your blood on the cross, let your Spirit be with all people so that we will not hate, not be hostile or self-seeking and will find peace in your Son, Jesus Christ, at this time of Advent. Amen*

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December 17, 2022

What Does it Mean to be a Servant of Christ?

[Romans 1:1-7](#)

1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, 3 the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit^{al} of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the gentiles for the sake of his name, 6 including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, 7 To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The passage refers to Paul as a servant of Christ. What does "be a servant" really mean?

I am reminded of the Basic Needs Feeding Ministry which takes place three afternoons a week at my home church. This ministry is aimed at helping the least, the lost, and the lowly within the community.

The program has met opposition by some for they feel providing basic needs will simply enable these individuals. Did Jesus ask for credentials and a resume when feeding the five thousand? Jesus demands our personal involvement in caring for others' needs. (Isaiah 58:7)

Jesus said he did not come to be served, but to serve. (Mark 10:45) In today's world we often measure greatness by high personal achievement. However, in Christ's kingdom, service is the way to get ahead.

This Advent season why not take a new step in a new direction and look for ways that you can minister to the needs of others instead of seeking to have your own needs met?

Mother Teresa once said, "We've just forgotten that we belong to each other." When we begin to connect ourselves together, we begin to develop kinship. And once we develop kinship, we can begin to bridge the gap between a person *needing* basic needs and *having* basic needs.

Decide that you will build that bridge and encourage the needy and unchurched to cross over to the other side and experience God's mercy, love, and compassion that are the marks of his kingdom. (Matthew 25: 35-36; 40)

Prayer: Heavenly father, open my eyes and heart to the needs of those around me. Use me as your servant, Lord, to show them your mercy, love, and compassion. In Jesus name, Amen.

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December 18, 2022

No Fear in Love

[1 John 4: 16-21](#)

¹⁶ So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. ¹⁷ Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. ¹⁹ We love^[a] because he first loved us. ²⁰ Those who say, "I love God," and hate a brother or sister are liars, for those who do not love a brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. ²¹ The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Picture a child at a park swinging on the swings. The child's dad comes up to him while he is swinging and tells him to jump into his arms. What does that small child do? He jumps into his father's arms, of course. The child trusts that his daddy will catch him. I can almost hear this child's bubbling laughter as his father catches him in his arms. The child is not fearful that his father will not catch him. He is assured of his father's love for him.

Our scripture states that perfect love casts out fear. One of the acronyms for Fear is: False Evidence Appearing Real. The Bible says that fear is torment or has to do with punishment. Living in fear is not a good place to be. God has another plan, a good plan, for us. God's love casts out that fear. Perfect love drives out fear. Like that child who jumps into his father's arms, we can live a happy life when we realize God's love for us.

When we know that God loves us, it is natural for us to spread that love to others. In fact, the Bible says whoever loves God must also love his brother.

When we are filled with God's love, we will show God's love to others. That love for others will naturally pour out of us when we are filled with God's love. There are many hurting people that need to be shown God's love.

We need to also show that love to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. God wants us to love and be connected to each other. By showing the love of God to others, we can be Jesus to the world.

Prayer: *Father God, help us to realize and have a revelation of your love for us. We want to trust you. Help us to send that love forth to people who really need your love. We love you. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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December 19, 2022

At the Right Time

[Galatians 4:4-7](#)

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶ And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir through God

When is the right time for anything? Have you ever struggled with that question? I have! You have decided you need to do something, but for whatever reason, the time just doesn't seem right.

Maybe you want to go on that trip you have planned for some time, but a family situation comes along. Maybe you want to ask a certain person out on a date, but then you see them talking to someone else. Maybe you are planning to quit that job you don't like, but there's a project coming up you want to be a part of first.

I don't know about you, but there seems to be three places I usually am.

To be in the right place at the right time - to be the recipient of good fortune, often accidentally or unintentionally, simply due to one's location and/or timing.

To be in the wrong place at the wrong time - to encounter trouble or misfortune that was not one's fault, but rather was due to unfortunate circumstances, timing, or physical location.

To be in the wrong place at the right time or to be in the right place at the wrong time - to be where one cannot take advantage of an opportunity.

A movie from many years ago, [Forrest Gump](#), had the theme of time and place. It was the story of a character who would find himself involved in a historical and memorable event. He would also meet notable people along the way. I have related to Forrest Gump many times in my life. Here is just one of the times: back in the late 90's I took part in the Vision2000 seminar in Charleston.

I was my home church's new Sunday School Superintendent so I took the Sunday School workshop. We had to pair off with someone we didn't know and because I was shy, I just sat around and waited for someone to come to me; it didn't happen.

