



2016 Advent Devotional



Kiokee Baptist Church

# Introduction

If you've been around Kiokee for a while, you may remember our Advent Devotionals from years gone by. Those carefully crafted meditations were written, compiled, and edited by our resident wordsmith, Hal Rowland. His thoughts, observations, and uncanny ability to articulate them well proved to be a wonderful treasure for those in our church looking to escape the tinsel veneer of this holiday season and return to the divine mystery of God in flesh.

Hal's real-world wisdom and genuine heart for helping people connect deeply to the truth of God's word were wonderful gifts to the Body here at Kiokee. But the greater gift was the fact that those Advent Devotionals encouraged us to engage corporately in head and heart preparation for the coming of our Lord.

So, last year we decided to start producing an Advent Devotional again.

Advent means "coming." It is the time of year set aside for the purpose of preparing our hearts and minds for Jesus' coming to our world at Christmas. With all the arrangements that need to be made this time of year — trees, presents, decorations, parties, etc.— it can be easy to neglect the indispensable preparation of our hearts. If we're not careful, December 25th will come and go and we'll find ourselves in piles of torn wrapping paper and unmet expectations wondering why they've left us empty and unfulfilled.

During Advent, we purpose to remember the ancient longing experienced by those awaiting Jesus' arrival by reconnecting with God's promises and being reminded of our desperate need for a Savior. We prioritize this time with hopes of recalibrating our hearts to ponder the glorious wonder of God's love, the miracle of Jesus' birth, and to wait in hopeful anticipation for His triumphant return.

At the beginning of our worship services on each of the four Sundays in Advent, we will read a passage of Scripture and light a candle from the Advent Wreath. Each candle represents one of the four emphases of Advent: Hope, Peace, Love, and Joy.

The devotionals in this booklet will follow that pattern, as well. Each of these contributors will share their thoughts on a passage of Scripture and conclude with comments or questions for you to consider throughout your day.

Head questions deal with what we need to know. Heart questions cause us to examine attitudes or beliefs that need to be challenged or strengthened. Hand questions take what we're learning and challenge us to apply it to our lives.

I am grateful to these folks for their contribution to this booklet, but even more so for their investment in lives here at Kiokee. It has been a joy reading each one's thoughts and a wonderful reminder of how multifaceted Declaring God's Greatness can look and sound from those whose lives are being transformed.

Week 1:

Hope

# Day 1: Keri Ball

*“We are saved by hope” speaks of the work of Christ for us on the cross and our faith in Him. But this is not all. We have a redeemed body coming up in the future.” J. Vernon McGee*

**Today’s Scripture:** Romans 8:24 NIV

There are many times in my life that I have felt hopeless. I am so grateful that this is not the truth and that I have hope in Christ Jesus. Because of Christ -- the Word who became flesh sent to dwell with us and then ultimately died for us -- we are blessed. But because He conquered death and rose on the third day we have hope. His victory gives us the hope of an eternal life beyond this world. If the story would have ended with Jesus dying on the cross then He would have just been another prophet, a crazy person, or even a liar. But because He defeated death with His perfect love we have the hope of eternal life. We are made new.

I find it extremely comforting that Christ prayed for us, the ones who would believe not by seeing but through the message, before dying on the cross for our sins. Reading Jesus’ prayer for all believers in John 17:20-26 has been a great source of comfort and hope for me through some of my darkest times. To know that I was on His mind and in His heart during what was probably his darkest hour gives me hope. “...May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am...” John 17:23-24. Just to read those words fills me with hope.

Christ is the example. As a Christian we are to take the next step and live in the truth of his hope every day and share that hope with others. Christ is my hope and the hope of the world. He is the light in the darkness, the peace in the storm, the rock on which I stand. None of us want to go through trials but without them I would never have experienced the sweet relief that His hope brings. Hope is knowing that He is coming back for us, that we will be with Him where he is.

## **Consider This:**

- **Head:** How does knowing that Jesus will return again give us hope?
- **Heart:** Go to God seeking Him every morning, strengthen yourself in His Word to become filled with the Hope of Jesus, and then go share it!
- **Hands:** Now more than ever this world needs the hope of Jesus and we are the ones who need to share it. How can you share the hope of Jesus with someone today?

# Day 2: Garrett Dorn

**Today's Scripture:** 2 Peter 1:3-4

In this text we see that God has a very specific design for the life of a Christian. Before we believe in what Jesus has done for us, the Bible tells us that we have a sinful nature -- that we are born into this world broken and in need of a savior. It is evident that through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection God has made a way for us to know him. After this happens, after the Holy Spirit regenerates our hearts, we are given new desires and a new heart.

The Christian should desire to obey and glorify God in all we do. How do we do this though? This passage in 2 Peter tells us that we have become partakers of the divine nature! God has already done the work necessary for you live a godly life! We must seek Jesus through his word and prayer, and then in turn submit the rebellious areas of our life to him.

The great news and great hope is that God has given us the power and ability to do it! I love these verses because it says that he has granted to us his precious and very great promises. There is a promise for the believer that God will conform us into the image of Christ! There is a promise that for the believer God will complete the good work he started in us! Let us rejoice in that. Let us submit every area of our life to Yahweh. He has given us his word. Now take up and read it and ask our great Father to conform you to his commands. Let us be obedient in our lives so that God is glorified and the Gospel goes forth! Finally I want you to know that you will fail and sin. But God has much grace and we have a wonderful and faithful advocate in Jesus Christ. He is always before the Father interceding for us.

## Consider This:

- **Head:** What, according to this passage, has God given us?
- **Heart:** How can you increase in the understanding of Christ in order to live the life He's called you to live?
- **Hands:** As you consider what to include on your Christmas wish list, think about all God has given you through Jesus.



## Day 3: Ansley Evans

*“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope — a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” A.W. Tozer*

**Today’s Scripture:** Revelation 7:9-17

I hope it doesn’t rain this weekend. I hope we get some rain this week. I hope somebody brings pecan pie to Christmas dinner. I hope my friends remember my birthday. I hope I find a husband soon. I hope the Lord will give us a child. I hope my son will not scream in Target. I hope my daughter will be successful. I hope my mother’s pathology report comes back okay. I hope my children will bring their families to see me. I hope they don’t play that movie again. I hope the ones I leave behind will remember me well.

This world is full of longing, and so very often we find ourselves “hoping” that a particular thing will or will not happen. We do and we plan and we pray as best as we can to elicit or avoid a particular outcome. And then we very often find that the outcomes that we hope for—even the important ones—are not guaranteed; we are not in control.

But praise God that we are not! Because I don’t think we could have orchestrated the means for the Blessed Hope that we have for an unfathomably beautiful future in eternity. (OK, I know we couldn’t have.) Things on earth are hard, but things in Heaven will not be. And we have a great God to thank for that hope. Because the Lamb came, and because He will come again, “a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people, and language” will “come out of the great tribulation.”

