

wicipation

FAMILY ADVENT JOURNEY

WELCOME

This guide is designed to help you to get the most out of our time together this Advent season. It is intended to be used with your family but can also be done individually. The guide contains space for you to take notes on the sermon each week and then has 7 days of devotional content that will be on the theme topic for the week. Each of these days includes questions for you and your family to meditate on as you consider how to apply God's Word to your life.

The guide also includes Small Group Questions so that you can discuss the things that you are learning with other believers. We are praying that these times in your small group and family discussions deepen your relationships with other followers of Jesus and also spur you on to walk closer to God!

We want this study to be helpful for your journey following Jesus, so we compiled some tips that will help you.

- Start your times with God in prayer each day!
- Always read the Scripture for the day first. If you only have time for one thing, it should be God's Word! Then read through the devotional and reflect on the challenges at the end.
- Apply God's Word with specific action steps.
- Rejoice when God gives you the strength to meet your goal!
- Share your goal with your group and family so they can help you and encourage you!

We also have a scavenger hunt portion each week for your kids to find an item on your campus and then watch the video to find out more about the story that week! At the end of their scavenger hunt they can show their completed Booklet to receive a gift!

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Love

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What point challenged you the most in this week's sermon?

2. Why should hope be talked about during Christmas?

3. How do we make sure our hope is in the right things during this season?

4. What are some ways that you sometimes get distracted from thinking about Jesus during Christmas?

5. How can you put your hope in Jesus instead of earthly things this week?

6. What specific step can you take this week to apply God's Word to your life?

SERMON NOTES

Hope

CHRISTMAS SCAVENGER HUNT. Week 1 - Shepherds

Find the real life SHEPHERD'S STAFF on your campus! Scan the QR code on the staff to watch the video. Discover the Key Word in the video and write it in the box.

*miss church but don't want to miss out? Watch the video below!



DAY 1

Hope in waiting for the head crusher

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Genesis 3:15

Admittedly, this verse doesn't sound much like a Christmas Passage. And yet, here in the opening chapters of the Bible, we're reading about an amazing promise God is giving all His children, regarding the hope we have in the baby we celebrate at Christmas, the Lord Jesus Christ!

Here, God is speaking to the serpent, satan, after the temptation of Adam and Eve and their fall into sin. He's saying there will be a constant fight between satan's forces of evil and the human race. Evil will try and take us down and will sometimes be successful. It will "strike our heels," but... Christ will "crush evil's head!"

Glory to God, we have a Savior who is stronger than anything evil will throw at us! The babe we worship this Christmas grew up to teach us, die for us, and then declared to be the Son of God with power, when He rose from the dead!

Family Talk:

We all have times in our life where it can seem like evil is winning. But Jesus will meet us in the midst of it and by His power and grace take us to a better place. Where are you feeling evil come at you?

Maybe it's in your school, family, workplace, what you think about, or in your neighborhood...

Where can you specifically apply the truth that Christ wants to crush evil in your life? Bring it before Christ the King and let Him crush evil's head!

DAY 2

Hope in Christ alone

When times are desperate, our first response is often to turn to others for help. People can be helpful, but our help falls short every time. However, there is One greater than any human being on earth.

God is not surprised by our problems or worried about how it will all turn out. He wants to help us and give us real hope.

Read out loud Psalm 146:1-5. While reading look for and list 3 below reasons for why we should "Praise the LORD".

1.

2.

3.

Now read Psalm 146:6-10 and find and list below 5 reasons for why the Psalmist says can should "Put our HOPE in the LORD"

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

He brings order to the world and helps those who call out to Him. He is our creator, provider, and healer. He loves us, watches over, and will reign forever and because of those things, and so much more, we will HOPE IN THE LORD.

Family Talk:

Where do you turn first when you get bad news?

Have you ever relied on someone, and that person failed you? Have you ever felt like God failed you? Why is hoping in God better than relying on humans?

DAY 3 Jesus, the Promised One

Read: Matthew 1:18-24

Jesus was the promised one, the Messiah, who had been prophesied about for hundreds of years. The wait was finally over, He was here and began fulfilling prophesies even in the womb! This passage is a beautiful example of not only the hope we have in Jesus, but the faithfulness of a God who will stop at nothing to save us from our sins.

Isaiah 7:14,

"Therefore the Lord himself will you give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

Jesus was God in human form, in the womb of Mary...He was Immanuel, God with us. But before Joseph understood he began to plan. Joseph sought to resolve the problem of Mary's pregnancy his own way. Obviously, her being with child was a huge problem within the Jewish culture and posed some real issues with their marriage. While Joseph was "just and unwilling to put her to shame", that was not God's plan. God didn't see Mary's pregnancy as a problem to resolve, or to hide, but rather he knew Jesus was the Hope for Israel, the Savior of the world.

The good news is, God is faithful! He sent an angel to intervene, to remind Joseph of what he had already known: a Savior was coming, born of a virgin, the Hope of Israel, God with us. This was Jesus, the Hope of the world being born in Bethlehem.