I saw an older gentleman sitting by himself, and I went over and sat with him. I rode home with my pastor at the time and told him of my experience. He asked if I knew who the gentleman was, and I told him the gentleman's name. He told me the man was the former, and later future, WV Governor Cecil Underwood, and I about went through the floorboard of the car.

Our scripture begins in verse 4: **"But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law."** God knew the right time to send Jesus into the world. It could have been thousands of years earlier, or thousands of years later, like today, but God chose the time he did when the Roman World was about to change.

It was the world people knew at that time. If God had waited too much longer, the writings of the prophets could no longer prove true. They wrote of a Messiah that would be crucified. Years later, Jesus might have been burned at the stake or mauled by lions in the Colosseum.

When is the right time? Another scripture says **"For God says, "At just the right time, I heard you. On the day of salvation, I helped you."**! The right time didn't exist until the time we are getting ready to celebrate; the day Jesus came into this world at Christmas. Since then, every time is the right time. Indeed, the "right time" is now. Today is the day of salvation."

Prayer: *God, you have shown us the right time for salvation, now we ask you to show us the right time to reach out to spread your word. It is in your son's name we pray, AMEN!*

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December 20, 2022

Peace

[Micah 5:2-5a](#)

²But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. ³Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in travail has brought forth; then the rest of his brethren shall return to the people of Israel. ⁴And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. ⁵And this shall be peace,

Sometimes I forget about these “minor” prophets until it is time to prepare a devotion or a sermon using the lectionary. Micah gives us a clear picture of how to prepare for a new life or perhaps I should say renew life.

Maybe you don’t do this but sometimes I rush through my scripture and prayer time. Gee, it’s not like I’m taking anything away from Him, and it’s not every day. Just sometimes!

This scripture shows me that I’m exactly like these folks. I was creating my own worship with a minimum of scripture and prayer rushing through because it is what I was supposed to do. I was quickly saying the names on my prayer list with no real depth for their need just to get it over. I was not being kind, compassionate, humble or honest. I had no peace.

Then it happens, a wakeup call, trouble comes knocking. I was unprepared because I had not been doing the will of my Father. I knew what I needed to do, bow and humbly ask Him to forgive me, repent and believe, and He would give me the peace I needed. I am thankful for His peace.

Prayer: *O Lord, what do you require – that I act justly, love mercy and walk humbly. In Your Name I pray. Amen*

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December 21, 2022

God is with us
[Colossians 1:15–20](#)

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, ¹⁶ for in^[a] him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in^[b] him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God^[c] was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

God is with us: to see a magnificent sunset, to look up at the stars, to see a universe beyond our imagination, to gaze at a bright full rainbow with awe and think how wonderful and awesome these are.

God is with us when God the creator came down in the person of Jesus of Nazareth to live among us and show us how to get our lives back on track, a new beginning, a new birth and a new wholesome life. How awesome is that?

God is with us when the birth of Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes laying in a manger could change things so much and so many lives—including mine. His life, his blood, his cross so that I and we could have redemption and the forgiveness of sin. Wow, now that's awesome.

God is with us: we can have a new birth, by his life he shows and teaches us how to live, by his death brought reconciliation. This Jesus has restored us to our original relationship with God. How great and awesome is that?

God is with us. He calls us to be disciples to live and serve in an imperfect world, a world full of imperfect people crying out for help. Wow.

We have something to share: that life with Jesus is a life that cannot be imagined and to begin to understand that God is with us.

Prayer: *God our creator, we confess our shortcomings, trusting your mercy and forgiveness and finding new life that is renewed every day and to examine our lives in the light of his. Amen.*

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December 22, 2022

Gifts from God

[James 1:17](#)

¹⁷ Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

Gifts from God come in all sorts of forms.

God blesses us with our talents. These talents may be musical, athletic, ability to teach, be a caregiver, be a witness, or be a friend. The list of talents is limitless.

These gifts may be a special someone in our lives. I know my husband and soulmate are truly a gift from God. A very special gift is the gift of a child, grandchild or great grandchild.

These gifts include the beauty that surrounds us. The gentle rain that washes the earth, the warmth of a sunny day, a beautiful sunrise or sunset, or the promise of the rainbow are all gifts for us to behold.

God's mercy and forgiveness is not earned but a gift from God. The greatest and most perfect gift from God is the birth of his son Jesus Christ. As Christmas nears, we await the birth of our Savior.