I think the thing I love most about Christmas is the season of Advent because it serves as such a heart-piercing reminder of the real hope that is found in the waiting and in the preparation. We didn’t get to wait on the birth of Christ, but we do get to wait for Him now.

*“Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King! Let every heart prepare Him room, and Heaven and nature sing!”*

### Consider This:

- **Head:** What role does the Lamb play in the revelation of the great multitude in white robes?
- **Heart:** What worldly “hopes” are you clinging to?
- **Hands:** How can you let Jesus be your shepherd even today?

# Day 4: Phillip Knox

*“The gospel infuses hope and joy into our current circumstances by acknowledging God’s greatness over any crisis we’ll face.” Randy Alcorn*

**Today’s Scripture:** Romans 5: 1-8

Christmas is a time of year where the burdens of life can weigh heavy on us. During the Christmas Holiday Season we can be filled with so many emotions. Many of these emotions are driven from the memories of passed loved ones, the accelerated busyness of life, the expectation to get a perfect gift or so many gifts, to the uncomfortable encounters with relatives, the frustration with the commercialism and the list goes on and on. In fact, the stress of the season, which was supposed to be a time of Joy to the World, can leave us tired, frustrated, angry and hopeless.

When my children were little I was in one of those Christmas time moods. It wasn’t an Elvis “Blue Christmas” mood but a frustrated and disgusted mood. I found myself struggling with lying to my children about Santa Clause, while the world around me is screaming louder than the voice in my head how I need to be a good Dad and buy into this Christmas commercialism. While on the way to work one morning these thoughts were weighing so heavy on me that my excitement of celebrating Jesus birth had diminished. During this dark time I began to reflect on what Christmas was really about and soon my mind was flooded with thoughts, out of which came a poem.

*What the world has to offer really seems sad to me,  
A man in a red suit and presents under a tree.  
What God has to offer is not like the words above,  
But a Savior who came with nothing but love.  
When you go through Christmas this very year,  
I hope the real meaning will become clear.  
So accept the greatest present Jesus is his name,  
If you take God’s present you will never be the same.*

As the realness of the Christmas season came to my mind, the rays of Hope began to shine in my life again. This is the REAL HOPE that gives life to a dying world... that God the Creator came as a man, lived among us in all our despair and hopelessness, then died on a cross to pay the penalty for our sins, rose again and intercedes on our behalf that we may have HOPE in the mist of hopelessness.

## **Consider This:**

- **Head:** Whatever mood you find yourself this Christmas season, remember your HOPE can be Built on NOTHING Less than Jesus Blood and His Righteousness.
- **Heart:** How does knowing that “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (verse 5) give you hope?
- **Hands:** What could you do (like writing a poem) to help you move from frustration to hope?

# Day 5: Tracy McDaniel

*“If God be our God, He will give us peace in trouble. When there is a storm without, He will make peace within. The world can create trouble in peace, but God can create peace in trouble.” Thomas Watson*

**Today’s Scripture:** Romans 4:18

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations. Just as it had been said to him.

In our world today, the word “hope” has become very watered down. It’s almost become like a wish. We use it in instances like: I hope I pass this test. I hope I’m not getting sick. I hope so-and-so doesn’t come over at Christmas. The way we use it today seems to be tied to a lot of uncertainty.

But there is a different kind of hope, a hope that does not disappoint. This is the hope Paul spoke of about Abraham. This is a hope with certainty, a hope in a God that keeps His word. Look at how this plays out: We move from uncertainty to hope to belief then to what we will become.

I don’t know what you are feeling, but I have good news: There is hope! His name is Jesus Christ. My sincere hope for you and yours is that you discover this one and only hope that is found in Jesus.

## Consider This:

- **Head:** How often to you equate hoping with wishing?
- **Heart:** What would it take to move your understanding to a more biblical view of hoping?
- **Hands:** Take some time today to remind yourself of the faithfulness of God. You can trust Him. You can place your hope in Him.



# Day 6: Nell Morris

*“We have a God who is infinitely gracious, and knows all our wants...He will come in His own time, and when you least expect it. Hope in Him more than ever... comfort yourself then with Him, and give thanks for all.”*

*Brother Lawrence in The Practice of the Presence of God*

**Today’s Scripture:** Hebrews 10:23 and Hebrews 6:19a

Hope is what has carried me through the last 40-plus years, and hope is what carries me through each day. (Shared with permission) My beautiful, smart, talented daughter has been battling alcoholism for 25 years and has come close to death. After several rehabs and relapses, she’s lost her marriage, her home and self-esteem, but she’s sober now and is seeking God for help and growing in Him daily. Her three sons have their own issues with drugs and serious legal repercussions. Her 16-year old son is in court-ordered rehab, addicted to alcohol and drugs, her 21-year old son is awaiting trial for using and selling drugs, and — Praise God! — her 26-year old son has been clean and sober for 6 years from a heroin addiction. Do I “hold unwaveringly” to the hope I profess through all this? No. Sometimes I sink into utter despair and hopelessness when I stand helpless and watch my children destroy their lives. But God pulls me out of the pit and reminds me that He is faithful and is able to keep that which I’ve committed to Him.

Once again he becomes “the anchor for my soul” and restores my hope. He reminds me that He is in control, not me, and He is big enough and powerful enough to defeat Satan who wreaks havoc in my children’s lives. My hope is not in AA, rehab, will power, promises or counseling, as valuable as they are. God is my only hope. He is my daughter’s only hope. He is her sons’ only hope. And He is your only hope, as well. This is not a fleeting, wishful thinking sort of hope, but my soul’s anchor, firm and secure. I don’t yet have what I hope for, but knowing He is faithful, I will wait patiently for His timing and His answer, whatever that may be. I see His hand at work in their lives and I wait. I thank Him that I can KNOW that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.

Hope was born in Bethlehem — and because He lives, I have hope — for me, for my children and grandchildren, and for our nation. Be joyful in hope!

## **Consider This:**

- **Head:** What does it mean to “hold fast” to our hope?
- **Heart:** What life circumstances cause you to lose your grip on hope?
- **Hands:** Take some time today to reflect on the promises of God.

# Day 7: Carey Tankersley

*“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11*

**Today’s Scripture:** Jeremiah 29:11

When I consider hope this is always the first verse that comes to mind. Over a longer period of time I began to realize that if I were to understand verse 11 the preceding verses provide the real context and meaning of what Christian hope really looks like. God gives a daily agenda of what our hope looks like in real time to the Israelites who are exiled and in captivity in Babylon in verses 4-7. “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

The word “hope” often appears as wishful thinking. To the Christian, though, it has a much more present tense. It exists as a very meaningful part of our daily walk in faith. It occurs when we chose to put our trust in the promises of God -- not in our circumstances, felt needs, or understanding of what the good life is -- and live accordingly. May we live in that promise this season.