Family Talk:

How excited would you be if you heard that a great king was going to be born?

Why is Jesus called our Savior? What was the problem that He saved us from?

DAY 4

Nothing is impossible with God

Read: Luke 1:26-38

Hope is to want something to happen or to be true. It's also a desire accompanied by the expectation or belief that it will be fulfilled. God's people had been holding onto hope since the beginning of time. Like we talked about on day 1, the first promise of a savior is found in Genesis 3:15, and from Adam and Eve this hope of a savior was passed from generation to generation.

Today's passage starts with God sending Gabriel to visit Mary. He greets her by calling her "highly favored" and reminds her that God is with her. Imagine how Mary would have felt being visited by an angel. It's no wonder she was troubled. Gabriel quickly goes on to calm her fears and deliver the great news that Mary was going to give birth to the Son of God. Her son was going to be great, be

given David's throne, reign forever, and His kingdom would never end.

The meaning of Gabriel's words were not lost on Mary, as she had been raised in the Jewish faith and the hope of the coming

Messiah. Imagine her surprise when she discovered that God was going to use her. Gabriel explains God's plan and ends his exhortation by reminding Mary that nothing is impossible with God.

The hope of God reigning forever gave a young girl courage to face a difficult journey that would change her life forever. Hope does the same for you and me, as it gives us strength and courage to face whatever comes our way knowing that nothing is

impossible with God and His Kingdom will reign forever!

Family Talk:

What is a way that you can celebrate hope in eternity with God this Christmas?

Who is someone you know that needs to hear about hope? How can you share it with them this season and coming year?

Becky Maiellano

DAY 5 Hold onto Hope

Read: Heb 10:19-25

The work that Jesus came to do in making us righteous before God is done. He succeeded. He won the victory. Those who believe in Jesus have been saved and become part of God's family. There is nothing more that needs to be done in order for us to come before God. The work of Jesus was enough.

The author of Hebrews wants the people to understand this truth and cling to it. He wants us to know that Jesus is our Living Hope, and He has already completed the work of paying for our sins. This Hope that we have in Jesus is now in His completed work. It is done. We do not need to doubt or question our standing with God. Jesus' blood paid the price for our sin, and now, we live in His righteousness.

This Hope that we are to hang on is solid rock. Our Hope in Jesus will not fail. We can live our lives with joy, rest, and comfort because of the work that Jesus did. We can have unwavering hope in Jesus as believers. Our debt is paid. We have been given new life. Our eternity will be spent with our Creator!

This should lead us to live encouraging others and reminding them about victory in Jesus. We should be eagerly waiting for Jesus to come back as King! This is "the Day" talked about in Hebrews 10:25. We should be confident that Jesus' coming is growing closer and this should excite us for we will get to be with Him! Let us have our Hope in Jesus' work so that we can have our rest in Him!

Family Talk:

Do you have confidence that Jesus paid for all of your sins?

Do you encourage other Christians that Jesus is returning soon?

DAY 6

Hope Is Our Anchor

Read Hebrews 6:19-20

The author of Hebrews knew his audience was accustomed to life at sea, knew the importance of the high priest in the Old Testament and the significance of being able to dwell in God's presence today.

The high priest was a mediator between God's people and God himself, making atonement for all the sins committed for one year. The high priest would enter the tabernacle, behind the curtain and into the inner sanctuary, where God dwelt, to perform this specific and time consuming task. Every year, this would be repeated. Since then, we praise Jesus for his death and resurrection. Mark 15 tells us that the "curtain was torn." Jesus is now our forever high priest, giving us direct access to God the Father because of his perfect sacrifice on the cross to cover all of our sin, once and for all.

Each of our souls are tied to an anchor. If our anchor is cast into this world (a career, spouse, friend, money, school, entertainment, etc) our soul's rope will fray, eventually leaving us stranded. Despite those being good things that may even point us to Jesus, none are a trustworthy anchor for our soul. God gave us something better, Himself. If we are Christ followers, our soul can rest in God's presence because it is securely tied to the assurance we have that God is who He says He is (Exodus 3:14). Perhaps right now, the surrounding waters are raging and it is too deep and dark to see your anchor. Trust in God's faithfulness. He will hold you firmly. Rest in His presence. Enjoy safe harbor.

Family Talk:

Today had some big words... Look them up to make sure everyone understood today's devotional: High Priest, Tabernacle, mediator.

What are you anchored to?

In Exodus 3:14, God gives us insight into His character, "God said to Moses, 'I AM who I AM". In different chapters through John (6, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15), we see multiple "I AM" statements where the character of God is revealed and we can see His faithfulness and unchanging character. List them below, then take the time to think about what they tell us about the character of God and the security we have with Him as an anchor?

Carissa Althouse

Day 7 Hope for Jesus coming back

Read: Titus 2:11-14

Titus 2:11-13 talks about two appearances – one done and one to come. Christmas is a celebration of the first appearing and Titus describes it as grace coming to earth. He goes on to say this embodiment of grace became our teacher. His lessons were simple – we must live sensible, just, and devout, lives – but their application is hard. Our broken world is not built on those values. It is not sensible, just, or devout that a person's skin color, culture, tribe, zip code, or caste should determine whether they get a meal, protection from the law, a good education, or economic opportunities. But in this present age, it does. I see it in India, Africa, and here in the States.