Prayer: *Gracious and Heavenly Father please open our hearts and minds to be ready to accept your gifts and your plans for our lives. Help us to use our gifts to help one another and further your kingdom. In Jesus name we pray.*

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December 23, 2022

Let Your Joy in the Lord Be Evident

[Philippians 4:4-5](#)

⁴ Rejoice^[a] in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.^[b] ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

Of the four themes of Advent, “joy” holds a special place in my heart. I am not talking about the feeling of joy that comes from exciting circumstantial situations, such as catching a big fish, a grandchild’s special accomplishment, or your sports team pulling off a huge upset. Those are fun, fleeting moments of joy and pride. I am talking about lasting joy that comes from knowing Jesus, which permeates your character and helps you through the difficult, uncertain times as well as uplifting you in the good times.

I love the joy that comes from being in the presence of the Lord. It was first experienced long ago when Elizabeth’s baby leapt in her womb when Mary, with child, greeted her. The shepherds glorified God for all they saw and heard. The three kings being overjoyed when they saw the star over Bethlehem. And when Simeon praised God for Jesus being a Savior to the Gentiles as well as the people of Israel.

It continued throughout Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, and through the ages to today thanks to the Holy Spirit, which He sends us. As Christians, we should all rejoice in His presence and let it be evident to all by the way we live day in and day out.

As I write this devotion, it is the 75th anniversary of the US Air Force. My wife and I spent twenty-three years of our life in the AF during which we lived in many communities across the States. One of the constants and blessings of that service is that we were always able to find a good church home where God’s presence was obvious, and we felt welcomed. Sometimes, we had to shop to find a spiritual home based on the Bible. But God always led us to where His presence could be seen and felt through the “love, joy, peace, and hope” of its members.

We live in difficult times where culture has impacted our lives and institutions, including our churches. I firmly believe if we let Jesus’ four special gifts guide our lives with the Holy Spirit’s help according to His purpose, then we will be carrying on His work. We should do so with a rejoicing attitude and a gentleness that is evident to all we encounter so we can bring others to Him. Keep in mind Dr. David Jeremiah’s advice: “Be sensitive to whoever God brings across your path today, listen for the leading of God, believing that every meeting is a divine appointment.”

Prayer: *Dear Father, this Advent season renew our commitment to using your gifts of love, joy, peace and hope to help us to grow in grace and to be more effective servants in taking the Gospel to where it is needed and to ministering to those less fortunate. Amen.*

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December 24, 2022 – Christmas Eve

“O Little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie...”

[Luke 2:1-14](#)

³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David.

At the time of the birth of Jesus, Bethlehem and all of Palestine was occupied by the Roman Empire. The gospel writer, Luke, describes the circumstance surrounding the birth of Jesus as stark and sparse. There was a great gap between the rich and the poor, and hunger was prevalent. The birth dates to the reign of Augustus Caesar, the Roman Emperor, who was known for his ruthlessness and cruelty and to when Quirinis was governor of Palestine. It is into this world of occupation, poverty, hunger, and suffering that Jesus was born.

Caesar issued a decree that a census of the known world should be taken, so Mary and Joseph make the arduous 90-mile journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. This journey would have taken at least 3-4 days. The trip was made while Mary was in the last stages of pregnancy, riding on the back of a donkey with Joseph leading the way.

Can you imagine how hard that was for her to endure? When they arrived in Bethlehem, there was no room in the inn. So, Jesus was born in a place where animals were fed. After Jesus was born, Mary wrapped him in swaths of cloth, which is the normal process, and laid him in the feeding trough.

Now out in the fields were shepherds quietly tending to their sheep, when suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared to them and proclaimed that a child had been born in the city of David saying, “This will be a sign for you: you will find the child wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Yet this is no ordinary child; this baby born in such humble circumstances is the Savior of the world, the Messiah! The shepherds go with haste to check it out and find it just as the angel had said. They are now filled with joy, and they began to praise God.

“The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.”

As we once again read this story, we are filled with awe and wonder--and sometimes a little nostalgia. We need to be reminded that this story is real. It happened, and it had powerful significance--then and now. We need to celebrate the true power of this story—that Christ was born and fulfilled the promise that God really *“is with us--Emmanuel.”*

We are not alone in our sin and strife. The great good news is that God sent his son to live among us and save us from our sins. We have a savior who loves us; he lived, taught, healed, died, was resurrected, and he is coming again! The savior who takes away the sins of the world: this is the God we have come to know and worship. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: “Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us tonight”. Amen.

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December 25, 2022

Christmas Boots

[Luke 2:15-20](#)

"Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger.

I love Christmas. Notwithstanding the argument that the holiday has become very commercialized, I love Christmas. I love the smells and the sounds and the food and the crisp air and well, I love Christmas. Believe it or not, I DO like shopping for gifts.