## Consider This:

- **Head:** How do verses 1 – 10 help us better understand verse 11?
- **Heart:** Where does your heart naturally go when you are in what looks like a no win situation?
- **Hands:** While we will never experience Babylonian captivity, we often find ourselves in situations (work, school, community activities, etc.) where those we are with do not share and could even be hostile towards our convictions. How can you engage and invest in these arenas without compromising your faith?



Week 2:

Peace

# Day 8: Betsy Barris

*“Come Thou long expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free  
From their fears and sins release us; let us find our rest in Thee.” Charles Wesley*

*“Peace reigns where our Lord reigns.” Julian of Norwich*

**Today’s Scripture:** Ephesians 2:14

I have a memory that is etched in my mind and heart. It could seem to be just a Christmas memory of a seven-year-old, but for me it helped me understand the comfort of the Lord. Whenever I was going through trials and challenges I would often reflect back and remember the peace I felt when I would lay down close to our decorated Christmas tree. I would read my \$0.49 Little Golden Books and color in my coloring book. Something would come over me: the lights shining, the glistening of the ornaments, the smell of the tree. I thought it was just the season and surroundings, but what I felt in my heart – I knew it was much more. These decorations served to remind me of the true Prince of Peace, Jesus. I believe He used that special time to let me know all was well and that He was there with me. This peace always returns to me when I keep my eyes, heart, and mind focused on Jesus. (Isaiah 26:3)

Oh, what a gift that God has given. I agree with Stanley Anderson, “There is a piece [peace] of eternity in every heart.” God designed us. He loves us so. Isaiah 53:2, “The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.” Our peace has been fulfilled because of Jesus. I am in continued awe of how God works through and in us. Corrie ten Boom experienced horrific circumstances yet, this is what she wrote:

*“A solitary cell awaited me. Everything was empty and gray...  
Here there was nothing, only emptiness, a cold, gray void.  
‘O Savior, You are with me, help me; hold me fast and comfort me.  
Take away this anxiety, this desolation... Take me into Your arms and comfort me,’ I prayed. And peace stole into my heart. The weird noises still surrounded me, but I fell quietly asleep.”*

My prayer is that we return to the open, hungry hearts of our seven-year-old selves. Come before the Lord in full surrender and trust. Be in His presence.

## Consider This:

- **Head:** What does Paul mean when he says that He himself is our peace?
- **Heart:** What are some of the ways you’ve experienced the peace of Christ?
- **Hands:** Spend a little time today singing and reflecting on a few of your favorite Christmas carols.

# Day 9: John Eubank

## Today's Scripture: Luke 1:38

Sometimes I think of peace as a thing I accidentally stumble into. I may walk out early on a cool Fall morning, or sit in the evening and stare into the depths of a warm winter fire, and think, "My, what a peaceful moment!", as if that moment was always going to occur and I just happened to be able to pop in at the right time. Is peace something I can only wish for like these quiet moments that pass by so quickly?

Scripture is clear that peace is a gift from the Lord, ("My peace I give to you" - John 14:27), but it is also clear through Peter that I have a role to play in bringing about peace in my life and the life of my community. Peter is quoting Psalm 34:13-14, a psalm of David, in verses 10-12. David and Peter alike knew that peace must be sought out and does not come naturally to us. They each experienced trouble, conflict, and persecution and they each tell us to pursue peace. Solomon puts it this way in Proverbs 12:20, "Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but those who plan peace have joy." Do I plan peace? Do I pursue it? How would I even start?

Thankfully, Peter gives clear direction in the surrounding verses, "...have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil, or insult for insult, but on the contrary, bless..." Bless people who do evil against me and insult me? How could God ask such a hard thing of me? Because He himself has done it. He knows the cost.... and the benefit. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, while I was still in sin, died for me (Romans 5:8). He even prayed for the men who hung him on the cross, asking for their forgiveness (Luke 23:24). And He asks us to follow His example.

So, when you think of the coming of Jesus this Christmas season, I encourage you to consider that His coming established His kingdom and His kingdom is one of peace. The extent to which I experience peace in my life may be a barometer telling me the extent to which I am cooperating with God in His kingdom. Let us follow the example of our Prince of Peace and plan for and pursue peace. The Lord will surely meet us in our pursuit and give the peace that surpasses understanding.

### Consider This:

- **Head:** Describe the fruits of an evil life from the passage. Describe the fruits of a righteous life from the passage.
- **Heart:** How does it make you feel when you think of blessing someone who has insulted you or hurt you? Do you believe God can work in that way to bring joy, peace, and blessing?
- **Hands:** Are there people or situations in your life for which you need to plan for and pursue peace? Pray for God to grant His peace and to give you the qualities described in verse 8 to cooperate with His kingdom. And choose peace at the next opportunity he gives you.

# Day 10: Ray & Ellen Farrow

*"Of all the things the enemy seeks to steal, kill, and destroy in your life, peace is almost always at or near the top of his list." Priscilla Shirer, Armor of God, p.95*

**Today's Scripture:** Luke 12:22-34

Satan attacks Christians in the arena of peace every chance he gets. Often he attacks through circumstances - a move, a lost job, the death of a loved one, family turmoil, a difficult boss, an illness, an argument, a traffic jam, a friend who disappoints, a change of plans, a burned cake. Big or little, Satan takes advantage of our circumstances to rob God's people of the peace that should be ours.

Over the last two and a half years, Ray and I have lived in five homes, belonged to three different churches, become grandparents (joy!) and empty nesters, held seven different jobs between us, and reluctantly left the careers we've loved for the past twenty-five years. Peace in our circumstances has been and continues to be elusive. Yet, peace has less to do with a person's physical circumstances and more to do with the position of one's heart. During this season of change, I have had frequent opportunities to choose peace. Sleepless nights turn to restful slumber when I choose to count blessings instead of rehearsing fears. Anxious thoughts give way to confidence in the One who has told me to cast all cares on Him (1 Peter 5:7) when I seek the wisdom of scripture instead of focusing on the events surrounding me. Uncertainties about the future take a back seat to confidence in God's plan for the present when I trust every day to His sovereignty.

Often we think of peace as a lack of conflict, but the biblical concept of shalom, interpreted as "peace" in English, is more than the absence of strife, conflict, disorder, or war. Jesus promised his followers, "in this world you will have trouble." (John 16:33) That isn't a promise from God that we often embrace! Yet it is in the hard times -- the non-peaceful times -- that we have the best opportunity to experience shalom. Jesus tells us to "take heart" because HE has overcome the world. Mary and Joseph's physical circumstances were anything but peaceful as they made their way from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Their homeland was in turmoil under the reign of a dangerous government; they had more questions than answers about the future, yet they continued steadfastly on the path laid out before them. This Christmas season and always, we are blessed because they chose peace in the midst of chaos.