It is easy to get discouraged because people I care about are trying to live by Christ's values as they suffer under society's values. I find the antidote to my discouragement in the second appearing mentioned in our passage. Someday, the great God and Savior, Jesus Christ will appear again, but this time He will not appear as a baby in a manger. He will appear with glory and power, and He will create a society where His values – the values He lived and taught us to live - will prevail on earth. The hope of Christ's second appearing is the fire that stokes our efforts to make a difference in the world today. We work for the world He will bring. We persevere in that work because we know when He appears, every attempt to bring His values into this present age will be realized in the world He will create. That is our hope.

Family Talk:

Pretend you are the quarterback of a high school football team. You get into a time machine and travel one week into the future and learn that your team will win the game. On the night of the game, how would that information change the way you would play in the second half if you were losing 21 to zero? How does that apply to our passage?

What injustices trouble you? How does Titus 2:13 help you face them and do something about them?

Closing week 1...

Family Talk:

What did you learn this week about hope?

What are you most excited about this Christmas?

What can we do as a family to remember our hope is in Jesus not in gifts?

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What point challenged you the most in this week's sermon?

2. How does the holiday season sometimes bring anxiety?

3. When do you feel the most peace during the Christmas season?

4. How does longing for peace remind you of your need for rest in Jesus?

5. How can you have peace and rest in Jesus this Christmas?

6. What specific step can you take this week to apply God's Word to your life?

SERMON NOTES

Peace

CHRISTMAS SCAVENGER HUNT. Week 2 - Joseph

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DAY 8 The Pain of Disobedience

Read: Deuteronomy 28:45-48

When I was young my family would go up to a cabin with our cousins. It was full of beautiful scenery and good times. The most fun was of course when we got to drive the fourwheelers. As I got more confident, I began to drive faster, and I remember my parents warning me that I needed to keep it slow or I would lose control. I, of course, ignored them. Until one day when I drove around a corner full speed and crashed into my cousin on another four-wheeler. Fortunately, we were both OK, but both four-wheelers had taken some damage, and my pride was stinging. If only I had listened.

In the passage we read, God is describing what the consequences will be for Israel if they disobey His commands. And they are serious! There will be hunger and thirst and poverty and war and destruction in Israel. Disobedience to God does not lead to peace, but to death and war. The entire chapter is full of great details of how miserable this will be. And we know that this did happen. Israel does disobey God, and they are eventually carried off by their enemies in Babylon and suffer war and death time and time again because of it.

And the same is true for us. Disobeying God comes with serious consequences. Sin leads us to death, not to peace. God warns us, just like my parents warned me, that the consequences of disobedience would be painful. If we want peace, we will follow the commands of the Lord. Because the commands of a loving God are commands worth following.

Family Talk:

How have you seen the consequences for disobedience in your life?

Why are God's commands worth following?

DAY 9 Waiting for Peace

Read Isaiah 9:1-7

The Jewish people had experienced many wars in their history. They had fought Goliath and the Philistines. They have fought civil wars after the Northern Kingdom broke apart from Judah, and they have seen much suffering because they disobeyed God. The people of the southern kingdom, Judah, had some good leaders who wanted to follow God, but many of the kings turned against God and worshiped idols. This brought about the consequence of disobedience.

BUT GOD. He made many promises to His people about bringing peace and restoration to them. Here in Isaiah 9, He promises that a time of joy is coming. He promises that there will be a time to put away the clothes of war because peace is coming. A child will be born who will lead the people of Israel, God's people. He will be the king on the throne. His name is Jesus! Jesus is the child promised here. He is the Prince of Peace.

The Jews were waiting for this peace. Their history is filled with war because of their rebellion against God. Yet, God still wants to give them peace. He wants to give them the peace that He promised them if they would obey Him (Lev 26:6). So even while they are still in rebellion, God promises that He will send one who will bring everything right. God sent Jesus to give peace to all who will trust in Jesus. The only way for us to have peace in this life and for eternity is to believe that Jesus made a way for us to have a relationship with God (Eph 2:13-18).

Family Talk:

How have you experience pain when you have disobeyed God?

Have you trusted Jesus to make your relationship right with God?

Paul Moak

DAY 10 Jesus Brings Peace

Read: Mark 4:35-41

Wow! The holiday season is here again bringing joy and happiness to all. However, along with all this good will, stress and anxiety, can enter and disrupt our lives and relationships. Because of our schedules, our special meals, and even our plans for gift giving, we often become anxious and sometimes lose our patience with each other. Few people are immune to these feelings. The big question is , "What can we do to bring peace back to our homes and relationships?"