I enjoy the challenge of selecting just the right present for just the right person, and I enjoy the happiness shown when the fruit of that research is unwrapped.

To say that our family had a Christmas tradition may be a misnomer. Raised as an Army brat, we traveled. As the high school years came along, the Army days had ended and things may have taken on somewhat of a pattern.

As if it were a tradition, the question is asked of us and by us, "What do you want for Christmas?" We are almost petitioning for a list.

We sometimes treat Christmas as a catalog ordering event. "Dear God, thank you for your Son, I would like more hours in the day, more money, less hassle, nicer co-workers, a new car, season football tickets, maybe a boat and, well, that'll do for now. And, by the way, could we get some world peace and a slow down on that global warming thing?"

As a kid, I was always asked. I never had a desire along the order of "If I don't get a blue bike I w-i-l-l j-u-s-t d-i-e!!!" I don't remember everything I ever got, but I do remember NEVER being disappointed or unhappy on Christmas.

I have a special memory of our Christmas living in Germany when, on my list, I wanted a pair of cowboy boots.

Christmas morning dawned and in a gleeful shredding of pretty paper, all of the presents were opened.... *no boots*. I remember that there were no boots, and I remember being a little deflated.

When the dust settled, and we caught our collective breath, Mom pulled on the cord controlling the window drapes. There in the corner(s) of the window sill...cowboy boots. A pair for me, and a pair for my brother Rob. Joy unspeakable!

Isn't God that way with us? He fulfills our needs and even provides to us what we think we want. We are happy and about to move on with the day and suddenly he draws back the curtains on the window to the stable and reveals what we most desire – His Son.

Prayer: Lord, slow us down. May we take in all that you have given us this day...and always. When we least expect it, you reveal what truly matters. Amen

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December 26, 2022

Enter In
[1 Peter 1: 8](#)

⁸ Although you have not seen^[a] him, you love him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy,

When I had my children, I loved them from the beginning. God loved his Son, Jesus, from the beginning too and, as Jesus entered this world, God was sharing His love with us. Bible stories tell us of the significance of His birth, but sometimes it is only after many years of going to church and hearing about Jesus that we realize what it truly means for us. God had a plan for Jesus. He was born, He died for us, He arose for us, and His Holy Spirit lives in us. And just like His Son, God has a plan for us too.

Although I have never seen Jesus, I love him and appreciate what he has done for me. I was a church person all of my life, but in 1973 I realized that you have to actually invite Him into your life. When I did that, my life changed so much. I could do things that I hadn't dreamed possible. I asked Him to live inside me and to take over. I prayed and studied and let him to speak to me. There were still a great deal of hard times, but He was always there beside me.

Each time we help someone, he is there directing us. When we listen to His voice, we can be His hands and feet. He understands our requests and our hearts' desires. He performs miracles in our lives. He helps us with the big things, but He also helps us with the small things. One miracle for me was when we were young and needed money for a bill. The exact amount that we needed came in the mail just in time to pay it. A more recent miracle was a business miracle where a contract that was to end was suddenly redirected to our business just in time. Life can change drastically when you invite Jesus to be in charge.

At this time of the year, we think about the love we have for others, and how we want to show that love to our children, friends, and strangers. Sometime the busy months leading up to Christmas does not reflect the reason for the season. We want God to flow through us with His love for others. We do it by buying gifts, making gifts, spending time with the ones we love, and hopefully celebrating Jesus' birth. We need to celebrate the greatest gift God could have ever given us.

As I look over my life, I know that God has been with me for every step. I'm so grateful to Him for blessing me and being with me daily. I have had the privilege of knowing Him and praying for others to find Him. God has blessed us so with the gift of His Son. What joy He has given His children.

Prayer: *Thank you God for your Son and this season. Live in each of us and shine through us with Your love. Help us to continually seek your wisdom and common sense. Help us to express our love and joy in you. Amen.*

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December 27, 2022

Hope
[Isaiah 9:2-7](#)

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. ³ You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. ⁴ For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. ⁵ Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. ⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

When one reads this passage, it is hard not to have a sense of awe and wonder! Everything we associate with the Advent season is in this passage.

It unfolds like the opening scene of an epic adventure movie. The expansive land covered in shadow as the "son" rises to reveal a breathtaking landscape.

There is one word that is missing in this passage....HOPE!

Hope is not *wishing* for the darkness to end; hope is believing that light will replace it. As we have prepared for the birth of the coming Christ throughout our Advent journeys, this passage lists everything we have come to HOPE in.

It reassures us of everything that we have come to HOPE for: This child, this one solitary life that would change the course of humankind. The Everlasting Father. The Prince of Peace.