## Consider This:

- **Head:** Identity a time in your life when you lacked peace in your circumstances. Now identify a time when you felt peace despite your circumstances. What made the difference?
- **Heart:** What circumstances are currently separating you from living in peace?
- **Hand:** What steps will you take this season to assure that Satan does not steal your peace?

# Day 11: Jeff Long

*"No one can pray and worry at the same time." Max Lucado*

**Today's Scripture:** Matthew 6:25-34

I know these verses talk about not worrying, but to do that we must be at peace and peace comes from our Father in Heaven. Philippians 4: 6-7 states: "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus." We serve a mighty God, one who knows all, sees all, loves all, provides all and comforts all.

My experience with peace comes from a most unlikely situation -- a 12 year-old boy. My son showed me what real peace is. He had just been informed a couple days earlier that he had a golf ball-sized tumor near the middle of his brain and that it needed to come out. As parents of this 12 year-old and knowing the seriousness of the situation, it was all my wife and I could do to keep it together around him. (On the one hand, we were trying to deal with the devastating news, then on the other, we were doing all we could to be strong for him). Well, just minutes prior to being wheeled into the operating room, my son and I were alone, and in that quietness I asked him how he was doing. He looked at me calmly and assuredly. Then with child-like faith he said, "It's gotta come out, right?" It was so matter of fact, it was almost scary. He was truly at Peace. He was demonstrating a level of spiritual maturity well beyond his earthly years. My son taught me a lesson that day.

Well, he survived that surgery, as well as several others over the next 6 1/2 yrs., and although he endured many setbacks and difficulties along the way, he never once asked "Why" or "Why me?" Instead, he stayed strong in his faith and accepted it all as part of God's plan. We can only know real peace when we truly turn everything over to the Lord and learn to accept that our lives are not our own, and that everything happens for a purpose. I have seen that lived out daily in this, now almost 21 year-old, young man's life. Even in the fiercest storms, God is with us, and He is in control of all things around us. There are many scripture verses that come to mind that we all lean on during times of difficulties. Matt 11:28-30; Luke 12:25-26; John 14:24; Ps 55:22; 1 Peter 5:6-8; And who can forget Ps 23. For me, I simply remember the look in my son's eyes, the tone in his voice, and the sincerity of his faith to know that God is in control, nothing happens without His say so. As a loving child of God it only takes a simple child-like faith that "Daddy" will take care of everything.

## **Consider This:**

- **Head:** What does Jesus encourage us to do instead of worry (v. 33)?
- **Heart:** What burdens or stresses do you need to empty your plate of so you can have peace?
- **Hands:** Find strength and peace in the arms of our Lord today. Give it all up, and let Him give you peace.

# Day 12: Melanie Meeks

*“If God be our God, He will give us peace in trouble. When there is a storm without, He will make peace within. The world can create trouble in peace, but God can create peace in trouble.” Thomas Watson*

**Today’s Scripture:** Isaiah 9:6; John 14:27

Peace is defined as “Freedom from disturbance; quiet and tranquility; restfulness.” Perhaps peace to you may be sitting on the beach listening to the waves, reclining in a hammock listening to the birds, or taking a nap in your recliner on a Sunday afternoon. Granted, these are all “peaceful”. But the peace that we read about in today’s scripture is so much more. We saw in Isaiah that this child born to us is called the “Prince of Peace”. Jesus stated in John that the peace He gives is not like the world gives. So, what is this “supernatural peace” that Jesus offers?

Jesus’s peace gives us a “restfulness” when we are experiencing storms in our life. Perhaps we are waiting on biopsy results. Jesus says, “Let’s walk together while we wait”. We may be experiencing broken or abusive relationships. Jesus’ peace will comfort and restore. Financial problems may abound. Is there any way we can have “peace” during these tough times?

What is the “prescription for peace” that Jesus offers? The first step to obtaining His peace is to accept Him as your personal Lord and Savior. During the Christmas season we celebrate His birth. He was sent to earth to save us. (John 3:16). Once we accept Him, the Holy Spirit comes to live in us. We then allow the Holy Spirit to guide us to the truths of God. We find these truths in the Bible, God’s word. Finally, we accept those truths God reveals to us in His Word. The simple remedy for our anxiety and fear is believing what God tells us. He is faithful! We then can have the peace that passes all understanding “... do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

## Consider This:

- **Head:** What storm are you currently experiencing?
- **Heart:** How will you respond to God’s “prescription for peace?”
- **Hands:** As you go throughout your day today, will you open up His word and allow the Holy Spirit to show you a truth of God you can stand on that will give you the peace offered by Jesus?



# Day 13: Michelle Sherman

## Today's Scripture: Isaiah 41:10

I deliver eulogies for my family. I know it sounds strange, but it's come to be what I do. It really works to my advantage now because everyone is nice to me since they all know I may be sharing stories about them one day too. It started when my grandmother, Nanny Woodward, went to be with the Lord. She was a character and loved to be in the spotlight, so I wanted to give her one last opportunity for all the attention to be on her. My heart would swell with love, laughter, and sorrow as I remembered all the joy she brought to my life. Thankfully, it would be several years before I would have to do this again, but then came a wave of deaths in our family. My grandmother, Nannie Shaw; my brother-in-law, Brent; my special great aunt, Aunt Audrey; and my father-in-law, Grandpa were all called to heaven within a couple of years. As each of them passed, I had the truly humbling honor of sharing the stories of those I loved so dearly. It was such an emotional experience each time, yet through it all, I experienced an incredible sense of peace.

I have found that as I write the precious memories I will share, it's almost therapeutic. However, I know with certainty that's not what brings me peace, it's Jesus. While my pages are full and the memories are sweet, my peace comes in knowing they had nothing to fear or dread in death and neither do I because of Jesus. Isaiah 41:10 tells us not to fear or lose courage because He is God. He gives us strength. He holds us in His righteous right hand. Wow! My Father in heaven holds me - a sinner, completely unworthy - yet He holds me and loves me as His child. When my heart aches from missing those I love or from watching others hurt so deeply, my Savior holds me tightly and pulls me close. He gives me peace.

More and more I have come to realize, knowing and trusting Jesus isn't just about peace in death. Reading His Word, learning from Him, and trusting His Holy Spirit to guide me brings me peace in life. I know that Jesus is with me in every part of my life and He is in always in control. I don't have to fret over the sins of my past or the uncertainty of my future. Jesus told us in John 14:27, "My peace I give to you." What an amazing Christmas gift! Through His birth, His death, and His resurrection, Jesus gave us the most incredible gift of peace. Along with Billy Graham, I believe it's the certainty in knowing as surely as the sun will rise, so will my God give me guidance, strength, hope, and comfort. Peace.