Jesus always has the answer for us. The Bible tells us in Mark 4 that Jesus is sleeping in a boat with the disciples when a violent storm arose. The waves became boisterous and almost swamped the boat. The disciples became afraid and called on Jesus to help them. This is what we must do when tempers flare and the joy goes away. We can call on Jesus and ask him to "calm the troubled waves" around us. Jesus will show us the way. The Bible gives us the path to follow:

- * Love one another John 15
- * Forgive one another Luke 17
- * Be Humble in all your ways. Proverbs 22

These new attitudes can "calm troubled waves" and fill your homes with the peace that Jesus brought. Start early, not late, to seek help from Jesus.

Family Talk:

How can we rely on Jesus to have peace during all of the family gatherings?

How can we follow the ways of Jesus to pursue paths that lead us to peace in Him?

George Glatfelter

DAY 11 Bequeathed Peace

Read: John 14:19-31

For many of us, when we think of 'peace with God', we think of the gospel. We are reminded that Christ's death removed the guilt of our sins, and with our guilt removed, we can now have peace with God. And although the Gospel is a life changing truth - I don't think it is the emphasis of the peace that Christ speaks of in today's passage. To understand the peace that Christ is giving to His disciples, we need to learn about the Peace Offering in the Old Testament.

God gives Moses instructions about the Peace offering in Leviticus 7:11-15. Its purpose was to give the worshiper an opportunity to express their deep appreciation and affection to God. According to Lev 7, it was to be offered at times of profound thanksgiving and was to accompany freewill gifts and vows. It was voluntary and symbolized the worshiper's joy in God. In fact, some translations call it the 'Fellowship Offering". An example of the Peace Offering can be seen in Deuteronomy 27, after Israel crossed the Jordan and readied themselves for the conquest of the Promised Land. The peace offering was to be a time of national celebration of God's presence and help.

When Christ tells His disciples that "...my peace I give to you...', he is not speaking of a removal of guilt between himself and God, but rather a deep and profound joy that He had in his relationship with God- a celebration of God's constant presence. In verse 26, Christ states that He would send the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit would remind them of Christ's promises, teachings, and truths. It is in the remembrance of the words of Christ that the disciples would have a deep and profound joy, realizing Christ's peace.

Family Talk:

The world often tries to find peace in favorable circumstances and situations. In what ways do you go after the worlds' peace?

Christ's peace comes through the understanding and confidence that we have in His Words. What was the most recent passage/truth from God's word that has brought you peace?

Day 12 Peace given by God

Read Romans 5:1

Immediately upon being contacted about writing a short devotional that every member of my church could read, the last thing I had internally was peace. It took about .001 seconds for my mind to start listing excuses. It then took about two weeks for me to realize the lesson in my own doubt.

Peace is something we sing about during this Advent season. We write the word on little tree ornaments and on signs hanging in our house. Peace is also something that seems to escape our grasp during this busy and hectic time of year. I think we have a false definition of peace. In our minds we believe that peace should be a magical gift from God that makes our life smooth and calm, no matter all the non-sense that we try to jam into it.

In Romans 5:1, Paul is using the word Peace to describe the harmony that we gain with Christ once we accept his grace to us, through faith. Peace is never having to wonder if we are enough or if we have made too many mistakes for God to love us.

It's not lost on me that initially I had no peace of mind in writing this. I had to remind myself that there is no amount of mistakes and missteps that can separate me from having peace with my Savior, through His grace.

Family Talk:

Take a moment today to think about the gift of peace you have been given by God this season. Ask yourself today: Am I showing my family and those around me that I have peace through my faith?

Do I let social media, news media, busyness, tv shows, video games, and all the other distractions of this world eat away at my peace?

Parent Pause:

How can I better lead my family toward peace and fulfillment from faith?

Drew Riedy

Day 13 The Gospel of Peace

Read: Ephesians 6:10-20

Our feet are what moves us. As we need a variety of shoes to fit a variety of tasks, we need special shoes to make us prompt, prepared and willing— a "readiness that comes from the gospel of peace". It is both something we apply and something we receive.

"Readiness" is "the state or quality of being ready; preparation; promptness; aptitude; willingness". Early on in life, I learned that preparedness establishes a true sense of peace that I am ready for what lies ahead. As a long distance runner, you had to put in the miles.....as a Marine, readiness was paramount on so many levels and the training was daily. Physically, mentally & spiritually.

In the military acronyms are plenty and there are many that I still remember to this day. Proper Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance. Personal growth is achieved with small disciplines repeated with consistency every day that leads to great achievements gained slowly over time. For me, I do not wish to miss out a deep relationship with our Lord and Savior. Do you? I meet with him every day with prayer, petition, and worship.

Family Talk:

What is your readiness plan? Do you meet with Him daily? What's on your heart right now, pause and invite Him in to go deeper than you have ever before.

"Peace" is freedom from strife of any kind, harmony, quiet, order, security, quiet, calm, stillness.

Read Phi 4:6-7

What are you anxious about right now? Turn it over to Him and receive His peace.