What is it that we have to look forward to if not for the HOPE in Jesus Christ, the light of the world?

I have always been a fan of movies and every once in a while, a writer will put something in a movie that strikes a chord with the viewer (me in this case) that they carry with them, that becomes a core memory.

For me, one of those lines is given from a wise headmaster at a magical school and in that one statement gave a mission to anyone that heard it. "Happiness can be found even in the darkest of times, when one only remembers to turn on the light." As Christians we should be turning on the light of Jesus Christ at every opportunity.

Prayer: *Almighty God, we thank you this day for the gift of your son Jesus. We thank you that in our times of darkness we are given the hope of light. We ask that you guide us, direct us, and make us vessels for your light so that we too may share the light and hope of Jesus Christ this day and every day. Amen*

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December 28, 2022

Growing Seasons

[Psalm 96](#)

*Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar and all that fills it;
¹² let the field exult and everything in it.*

At this time of year, the thoughts of gardeners among us drift toward how we'll prepare for the upcoming planting season. We'll till the soil, sow seeds, carefully and faithfully tend the garden, and wait for the first signs of growth. Throughout the growing season we'll watch the fruits of our labor flourish and ripen. We'll keep an eye on the garden to root out weeds and chewing bugs to ensure continued growth.

When reaping a good harvest, we'll be joyful that our labors in the field have been rewarded. We'll probably share a portion with others and then put an amount aside to enjoy in the future. We'll even save seeds from the harvest in preparation for a new garden the next season. We'll trust that the seeds will produce another bountiful crop. If the growing season hasn't been successful, we'll still prepare for a new crop the next season and look toward getting improved results. We'll have faith that a better crop is in the future.

It's much the same with the children in our lives. We plan for their arrival and, throughout their growing season, we root out the bad influences to which they are exposed and fend off their fears and concerns with loving care.

We consistently bless and praise God to teach our children how to grow in their own faith. When the physical growing is completed and the children are ready to strike out on their own, they -- and we -- experience the harvest of that growth, not only in stature and knowledge, but in the seeds of faith we, and those who love them, have planted in their hearts and minds. By doing so steadily and prayerfully, each child's growing season has a firm foundation upon which to develop themselves as an ambassador of God who will reach out to others in the world.

What are our personal growing seasons? What have others planted for us and what have we planted for ourselves? Will our harvest be plentiful as we rejoice in our Creator? Or will it be full of weeds so that we need to plow deep to reset our thinking and put our feet back on the path to God? Whatever your personal walk with God may be, sing and rejoice in the word of the Lord and make **your** growing seasons the best ones possible.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, help me to be aware of my place in this world as I sow the seeds of growth, love, and faith. Let not my seeds fall on fallow ground but on fertile soil, whether it be seeds for crops, encouragement, love, or support. Please let me be the instrument of successful growing seasons for those around me so that they, too, can "Sing unto the Lord, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day." Amen.*

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December 29, 2022

The God Who Stays

[Hebrews 13: 1-8](#)

"I will never leave you or forsake you." ⁶ So we can say with confidence,

I was not attending a church, and with no guidance, I was feeling lost. What I did not know at the time was that it was in God's plans all along how and when he would call His lost sheep back. He called me through music, under circumstances I had no control over. Singing was a fun hobby; I never considered myself to be a "professional singer," feeling under qualified and underserving, I find myself in two church choirs.

In 2008 our brother Gregg was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 52. Listening to and singing hymns was a way to help us through this difficult time. One hymn seemed to help: my father-in-law's favorite hymn was *There Will Be Peace in the Valley*, and we played it constantly.

Less than a month after our brother passed, the dad of my cousin who baptized my family, suffered a brain aneurysm. My uncle was just a few years older than me. While he was on life support, a cousin purchased a stuffed frog for our aunt. The frog sang *What a Wonderful World*. My aunt would make that frog sing for all visitors, and there were many. I wanted to hide that stupid frog.

Sunday after the funerals, dragging my feet thinking, choir is on summer break, no big deal if I sleep in, God will understand. **I won't miss anything.** Struggling, I decide to attend and sit in the balcony. On summer breaks, our choir director would bring in a soloist. We never knew who that would be.

Time for the anthem, a gentleman I had never met introduces himself as Willie Day. The music starts, he is singing *There Will Be Peace in the Valley*. Ok, that's eerie. I feel a stirring in my soul, and my eyes begin to water. He finishes the song, and I am feeling thankful I ignored that devil whispering in my ear. Willie is not finished; he starts the music. He is singing *What a Wonderful World*. This is no coincidence.

Now you have my full attention, Lord. I feel Your strong presence and Your peace. I realized God has always been in control. He's the God who stays; it was I that had turned away. I know in my heart that His words are true. We can trust His promise that He will never leave us.