### Consider This:

- **Head:** What are some areas of your life that you need to share with Jesus and accept His gift of peace, knowing He is in control?
- **Heart:** How can you help others see Jesus in you by reflecting a peaceful spirit, especially during difficult times?
- **Hands:** As you go throughout your day today, be reminded of the peace that comes from knowing and trusting Christ, Prince of Peace.

# Day 14: Doug Smith

*“God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.” C.S. Lewis*

## **Today’s Scripture:** Philippians 4:6-7

I really enjoy the Advent season. It helps me see pass the retail Christmas and keeps me focused on the true meaning: Jesus. Just think about the four themes of this season: hope, peace, love and joy. Wow, don’t these four characteristics just capture who our Savior really is?

As I write these thoughts down, I think of the peace of Jesus. And in this crazy mixed up world we live in, peace is surely needed. But that seems more in line with Jesus being the Prince of peace when He will reign with a new heaven and new earth. As for me at this time, I’m searching for a peace that will calm the sea that can rage inside me. A peace that calms my inner self, when all it wants to do is worry.

Paul tells us in the scripture passage not to be anxious about anything but to go to God in prayer with everything. And then he tells us that Jesus will replace our thoughts of worry and anxiety and a heavy heart with His peace. The things of this world that have us troubled will still be, but we now have the confidence and peace of Christ to see us through. What a wonderful life that can be.

I saw this with my own father who was facing a procedure to clear blockages in his heart. He’d never had anything like this happen to him before and it was especially troubling with how fast it came about. I remember sitting in room with him seeing how anxious and upset he was getting. Even with his family and friends around him, the anticipation of what was to come had him worked up. My uncle asked everybody in the room to say a prayer out loud for my father. It was a touching few minutes made by a few people going to God on behalf of my father. And afterwards, I could really tell that he had eased up and he even told us he felt better about what he was facing.

I have to remind myself over and over the peace of Christ is so freely available. Paul tells us to go to Him with everything. Even though He knows it all and is in control of it all, He desires that personal time with me. It is this quiet time that His peace replaces all my worries.

### **Consider This:**

- **Head:** What does Paul encourage us to do when we are anxious?
- **Heart:** What are some of the things that weigh heavily on your heart?
- **Hands:** Will you make this Advent season a peaceful one by taking everything to Him?

Week 3:

Love

# Day 15: Reid Inglett

*“Love is not only something you feel, it is something you do.” David Wilkerson*

**Today’s Scripture:** Romans 5:6-11b

If you were asked to define or describe “love”, how would you respond? In my experience, “love” is a difficult word to define and an even harder concept to get your arms around. We, as a society, use the word ‘love” many different ways. We use it to show a strong preference or desire for an activity, hobby, style, or object (e.g. I love football, I love shopping, I love your dress/hair/shoes, I love steak/pizza/ice cream). We use it to describe an emotion, feeling, or attraction to another person (e.g. puppy love, can’t eat/sleep/think about anything else – It must be love, when I’m around them my heart races/my palms get sweaty/I have butterflies in my stomach – It must be love). We use it to express an appreciation of and dedication to a personal relationship (e.g. pet, friend, sibling, parent, or spouse). Most of these usages involve things that are fun, enjoyable, or beneficial to us.

God, on the other hand, paints a very different picture of “love” in Scripture. The biblical representation of “love” (i.e. true/real love) is a sacrificial action from one to another that is more concerned with the well-being and outcome of the receiver than it is with the cost or comfort of the giver. In Romans 5:6-11, the apostle Paul describes our condition (we are weak, dead in our trespasses and sins, sinful, unrighteous, and ungodly), God’s response to our need (through the life and sacrifice of Jesus), and the results of His action (justification, reconciliation, and salvation for the believer). Jesus’ sinless life lived and sacrificed to save a sinful people – That’s love!!! The next time someone asks you to define or describe “love.” Introduce them to Jesus!!

## **Consider This:**

- **Head:** How would you define “love?”
- **Heart:** How has that definition changed for you over the years?
- **Hands:** How can you put hands and feet to that definition today?



# Day 16: Eddie Brown

*“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from GOD, and whoever loves has been born of GOD and knows GOD.”*

**Today’s Scripture:** 1 John 4:7

What a beautiful picture of love, that you are God’s treasure and if you love GOD the overflow is love for one another.

“But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us!” (Romans 5:8). No doubt you’ve already heard the familiar words of our mission statement to love people. I have witnessed this love my entire life with the people of Kiokee. But this Advent season let us draw on a timeless treasure of “O Holy Night” this year. Each of you is probably humming the tune even now... do not miss the truth of the final verse: “Truly He taught us to love one another; His law is love and His gospel is peace.”

If you want to know how to love one another, cast your eyes on the love that sent Jesus to earth to live a life of love and pay the price for all of our sins. It is all about love. This isn’t a love of Scrabble words or impossible tasks. The loving environment of this place called Kiokee represents to us all a love that says, “I am willing to love you no matter what.”

We can love because He first loved us and that is our... passion. The love that flows from God to us is strong and resilient, and it is meant to overflow to those around us, no matter the circumstance. Reflect on this Love today, be filled to the brim with it, and watch how it transforms your life and the lives around you.

## **Consider This:**

- **Head:** How can knowing God influence our loving God?
- **Heart:** Is there something in the way of you experiencing the fullness of His powerful love for you?
- **Hands:** Is there an intentional way you could show love to those around you this Christmas season?

# Day 17: Susan Melchior

*“The seasons change and you change, but the Lord abides evermore the same,  
and the streams of His love are as deep, as broad and as full as ever.”*

*Charles Spurgeon*

**Today’s Scripture:** Psalm 89:1-4

The psalmist exclaims in verse one of the passage, “I will sing of the Lord’s great love forever...” How vividly I remember singing as a child, “Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so!” What a precious truth for us to sing as children and sing to our own children. I must confess as I grew in my walk with the Lord I began to realize how hard it is for me to actually grasp the deep, deep love of God! How do we wrap our hearts and minds around God’s unconditional, unswerving, never ending love! I am reminded of Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians, “...to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge...”

God demonstrates His steadfast love to us in so many ways. Verse four and five of the passage refers to the greatest gift of love He has given us, “...I have made a covenant with my chosen one. I have sworn to David my servant, ‘I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.’” These verses are referencing the promise God made to David in 2 Samuel 7 to establish his offspring forever. Little did David know that this promise would come to fulfillment in the birth of a baby in a manger and that baby would be Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior of the world! Our God’s love and ways are so much higher than ours and are forever perfect and gracious! Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus! May we forever cherish and trust in His mighty love for us.

## **Consider This:**

- **Head:** Take time to mediate upon God’s love for you today. Pray that Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians (3:14-21) might come to fruition in your own life.
- **Heart:** As you seek to know and trust God’s love for you in a deeper way how will that affect your walk with Him?
- **Hands:** Look for opportunities today to demonstrate the love of God to others. What are ways this Christmas season you can encourage others in the love God shows us through Christ?