The fruit of the Spirit and the armor of God interact to explain the relationship of the believer with Jesus:

"The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever." Isaiah 32:17

Dellas Edmisten

Day 14 Anticipating Peace

Read: Romans 16:17-20

Jesus came to bring peace but still there is so much around us that causes us to not feel the peace of God. We struggle with worry and stress. We fight with those around us. We have friendships that are broken or struggling. We have family that we don't enjoy being around. The prince of peace has come but it still feels like we are at war.

This is part of the anticipation. We are ready for ultimate and eternal peace. We long for love that keeps us all as friends instead of what we experience where people let us down. We want peace. We want evil to be finally defeated. We want the fight to be over and the war to be won! Right now, as we wait eagerly for

Christmas, it is a great time to think about what else we are waiting for. Peace is definitely one of the things that we can look forward to.

The Apostle Paul also looks forward to the day when peace will be final. He is excited for the day when God will crush satan with the finishing blow and we will be with God in peace forever. This is what we as followers of Jesus look forward to! We know that Jesus has brought us peace with God through His death and resurrection (Rom 5:1), but we look ahead to when we will get to live with God in heaven enjoying peace in an unbelievable way!

Family Talk:

What is one reason why you look forward to peace in eternity?

What are you excited for about heaven and being with God?

Closing week 2...

Family Talk: What did you learn this week about peace?

How does Jesus bring peace into your life every day?

What can we do as a family to remember that we have peace in Jesus no matter what's happening around us?

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What point challenged you the most in this week's sermon?

2. How can the joy of Christmas be something that is always in our hearts and lives?

3. What temporary things do you let impact your happiness or joy?

4. How can you rejoice in the future glory that God has ahead of you?

5. How can you view life with the focus on joy forever with God being bigger than anything you face on this earth?

6. What specific step can you take this week to apply God's Word to your life?

SERMON NOTES

CHRISTMAS SCAVENGER HUNT. Week 3 - Mary

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DAY 15 No Joy to be Found

Read: 2 Kings 24:1-17

At first glance we read a seemingly grim passage of scripture, the fall of Jerusalem. Why would God would allow such terrible things to occur to His chosen people. I think that in order to make sense of this passage we actually have to change those words "allow to happen" to "cause to happen". We see right off the bat in verse 2 that the Lord sent Babylon to take over Jerusalem. Why? Because of the sin that they were involved in. The rebellion and sin against God that Jerusalem was actively involved in caused God's discipline to come down.

I am reminded here of the weight of our sin and rebellion. This is the type of discipline that should ultimately rain down on us when we sin, and act counter to God's will or design. Likewise, I am reminded of the wonderful work that was done on the cross. Jesus should be praised for taking the penalty that we deserve for our rebellion. Reading a passage of scripture like this should lead us to repentance and an introspective look at the way we rebel against our creator. It is interesting looking at this passage during our JOY week.

Family Talk:

What is the sin and rebellion that you need to repent of today?

How is that sin robbing you of the joy that God wants to give you?

DAY 16 Promise of Returning

Read Isaiah 35

Yesterday saw the nation of Judah getting taken captive as prisoners. This was a dark time for the people of Judah. They were experiencing great loss as they were leaving their homes and the land that had belonged to them for generations. Their armies were defeated, and their kings failed them. But God is not done with His people. God made many promises to the people of Israel, and He is faithful to keep them.

One of those promises is in Isaiah 35 which talks about the day when the holy people of God will come back into the land that He has given them. These verses speak of the days of joy that are coming. The people of Israel would cling to the promise of returning to the promised land throughout the time of their exile. They longed to experience joy, and that joy could only come from God saving them.

The chosen people of God looked forward to when He would bring the amazing peace and prosperity described in this passage. The pain that they experience in exile would be forgotten because of the immense joy that they would experience in God. Isaiah gives that as the picture. That picture is ultimately an eternal reality for followers of Jesus. We will get to experience this level of joy. We will have all of our sorrows flee. Our God will save us and bring us home.

Family Talk:

What moment have you been the most sad?

How could being with God forever give you greater joy than the sadness you've experienced?

Paul Moak

DAY 17 Joy in Jesus' coming

Read Luke 1:39-45

The people of Israel went through hundreds of years of not hearing from God, but now there were two special births that would take place. The first baby was John the Baptist, who came to preach repentance, preparing the way for Jesus, the second baby. Here in this passage, we have one of the most only God passages in all of Scripture. We have two babies who are going to be servants of God and John is already excited to be close to Jesus. Unborn John leapt for joy in the presence of his Lord. This is a response of praise! David "danced before the Lord with all his might" (2 Sam 6:14). The Savior is worth all of our worship and praise.

We need to recognize that Joy from God is the most fulfilling type of joy. A pure and complete joy. It's what caused John to get excited in the womb about the Messiah.

We feel this joy when we fully grasp the weight of our sin and how we could do nothing to become right with God. But Jesus made us right with God! He came as a baby to be the Savior we needed. Understanding and dwelling on this reality should bring us immense and sustaining joy. Encountering Jesus causes us to leap for joy!