Prayer: *God of Love, we bow humbly before you in amazement that the King of the universe would even care about our broken lives. You are a God who leaves the 99 in search for the one that has been lost. Your promise that You will be with us, You go before us, Your promise never to leave or forsake us is true still today. Let the entire universe sing shouts of Hallelujah Praises!! Amen*

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December 30, 2022

And It Moved into the Neighborhood

[John 1:1-14](#)

The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish. – John 1:14

In a world that has been ravaged by everything from a global pandemic to nationwide infant formula shortages, it is easy to feel like we are living in a space in which God is not moving. In fact, we often feel as if the movement of the Holy Spirit is out of reach: that the movement of the Holy Spirit can only be truly felt and experienced by those who have the right gifts or can say the right words or are living the right life.

The Word as it is made known to us in the first chapter of John has been moving within a world similar to the one we know best. The world of Jesus's ancestors was no stranger to the pains of disease, resource shortages, and war. And just as our world has its many faults, God knew that this world too would not accept their Son with open and loving arms. But yet, this did not shake the movement that our loving Parent had planned in perfect detail from start to finish.

Knowing the road that would lie ahead, the Son and the Word rolled up their sleeves and got to work. As Jesus moved into neighborhood after neighborhood, the Word followed closely behind and remained even after Jesus traveled to the next place. And just as our Parent God would have it, no place was left unchanged.

In our daily lives, it is all too easy to pinpoint the places and spaces and people that we feel need the most fixing. We make it our mission to bring the movement and working of the Holy Spirit into them. The reality is that we must first stop. We must stop and see the glory of what the Word is already doing with our own eyes. The glory that is like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish.

Amen.

Prayer: *Holy Parent, we thank you for the Word that is present in everything we do, in both spaces we frequent and the places we will not go. May we move within the world with the desire and courage to be a servant of the Word even in places that we do not see you at work yet. Amen.*

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December 31, 2022

New Life in Christ

Titus 2:11-14

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, ¹² training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

Temptation is always lurking; the devil in disguise, trying to get us to deny and defy Christ. Social media and the internet can make it so easy to stray from our godly intentions. It sometimes takes intentional work to say “No” to the things of this world, and to say “Yes” to God’s ways.

When I turn my head or divert my eyes from the man with the sign asking for help, does Jesus nod understandingly? When I pay all my bills before giving my first fruits to God, does He understand and smile?

The more I pray for people and situations, the more I pray with people, the closer God feels and the more I feel Him smiling. Anytime I’m in prayer or being God’s hands is the time I’m giving Satan a mighty migraine, as my pastor encourages us to do every Sunday in his benediction.

New life in Christ is often represented by a butterfly. There’s just something inspiring about that cycle of life.

Our lives often follow a similar cycle. We begin as an egg in the womb, born as an innocent being, then grow and are affected by the world.

But, thanks be to God, we can be born again, and start a new life. Does it mean we won’t be affected by the world? No, but we are now *in* the world, not *of* the world.

A new year, a new life, both in Christ. This is my prayer for you.

Prayer: *Father, show me where I can be your light. Show me to see with the eyes of my heart. Help me to see you in unexpected places, because, after all, you’re everywhere. Help me love too much to give space for hate. In Jesus’s name I pray. Amen.*

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January 1, 2023

The Holy Spirit in the New Year

[Titus 3:4-7](#)

“...and according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior...”

How is it possible that 2022 is over, and we’ve begun a new adventure? Do you have regrets, like me, about uncompleted projects or unspoken words? Did you make resolutions which were unrealistic, make none at all, or did you, like me, forget to include God first in your resolutions?

The scripture from Titus tells us that God through Jesus will enter our lives and regenerate us through the renewing of the Holy Spirit. I think this is God’s way of keeping in touch with us even when we stray far away. I was baptized at 12 after growing up in the church. It was a quiet experience, and I sometimes felt disappointed because I didn’t have the “mountain top” experience of many believers. I sometimes had a difficult time feeling that I was “saved” as had those others.

Recently, I’ve felt that the Holy Spirit is working in my life more than I’ve ever noticed before. I try to be more aware and “listen” better to understand what He is telling or showing me. I now believe that my quiet acceptance of Christ isn’t any less powerful than those more dramatic ones. God calls us, through the Holy Spirit, at different times. Some receive God’s message quickly, while others have a slow development of their faith.

In this new year 2023, I want the Holy Spirit to work more strongly in my life.