# Day 18: Paul Morris

*Love came down and rescued me, love came down and set me free. – Kari Jobe*

**Today's Scripture:** Ephesians 2:4-5

We have all been on a road trip where we slowly ascend up a mountain pass. Big rigs slow under the weight of their loads as the incline works against the diesel engine. Have you ever noticed the signs pointing to a scenic viewing area or vista as you climb? We often drive by them continuing on towards our destination, but every once in a while it is good to pull over, get out of the car and look at the great valley below.

That vista (or view) reminds us of how high we have ascended from the valley floor. Christmas is a wonderful time for many people and there is an excitement in the air. However, it seems just as many others feel distant from the love and joy. Sometimes it is helpful for those who struggle to see how far from the valley floor God has brought them.

Who can understand the vista without first knowing the valley? We were all from the valley. We were dead in our sins and ruled by the flesh. In His great love the Lord came down from His place of exaltation to the valley. Jesus was driven by His powerful love for you, for me, and others who have felt the brokenness of their sins. He was not content to leave us on the valley floor. He came down and rescued us. Through His love and obedience to the Father, Jesus became a babe in the manger. Christ raised us to the vista of His righteousness and then He gave us that same righteousness.

Here's the thing with vistas, we do not and should not stay long gazing on the view. We are on a journey in the love of Christ and must continue forward to our destination. Ephesians 2:4-5 reminds us that the Lord is rich in both love and mercy. He has moved us from death to life. If you struggle during the holidays as many people do, look down from the vista and see how far God has brought you. From that viewpoint one can see the handy work of God as He rescues others and leads them up to the vista.

## **Consider This:**

- **Head:** Ask yourself if you can see how far God has brought you up out of the valley from death unto life?
- **Heart:** How would it change your Christmas outlook if Jesus came and sat next to you on the vista and told you stories of His love for you?
- **Hands:** As you go throughout the holidays take time each day to thank God for coming down to the valley to rescue you. You can show your greatest love for Him by sharing His love with another person. Will you do that?

# Day 19: Ken O'Barr

*“One thing that hinders sincerity in the worship of God among brethren is insincere love among one another.” Israelmore Ayivor*

**Today's Scripture:** I John 4:7-12

People often quote popular verses such as “love one another”, or “love your neighbor as yourself”, or “God is love”, but how often do we really stop and think about the true meaning behind these Scriptures? In relation to loving others, how real is our love for them? The reality is spoken loud and clear for us in this passage - “Anyone who does not love does not know God.”

As Christians, we are commanded to love others with the love of God. The love of God is unconditional. No matter how badly we mess up, He still loves us. So, do we truly love others with that same love? Maybe when it comes to your kids, or your spouse, or your parents; but maybe not the neighbor next door who plays his music too loudly at night, or the slow driver in the fast lane, or the screaming kid on the airplane who enjoys kicking the back of your seat. Now let's think about the really tough ones....the friend who smiles to your face and then talks about you behind your back or the friend who makes promises to you, but doesn't keep them. These are the times when we truly see whether we love with the love of God, or if we choose to hold grudges, and build up anger toward those who have hurt us.

This passage tells us that “if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us.” God desires for us to love all people all the time. We don't have to like what they do, how they act, or what they say. However, we do have to love them. Often, this can be a tremendous challenge for us. It's easy to say, but difficult to put into action.

Christmas is a time when we are busy, stressed, worried, and downright overwhelmed. It is a difficult season for many people. When you encounter someone this holiday season who needs help, needs a friend, needs someone to talk to, or maybe just needs a hug.... love them.

## **Consider This:**

- **Head:** How easy is it for you to recall those who have hurt you - even years ago?
- **Heart:** What does this tell you about your heart? How might your heart change if you simply demonstrated love to them through your words or actions?
- **Hands:** Pray that God will use you to help others today. Pray that He will put someone in your path who needs the love that only God can provide.

# Day 20: Carol O'Neill

*"In this the love of God was made manifest among us,  
that God sent His only son into the world  
so that we might live through Him." 1 John 4:9*

**Today's Scripture:** 1 John 4: 7-12

I have wonderful memories of Christmas as a child and even more wonderful memories of Christmas as a parent of three boys. I LOVE Christmas... the sights, sounds, smells! However, love at Christmas the way we do it is sweet, safe and cozy. Love at Christmas the way God does it is radical, dangerous and epic. I'm not sure I would have loved the sights, sounds or smells of the manger in Bethlehem.

John reminds us in 1 John 4:7-12 of several radical ways that God loves and commands us to love. First, John says that God is the source of love. It is a part of His nature and it is unconditional. It doesn't depend on what we do or how we behave. It is always there for us. Radical! God models genuine love. He manifested this by sending his Son. In love, God looked at humans on earth trying and failing, hurting and oppressed and decided to send rescue. In love He sent Jesus to a world who ultimately would kill him. Epic!

God commands us to love one another. Some days this seems hard to do even with those closest to me. When I am struggling to muster up any willingness to act lovingly toward others, I need to turn to God and remind myself of the passionate love of God for me. Loving others is often dangerous! God says that as we love one another that God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. We love each other only as we first receive God's great love for us.

If we went to a lot of effort and expense to get someone a very special Christmas gift and they just tossed it aside with indifference, we would be very hurt. Let us not treat God's gift of love as a trivial trinket. Instead, may our hearts overflow with thankfulness to Him. God longs for us to love Him, too. As we hear God's beautiful love song again this Christmas, let us not just listen but respond with the gift of our life.

## **Consider This:**

- **Head:** Are you striving to love people the same way Christ loves you?
- **Heart:** What does it look like for you to be radically loved by God this Christmas?
- **Hands:** What does it look like for you to radically love others this Christmas?

# Day 21: Francis Yelton

*“Contentment is not the fulfillment of what you want,  
but the realization of how much you already have.”*

**Today’s Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18; Philippians 4:6

Love is not a descriptive word but is an action word. One of the ways God shows us His love to us is by helping us to deal with the challenges that come our way. Life presents us with issues, trials and tribulations. Some days even make it difficult to place one foot in front of the other, but God’s word reminds you and me to pray always and to be thankful. How many times have you come out of a difficult situation only to realize that you did not do it alone – or even during the difficult time realize that the Lord was with you the entire time? This is Love. As a parent we want to protect our children because we love them and care for them. Imagine then, how much more the Lord (whose love is perfect) wants even more for us.

For me the time that I was made most fully aware of God’s love was May 2012 to October 2013. I had to truly rely on the Lord and not on my own strength. We lost my dad in May and then by July I had finally admitted that something was not right with my body and I needed help. The search found an extensive clot in my leg and clots in my lungs. Even though the time was challenging, I experienced a peace beyond my understanding, God’s Love. There was never any question that He was with me and He would see me through. After the second hospitalization, and returning home I laid in the darkness and came to a full awareness that the Lord had spared me and I found myself asking why? This was not a negative or complaining mindset, but wondering what it was He had for me to do.