This Jesus joy should also occur as we when we see other people's obedience and faith! We should shout for joy not only because of the Savior, but seeing the Savior Alive and working in the lives of everyone we love! We should be so excited to see those around us growing closer to Jesus! We should be rejoicing as Jesus works all around us!

Family Talk:

Ask God to fill you with joy when you are in His presence

What can you rejoice that you have seen God do in someone that you love?

DAY 18

Joy in the Purposes of God

It's October 31st as I write this, a day many call Halloween. Regardless of whether or not you recognize this fall holiday, we are bombarded with ghosts and jack-o-lanterns through the lawn decorations and movies on television during this time of year. I don't particularly favor such a holiday, but I am fascinated by the fact that when Jesus appeared to his disciples after the resurrection, many of them were frightened and thought they were seeing a ghost!

Read Luke 24:36-53 to get the context and story behind this encounter.

When Jesus rose from the dead, he was raised an immortal body as described in I Corinthians 15. Jesus appeared to them and they thought they were seeing a ghost. But Jesus encourages them to touch him and see that he was not a ghost, but rather a resurrected version of who he was prior to his death on the cross. After this encounter, Luke says he left them and was taken up to heaven and they worshiped him with great joy.

Why would there be joy when your leader, friend and Savior departs from your presence? I think they understood that this was the culmination of everything Jesus came to accomplish. They had a tremendous hope for their own ascension into the presence of God for all of eternity because of Jesus departure to promise that where he was going they would be one day. They rejoiced because their life on earth was only a vapor and that their eternity promised was one of great joy and fellowship with Jesus forever!

The joy of Jesus' followers in Him leaving really challenges me about the focus of my life, my priorities. Jesus came in a manger for the sole purpose of providing a way to be saved. His purpose in the manger was still His purpose after the cross. To see people trust Him and live with Him forever. This should be our purpose and our mission. And as we saw in Luke 24, this kind of focus brings great joy and rejoicing to our existence.

Family Talk:

What is the purpose of your life? In other words, what do you live for? What do you value most?

How should we adjust that purpose in light of Jesus' purpose expressed in Luke 24?

DAY 19 Joy in Believing

Read: Acts 13:48-52

God used Paul and Barnabas to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah (49:6) that Christ, the servant of the Lord, is a light for all nations that He "may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." When the Gentiles believed in the Lord Jesus Christ they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; they were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:48-52).

Others could visibly see the joy that the Gentiles experienced. These new believers believed in Jesus Christ and rejoiced "with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory" (1 Peter 1:8b). I picture them bursting with energy and enthusiasm – where worship and service were a natural overflow of their inner joy.

I was a teenager when I believed in Jesus, and I was filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. My newfound faith gave me a purpose. I wanted to talk to Him, learn more about Him, read His Word, worship Him, tell others about Him, and fellowship with other believers. I shared the plan of salvation with others, looked for opportunities to serve, and joined a small group.

Sometimes the new joy we feel when we first believe is lost. This can happen to any of us. But there is a way for us to reclaim our joy in Christ. Some things that have brought my inner joy back are praising Him through songs, talking with Him, reading His Word, serving someone, or sharing with a trusted friend.

Family Talk:

Have I believed in Jesus?

If so, does my joy need re-igniting?

Vicki Moak
DAY 20 Rejoicing Together, Celebrating Victory

Read: Revelation 19: 6-10

One of my vivid memories of Christmases gone by is our great family Christmas meals. There were grandparents, parents, and children all together around a table full of food. Family stories filled the air and love seemed to envelope everything. Lots of joy abounded. Beneath all this was our remembrance of Jesus coming from heaven to us so that we could believe on him as our savior.

A time to joy in our salvation. Mary declared, "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior." The Angels heralded, "Good tidings of great Joy."

Ah, but there is even greater joy awaiting us around an unimaginable table called the marriage supper of the Lamb. It will be a celebration meal in heaven with the whole redeemed family of God. We will shout with the millions declaring, "Hallelujah . . . let us rejoice and be glad." Our salvation will be complete; the Lord has won and we shall ever be with Jesus and our forever family Oh what a joyful, happy time that will be!

Dear believer, that day is drawing ever closer.

Family Talk:

Let the joy of this present advent time open a window in your heart to see more clearly the indescribable joy of the greatest family homecoming meal ever, rejoicing around the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Are you looking forward to the day that you will get to sit at the table of God and eat with Him? Does communion remind you of this?

Pastor Don Wagner

Day 21 Joy in Hard Times

Read Psalm 30

This week has been all about thinking about joy. We have seen times of great joy and also times where there was despair. But God continues to work even when the times seem darkest. This truth applies to our lives too. Right now, in this life, there will be seasons of struggle, days of pain, experiences that you may wish never happened, but God is still there. He wants you to come to Him with your hurts, struggles, and failings. He wants to lift you up in the same way that He lifted up David.

This world is the worst place followers of Jesus will ever experience. On this earth, we must deal with lying, deceit, betrayal, and many twisted and broken things that are not in line with God's commands. All of these things impact us and leave scars on our souls. But that is not the end of the story. This life on earth is so short when compared to the length of eternity with God. The darkness may feel like it is winning in moments here, but God promises to defeat the darkness. We know that joy comes in the morning!