This new year I will make one special resolution to be more attentive to the compelling voice of the Holy Spirit and to strive to follow His lead. I know I can only accomplish this by reading the Bible more, listening better and most of all by letting God take the lead.

My hope of regeneration and renewal can only happen with God’s guidance so that by the end of 2023, I will be more in tune with the Holy Spirit’s direction for my life.

Prayer: *Glorious Father, allow us to understand you more as we renew our connection to the Holy Spirit. Let 2023 be the year that we fully embrace the life you have planned for each of us. In Jesus’ holy name, Amen.*

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January 2, 2023

Finding the Good News

[Isaiah 52:7](#)

How beautiful upon the mountain are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

Many times in our lives, we have or will be waiting for "the feet of him who brings good news," as we anticipate events. Maybe it is a school test result...the arrival of a loved one from travels...the results of medical tests or the birth of a child. The list is endless, but what if the results are not good news? What if the results are not what we were wanting to hear?

In the summer of 2021, our family was anticipating the birth of a grandchild with all the joy and expectations a family typically has at that time. Several months prior to birth, we became aware there were concerns with the health of our baby. We prayed, our friends prayed, and our churches prayed for a change in the outcome but "the feet" did not bring the good news we wanted to hear.

As the parents began adjusting to a new reality, they shared Della's story on social media daily with details about her health, her steps forward and her steps back. I must be honest and say I thought such openness on social media was a mistake. However, an unexpected thing happened, or at least it was unexpected to me: there was a tremendous outpouring of love and prayers from around the world, the placing of Della on hundreds of prayer lists, the overwhelming number of kind words posted back on social media, and the surprise of people from all walks of life reaching out to lend support daily.

The news may not always come in ways we want or expect, but possibly we need to be open to hearing and seeing the good news in different ways. In our case we have learned to rely more deeply upon our God for strength to face an unknown future and to see Christ in the faces of the nurses and hospital staff who cared for them. We give thanks for the church members who brought meals for many months and still continue to do so and the friends who came unexpectedly to mulch the flower beds and the many kind words and hugs.

We worship a God of grace, mercy, and love who can and will give us the strength we need and surround us with fellow Christians who will share our burdens. THAT is the good news.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, open our hearts and minds to see the good news in all of the situations we find ourselves in life. Help us to lean into your grace, mercy and love each day. Amen.*

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January 3, 2023

My Jesus
[Hebrews 1:1-12](#)

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

Last year's holiday season marked the beginning of a tumultuous time for my family. Shortly before Thanksgiving my father began experiencing severe health complications related to his kidneys and the colorectal cancer he'd been diagnosed with nearly eight years ago. As his physical and mental health eroded, the strain on my siblings, me, and especially our mother grew to a point that was nearly unmanageable.

Throughout all this, we were blessed to have many friends and neighbors offer their prayers and support. Every few days, I received a thoughtful text message, a phone call, a card, or an offer to go out for a nice dinner to help get my mind off things, even if only for a little while. These were the life rafts that kept me afloat when it seemed that the stress and sorrow would surely pull me under.

And yet when I think back on those difficult days, my heart is most tender for the memories of my time with Jesus. Kneeling in prayer at my bedside. Sitting in my car on my lunch break, pouring my soul and my tears into his hands. Knowing exactly who orchestrated the small miracles we received just in the nick of time. The kindness and love he demonstrated in my father's final days.

Those are moments I will never forget ... moments with my Jesus, my sustainer and healer. Who ranks above angels and was given all the power and authority of heaven, who is who he says he is and whose promises are true.

Prayer:
*My friend.
My everything.
My Jesus.
Amen.*

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January 4, 2023

“Yes, Pass It On”

[2 Timothy 1: 3-14](#)

I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you. (2 Timothy 1:5)

I just love this passage! Timothy was blessed. His mother and grandmother took seriously the sacred teachings from Deuteronomy (6:4-9) to diligently and at all times pass on God's Word.

I feel a kindred spirit with Timothy. My mother also invested considerable time in making sure her children were regularly exposed to the things of God. All three of her children have been actively involved in the church and faith for years. I recently reminded my now 93-year-old mother of this fact and her remark, “Honey, I did what God commanded me to do.

And sometimes it wasn't always so easy.” And having raised my own three children (and who says you're ever finished), I can concur that at times it's been challenging to consistently and genuinely share the faith with the family and with those who I encounter each day.

Just like my mother, Paul poured himself into Timothy and encouraged him to do the same for others. Paul to Timothy: “This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you....” Don't let those embers die, Timothy! Get out there. Pass it on.” I'm so moved by Paul's love for Timothy and therefore his admonishing to not quench the Spirit.