By March of 2013 my Mom received a diagnosis of Kidney Cancer and at that moment I knew. He wanted me to be hands and feet for her. My Mom went to be with her Lord on October 24th. With her passing we received the opportunity to take my great nephew into our home to become a full-time member of the family. He will walk beside us and help us through those valleys that feel so dark but He loves us and provides us the strength that we need.

## **Consider This:**

- **Head:** Are you spending the time in His word so that you may have the knowledge to have a life that is Christ like and the knowledge to share it with others you encounter?
- **Heart:** Are you ready to take His word and apply it to your heart – it will provide a peace that is beyond your understanding
- **Hand:** Will you use the gifts from the Father and share the love that He has provided by giving it away to others who do not have it?

Week 4:

Joy

# Day 22: Olivia Brown

*“The joy of life comes from our encounters with new experiences, and hence there is no greater joy than to have an endlessly changing horizon, for each day to have a new and different sun.” Christopher McCandless*

## **Today’s Scripture:** Psalms 30:5b NKJV

So I watch the Weather Channel, and the weatherman says winter solstice is coming. Winter solstice, the advent of the longest, darkest day of the year will be coming on December 21. Solstice -- the word is derived from the Latin sol (sun) and sistere (to stand still), because at the solstices, the sun stands still; that is, the seasonal movement of the sun’s path comes to a stop before reversing its direction. Translation: ((Late dawn + Early sunset + Short day + Long night = not enough time to get things done) x not enough sleep)) = impatience + low tolerance + turmoil = depression. Depression, the joy thief. Short, darker days ~ these will be the days leading up to Christmas. And in our own way, haven’t we all known the dark? A terminal diagnosis, a grave dug, an empty womb, addictions, living nightmares ~ no dawn in sight.

These may be the darkest weeks of the year coming. But this Season of Coming, of Advent? Where Hope is found in the waiting ~ because it is coming, isn’t it? Where Love came down and rescued us. And where Joy is that rapturous whirl that transports you to the place where Jesus is too much. In a world of dark, when our days and nights are the darkest, Jesus reveals Himself as the light, the dawn. In a hopeless, impossible, dark situation God says, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.” Psalms 30:5b

Joy. It comes because He came. Believe it because ... those who are Joy believers are the Jesus believers. God comes and says “I am El Shaddai. I am enough.” Is He really enough? He says “Come. Know me as the One who is enough, the sufficient God, El Shaddai.” Believe Him to be Dayenu, Hebrew meaning more than enough. More God. More Hope. More Peace. More Love. More light in the dark. Because Joy comes in the morning. Always for the Jesus believers.

Remember this: Joy is a gift from God and the hallmark of the Christian life, and it results from our response to the gifts of God. Joy comes when we are aware of God’s grace, His love, and His favor. Finally, Joy is experienced and lived out in obedience.

### **Consider This:**

- **Head:** What do you think is the difference between joy and happiness? Do you think Joy is natural or spiritual?
- **Heart:** How can you fight for joy in the ups and downs and the dark areas of everyday life?
- **Hands:** So what can you do today, out of obedience to God, to be full of the joy gift and to share this gift with others?

# Day 23: Julie Fullbright

*“Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of your life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation.” Kay Warren*

**Today’s Scripture:** Luke 1:38

Sound familiar? Have you or a loved one ever set out to work on a craft or project that sounded so good in the planning, with less than desirable results? I have. Many times. Sometimes our best efforts don’t produce the result that we anticipated in our heads. The website [www.pinterestfail.com](http://www.pinterestfail.com) even allows you to soothe your shattered ego by viewing others’ attempts at projects with similar outcomes. Christmas brings a whole new slate of projects and possibilities.

Let’s face it. Christmas is stressful, especially if we have expectations that haven’t lived up to reality. Into this season we bring the baggage of a whole year (or more), with unresolved issues and difficult circumstances, which don’t go away at the turning of a calendar page. As each day speeds closer to December 25, how can we have joy in the middle our mess?

Consider Mary. Upon hearing from Gabriel the Lord God’s plans for her, her response was trust. Acceptance. “I am your servant. May it be to me as you have said.” She didn’t wring her hands at the thought of being an unwed mother, with its social implications. She didn’t spend time arguing with God, as Moses did, over her capabilities or worthiness for the task presented to her. She simply responded with trust, in the spirit of joy.

As we near December 25, perhaps this Christmas doesn’t look like the one you have planned in your head. Instead of spending time on projects that ultimately won’t satisfy or complaining about the circumstances that we are facing, may we respond more like Mary.

## **Consider This:**

- **Head:** Think about times in your life God has made something good from the messy circumstances in your life.
- **Heart:** What do your actions reveal about who/what you are trusting in?
- **Hands:** Ask God to make you willing to trust him more. In what areas in your life do you need to trust him more?



## Day 24: Sam Good

*“Often a work of God comes with two edges, great joy and great pain, and in that matter-of-fact response Mary embraced both. She was the first person to accept Jesus on his own terms, regardless of the personal cost.” Philip Yancey*

**Today’s Scripture:** Luke 1:46-55

You know, there is a lot of joy in the world. I think joy is excitement, and pleasure. When you are joyful, you have a bright face and you aren’t sad. I’ve always been a pretty joyful guy. Contentment and joy have always been a part of my life, but I have had my sad moments. You know as you go through life, there are not always great days.

I think there are several ways to describe joy. One could be the feeling you have all over your body, especially in you heart, when you confess Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Or it could be the peace that a believer in Jesus feels when they know their salvation, or what happens when they follow in the footsteps of Jesus or carry out his commandments in their daily living.

One type of joy the Bible speaks of is a joy that comes from the pleasure of the Lord. In this great prayer, Mary is overwhelmed by the pleasure of the Lord and speaks this great prayer, but I think she had mixed emotions. On the one hand she was joyful because she had the favor of the Lord and would carry the Savior of the world. On the other hand, here she was betrothed to Joseph. They’ve never been together, but she was with child. You know that she was going to be thought of in bad ways. So she was joyful, but also probably very concerned. Especially about what other people might think.

You know, that’s one of the greatest joy killers, worrying about what other people think. But Mary didn’t allow the possible rejection she would face by family and friends to keep her from experiencing the deep joy of finding favor with God.

### **Consider This:**

- **Head:** What was Mary’s response to what the angel Gabriel told her?
- **Heart:** How often do you find that you are more concerned with what other people think than what God thinks?
- **Hands:** Re-read today’s passage from another translation and think about how you might have responded were you in Mary’s shoes.