This is the amazing future that we await! We will get to be in the presence of God praising Him! He will wipe away our tears, and we will feel joy in His presence. We have to remember this when we go through heartache. We need to cling to God and His promises during our toughest days here on earth. We longingly look forward to the future joy of being with Jesus forever!

Family Talk:

When is it the hardest for you to have joy in God?

How can remembering eternal joy change your perspective?

Closing week 3...

Family Talk: What did you learn this week about joy?

How is joy different from happiness?

What can you do to have joy even when life is hard?

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What point challenged you the most in this week's sermon?

2. How does it make you feel that God loves you as His child?

3. What things about Christmas distract you from God's love?

4. How can you make sure that you are focused on God's love for you this Christmas?

5. How can you share God's love with others this week?

6. What specific step can you take this week to apply God's Word to your life?

SERMON NOTES

Love

CHRISTMAS SCAVENGER HUNT. Week 4 - Angels

Find the STAR on your campus! Scan the QR code on the table to watch the video. Discover the Key Word in the video and write it in the box.



*miss church but don't want to miss out? Watch the video below!



DAY 22 People of God

Read: Deuteronomy 7:6-8

So often we worry about what other people think about us. This can cause us to want to look and act like those people by buying what they buy, wearing what they wear, talking like they talk, and doing what they do. This rarely works and usually costs us time, money, and energy that we will never get back. One of the great things about God is that He doesn't choose us based on the things that people focus on. In fact, he doesn't choose us based upon external comparisons at all, but simple because He loves us. Because God loves us, He chooses us, redeems us (that means saves), and treasures us. He does this because He wants to. When God decides to do something, it becomes a promise.

When I think about the truths of this passage of Scripture, I marvel at how grand God's plan is. He gave us the example of His love and power by how He rescued an entire nation of people from slavery. He makes promises that are not limited to one human lifetime but expanded to "a thousand generations!" God wants me to understand how great He is and how great His love is. He wants me to know how much I am loved. We see this because of how He cared for His people, the nation of Israel.

Family Talk:

What does it mean to know that you didn't have to do anything special to earn God's attention?

How does knowing this change the amount of time and effort you might spend on getting other people's attention or approval?

Is this the kind of idea that we should keep to ourselves? How should we be sharing this good news of God's love with others?

DAY 23 Rejection of God

Read 1 Samuel 8:1-9

It's so amazing to see, that after all of these years, we still struggle with many of the same things the Israelites struggled with. We have a God who loves us so much, that He would give his Only Son for us, yet time and time again, we allow the world to dictate how we live our lives.

Here we see Israel coming to Samuel asking for Him to give them a king to lead them "Such as all the other nations have" (v. 5). They wanted to fit in! God then tells Samuel to give them what they want, as they reject him, but also to warn them that it wasn't going to allow them to experience the BEST that He had in store.

It's so easy to just do what everyone else around us is doing, because then we feel accepted, and like we fit in. This could look like gossiping with others about someone else, watching something you know you shouldn't be, or even choosing to lie to make yourself look better than you are. Yet God, who loves us and knows us better than anyone else, (and actually knows what's best) calls us to be set apart, to be different. We can learn from the Israelites here, and the struggles they had because they rejected God. We should look to be set apart, and allow God to direct our lives!

Family Talk:

What is an area of your life that you want to be accepted more by your friends/others than doing what God has called you to?

Why do you think we so often choose to do what the world says, instead of what God says?

David Greer

DAY 24 Jesus sent to be love

Read 1 John 4:7-21

God's love is amazing! This passage describes in such great detail the love that God has for us. It tells of how Jesus' birth is God showing His love! Jesus literally was God's love coming to earth. This level of love is unthinkable. God loves us, His creation, enough to send Jesus so that we could live through Him. He sent Jesus to be the Savior of the World.

Jesus' birth was the birth of love. We have the ability to love God because He first loved us. We see this love through Jesus coming. Oh, how sweet the love of God. This should be our first thought whenever we think about Christmas. We shouldn't think of red and green or Santa or trees. We should remember the love that was shown when Jesus was born and how God's love for us changes our lives.

Let this focus invade your thinking the next few days leading up to Christmas. Think about all of God's love for you. Think about how Jesus was born to save the world. Every time you see a Christmas tree think about the love that God has for you. These are the thoughts that should fill us. Not just thinking about presents under the tree or the family time together. The thing we thing about most this Christmas season should be God's love given to us in Jesus.

Family Talk:

What reminds you most that God loves you?

How can you think God's love this Christmas?

DAY 25 Death of love

Read: Rom 5:8

Jesus' love for us existed long before He came to Bethlehem as a baby. Jesus knew before creating the world that He would have to come to save us from our sins. This is why we celebrate Christmas. We celebrate Christmas because God loved us and sent Jesus. The reason that Christmas is such a big deal is because Jesus saved us.