We live in a country that has been so blessed by God over the years. However, in recent decades some (and a growing number) question the faith and God of our forefathers and foremothers. The relevancy. The need. The passing on of our faith is slowing down. And if it continues?

Thus the power of Paul's words for us today:

“So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord.” “Hold on to the pattern of wholesome teaching you learned from me—a pattern shaped by the faith and love that you have in Christ Jesus.” “God has not given us a Spirit of fear, but of love and power and a sound mind.”

Wow! If we read these scriptures with any sense of urgency and love—much like Paul did in sharing with Timothy—we know we have our marching orders as well. As Paul reminds Timothy, “Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will in turn be able to pass them onto others.” (2 Timothy 2:2)

We remember at this time of the year that God gave us His Son Jesus that we, too, might be able to give unto others this life changing news.

Prayer: *Almighty God, help us to stir into flames that passion to follow you more nearly and to serve you more dearly. Keep us burning, burning til the break of day, as we relentlessly and lovingly pass it on. Amen.*

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January 5, 2023

Seeing is Believing

[Isaiah 63:7-9](#)

I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord, the praiseworthy acts of the Lord, because of all that the Lord has done for us, and the great favor to the house of Israel that he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. For he said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely"; and he became their savior in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

We are given a reminder each year of God's steadfast love for us. If we are completely blind to what God does for us each and every day of our life and cannot see how much he loves us, we are given a day and a season each year to remind us of his unconditional love for us.

Although this day has been commercialized, it is a reminder--even to the unsaved. We call it "Advent:" a time to focus on what is coming. The world calls Christmas season a time for remembering that it more blessed to give than to receive and after the day passes, it goes back to the way it was without following through and remembering that the greatest gift was Jesus.

A few years back I had the privilege of driving men from Recovery Point to Steele Memorial Methodist Church for Celebrate Recovery program. I was privileged by the fact that I sat in on some meetings and heard stories of how lives became unraveled because they didn't know or had never heard of God's steadfast love for those in distress.

It was amazing to see lives changed, attitudes changed because of the relationships being built by sharing God's love. There were those whose lives were turned around wanting to go back into the world to become preachers because of accepting God's presence in their lives and being redeemed by his word. It is amazing to see God's love at work.

As we enter into the new year, let us open ourselves to being merciful to our fellow man. Let us share the good news with all we meet, but let us not only share with the less fortunate but let us make it a point of finding them, the unsaved so we can fulfill our duties as disciples.

Prayer: *Father God, we thank you for your presence in our lives. Give us understanding and strength that we may complete the assignment You have given us. We ask this in the name of Your Precious Son Jesus. Amen*

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January 6, 2022 – Epiphany

Are you a Bridge?

[John 17:20-26](#)

I'm praying not only for them but also for those who will believe in me because of them and their witness about me. The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind—just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, so they might be one heart and mind with us.

When I was growing up, my Great Aunt Sue lived across the Kanawha River from Glen Falls. Below the falls was the creaky old bridge we would cross to drive to her house.

At the far end of the bridge was a small trailer where a man sat to collect toll. This was not a toll bridge, but he didn't care. To cross the bridge, you had to pay him money. He was an unnecessary and unauthorized obstruction to reaching the other side.

What is the purpose of a bridge? According to the Googler's friend, Wikipedia, a bridge is "constructed for the purpose of providing passage over the obstacle, which is usually something that is otherwise difficult or impossible to cross."

A bridge provides a way for us to reach something otherwise unattainable.

In today's scripture from John 17, we are overhearing Jesus's conversation with God. Jesus is praying not only for his disciples, but also for those who will believe in Christ because of them. If you think about it, Jesus, in this passage, is praying for us.

"The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind--just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, so they might be one heart and mind with us."

I think it is more than amazing that Christ prayed for you and for me, for each of us and for all of us over 2000 years ago. He prayed that we would be evidence to the world that God sent Christ to us and loved us in the same way God has loved Christ. Did you catch that? He prayed that we would be evidence that God loves us *the same way* God loves Christ.

We are called to be the bridge so that other people can reach the unattainable conclusion that they are loved by God – beyond measure.

What kind of bridge will you be? Will you be a bridge like Christ – opening the way for others to come to new life? Or will you be the obstacle like the man who collected tolls on the way to my Aunt Sue's house?

Prayer: *Loving God, open the way for us to be bridges to the knowledge of your love instead of obstacles. In your son's name, Amen.*

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My prayers continue to surround each of you, and I am grateful for your ministry as you all respond to your various callings. It is indeed a privilege and pleasure to serve as your Conference Lay Leader.

Best wishes for a happy and healthy New Year 2023!
~Kristi Wilkerson