# Day 25: Robby & Emily Hardaway

*“Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God.” Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

**Today’s Scripture:** Luke 2:8-12

Think of a time when you were afraid, specifically afraid of the unknown. It may have been a time when you were starting a new job and you were afraid of what your first day might bring or that you made the wrong decision and should have stayed at your old job. Perhaps you were afraid when you found out you were pregnant, and the fear of inadequacy washed over you.

We’ve all been afraid of the unknown. We’ve been fearful in all kinds of different situations. But one thing that the scenarios listed above have in common is that joy follows these periods of fear. Fear of starting a new job brings joy of new relationships with your coworkers and new work experiences. Fear of finding out you’re expecting brings the joy of life into the world. *If we allow fear to cripple us, we can miss out on the joy that comes later.*

This is clearly seen in Luke 2:10-12. The shepherds were in a field tending to their sheep when all of a sudden, out of nowhere, angels appeared to them. The shepherds were about to receive the good news, but they were afraid. Why wouldn’t they be afraid? They of all people in the world were about to receive the good news that the savior had been born.

I’m sure that after this, the shepherds were eagerly anticipating what this news was and their initial fear was melting away. What was initially fear had now become joy. And not just any joy, but true joy that comes only from Christ. Joy about the news that Christ came into the world to be our savior and to give eternal life. Like the shepherds, we may fear what is difficult or unknown from our everyday lives, but if we will seek and trust Christ, we will receive that which is true joy. God continues today to reassure our fears through his word, the Holy Spirit, and the body of Christ. When we live our lives with the joy that we have received from Christ, then others will see it in us and desire it also.

It is then that we will be better able to reach people and make disciples of Jesus and we can share the joy of Christ’s sacrifice with them. Therefore don’t let fear cripple you this Christmas season and let the joy of the Lord shine through you.

## **Consider This:**

- **Head:** Why did the angel tell the shepherds not to be afraid?
- **Heart:** What in your life today, that perhaps you are afraid of, is keeping you from experiencing the full joy of salvation that comes from Jesus?
- **Hands:** Think about what can help you remember to not be fearful, but to be joyful in your everyday life.

# Day 26: Kenny & Wendy McKay

*“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.”*

*James 1:2-3*

## **Today’s Scripture:** Romans 15:13

Over the past few weeks I have thought “how can I have joy in my life?” I have pondered this question because it seems every time I turn around something bad is happening in our world. There is injustice, hate, sickness, and immortality coming at us from all directions every day.

One thought is to shield myself from all these things that steal my joy. This, however, will not work because I have my own sin that I cannot fully shield myself from it.

Another thought is to surround myself with happy people. They always seem to have joy. This will not work either because as much as I want to believe that happy people have joy, bad stuff still happens or they are not always happy people. (Even happy people have bad days.)

The only way to have joy is through our hope in Jesus Christ. Joy is not the same as being happy and it is not achieved by being sheltered from the world around us. True joy is knowing that God is working in our lives everyday and knowing that we have hope in Jesus, our Savior.

### **Consider This:**

- **Head:** Where are you looking for joy? Is it in materialistic things, your family, friends, job?
- **Heart:** How’s that working out for you?
- **Hands:** Today I encourage you to think about what true joy can be, and what might be keeping you from experiencing joy in Jesus.



# Day 27: Wes Gardner

*“Prayer makes no sense apart from waiting.” Mark Buchanan*

## Today’s Scripture: James 5: 7-8

I don’t really like to wait. I don’t like waiting in line, waiting for a call, or waiting for my turn to speak. I like to be waited on, but not being the wait-er. I don’t like waiting rooms, waiting lists, or waiting for the other shoe to drop. Sometimes waiting is tough and it can be tougher when your mind is in the wrong place.

But somewhere along the line, I’ve heard that waiting is good for you. More than a necessary inconvenience, learning patience is a helpful discipline. It keeps you from being a slave to your desires, helps you realize that you do not have to get your way, and exposes your misguided notions of blessing, success, or an appropriate time table. It also increases your faith.

But there’s another type of waiting that I kind of enjoy — anticipation. When I have something to look forward to, I am less likely to get bogged down by my present reality. Focusing on the upcoming event can make most anything palatable. Somehow the excitement of what’s going to happen trumps the tedium and gives cause to the difficult.

James is encouraging his readers to do both. He wants them to develop the discipline of waiting, but he desires that practice be bolstered by anticipation. He encouraged them to stand firm in the midst of persecution with their mind set on the fact that Christ will indeed return as the righteous judge.

When I was younger, it seemed like Christmas would never arrive. But as December 25th approached, my anticipation would grow knowing that I was another day closer. Likewise, as each day passes we are one day closer to Christ’s return (the second Advent) and the eternal joy He has promised us. The more we “establish our hearts” in this reality, the greater joy we will experience until that ultimate joy is fulfilled.

### Consider This:

- **Head:** Why do you think James uses the farmer as an example of patience?
- **Heart:** How would your experience of waiting be different if you realized that while you wait on God you can actually wait with God?
- **Hands:** What can you do today to further establish your heart?

# Day 28: Adam & Laura Scott

*“The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and He helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise Him.” Psalm 28:7*

## Today’s Scripture: Psalm 28:7

Have you ever seemed overwhelmed by circumstances or relationships in life? We all have, and I’m sure most of us have prayed for God to change those circumstances or relationships in hopes that will bring us happiness or joy. It may work from time to time, but how often do we find our selves in the same storms or struggling in some of the same situations?

During those times, we often pray for Jesus to change our circumstances or relationships, but do we ever think to pray “Jesus change me!” In the past few years, we’ve found that to be the most transformational and comforting prayer during difficult times. Whether we like it or not, we are all in the process of changing in some form or another. However, when Jesus changes us, our circumstances may not necessarily change, but our ability to deal with them does. Also, we will find ourselves conforming to His image in every aspect of our lives.

Our Scripture passage reminds us that apart from God, there is no joy. Our sins have separated us from God, and in His grace, He provided redemption through Jesus Christ. At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of the One who provided that redemption, our Savior, Jesus Christ. We all know that the true worth of something is “what the buyer is willing to pay.” So, what is your soul worth to Him? He values our souls so much, that He shed His innocent blood so that we could have fellowship and joy with Him for eternity.

In Christ alone, true joy is found. When Jesus transforms your life, the joy he gives not only changes how we deal with circumstances or strained relationships, but it also changes our lives. Once that happens, and we conform to His image, we are filled with joy and our lives and actions, or as the psalmist declares “our songs” will sing His praises now and for all eternity.

### Consider This:

- **Head:** How often do you ask the Lord to change your circumstances or relationships?
- **Heart:** What are some of the things your heart is tempted to trust other than the Lord?
- **Hands:** Take some time today to reflect on God’s great love for you and ask Him to help you discover the strength and shield He provides.