He did not save us by only coming to this earth and living a perfect life. That was only the first step in His plan of salvation. Jesus then died on the cross, taking all of our sins upon Himself. He died so that we could have new life in Him. His death paid our penalty for sin once and for all. Then He rose from the grave breaking the power of sin and death!

This hope that we celebrate on Easter is really the reason behind the power of Christmas! God's love for us brought us amazing new life! We get to remember that love that God had for us starting by celebrating the birth of Jesus! Jesus' love for us is so amazing and Christmas is a great time for our families to remember that together!

Family Talk:

What does God's love mean to you?

How do our family traditions remind us of Jesus' love?

Paul Moak

DAY 26 Family of God

Read John 1:12

As I write this, I'm listening to Christmas music – what better way to get in the mood for writing about the holidays? What strikes me is how much of this music is about being home with family or going home or being with people you love. I'm not really sure why, but Christmas makes us long to be with people we love and who love us. For some, Christmas means a precious time of family. For others, Christmas reminds them how very alone they are, how rejected and unloved they feel.

In John 1:12, John writes, "But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God." Because we have the word "but" starting things off, let's go back a few verses and get the reason for it. Starting in verse 9, John explains that even though Jesus came to earth as a human, the world didn't want him. They didn't even see Him as who He was. Even His people (Verse 11) didn't want Him. His family rejected Him and killed Him.

"But" – But those who did believe Him, an immense gift was given. We were given **the gift of family** – not just any family, but **the family of God**. What does that mean? That means that we're no longer alone. We're no longer cut off from God, but He loves us and receives us like His own children. Galatians 4:4-5, Paul tells us that Jesus was sent for that very purpose, so that we could know "the adoption as sons". When Jesus was born, humanity was no longer alone. **Through belief in Him, we could know the love of the eternal family of God**.

Family Talk:

Why do you think family is so important at Christmas?

Do you know anyone who is alone at Christmas? How could you bring them to your family or even more importantly, how could you tell them about Jesus?

CHRISTMAS EVE

CHRISTMAS SCAVENGER HUNT. Christmas Eve - The Baby

Find the real life Manger on your campus! Scan the QR code on the table to watch the video. Discover the Key Word in the video and write it in the box.



*miss church but don't want to miss out? Watch the video below!



DAY 27 Christmas Eve!

Read: Luke 2:1-21

The Jewish nation had been waiting for their Messiah. He was supposed to come with fanfare. He was supposed to come conquering. He was supposed to come and lead them to victory. They had waited. They were waiting. Everything was tied up in the arrival of this Savior.

He came so silently. He came with so little interruption to the stream of their lives. Honestly, the Roman census caused more of an uproar. Yes, an angel choir came and a new star appeared. But the angels sang at a field to the lowest of the low. And considering that Jesus had descended from Heaven where He had all the angels at His command, one choir wasn't that much. The star was magnificent, but a few wise men with extensive knowledge were the only ones who thought it meant something.

The answer to everything mankind would ever want or need – all the hope, all the peace, all the joy, the very definition of love -- arrived in this world with the equivalent of a heavenly peep. No one who has ever been born would change the course of humanity like Jesus. He had been promised (Genesis 3:15). He had been foretold in Isaiah (Is. 9:1-7). Every prophet in the Old Testament cried out for His arrival.

It's hard to imagine what that day was like. We know what Christmas feels like now. Every day that passes just adds to the anticipation. Every party, every present wrapped creates a little more excitement. Today, we get so excited for the earthly gifts that we get, but do you think anyone sensed what was about to happen? Could the rocks and trees hear the heavenly choir preparing? Did the air feel heavy with an inexplainable joy?

We'll never know what that day was like. What we do know is that He has arrived. He came, bringing the peace for every fear, the hope for every doubter, the joy for those who mourn and the love that we are all created to know. The conquering Messiah arrived in the arms of a young girl who was far away from home, placed in a feeding trough and was worshiped by plain old workers. But oh – the waiting, the real waiting was over. **Rejoice! The King has come!**

DAY 28 MERRY CHRISTMAS!!!

"Sing aloud...be glad and rejoice with all your heart...The Lord has taken away your punishment, He has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King is with you. Never again will you fear any harm. The Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing..." Zephaniah 3:14-17

Merry Christmas! I don't know about the rest of you, but there's something powerful about worshiping Jesus on Christmas Day! Today Karen and I will make it to each of our children's homes, bringing gifts for them and our grandchildren. We'll stay an hour or so, eat some food and move onto to the next. It's our tradition now that all of us live here in York.

Sometimes we reflect about how as a ministry family who has moved from Ohio to Massachusetts to Pennsylvania, we never dreamed all of our children and grandchildren would one day live in the same town. But for now, we're living this dream to the fullest as we shower love on our family!

Family Talk:

As we come to the end of our Advent time together, let's rejoice in what we've learned. What has God specifically said to you this season? How have you grown in your appreciation for all Jesus has done for you? And as you look past this season and into the new year, how will you live your dreams to the fullest and pass on His great love for you to others? It's one of the reasons why we exist!

