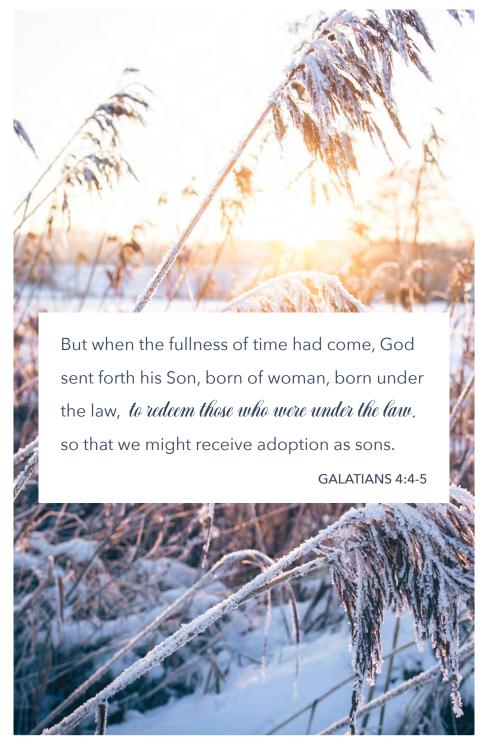


advent \ devotional

As we enter the Christmas season, we're journeying through the book of Ruth to discover fresh hope and perspective in the story of our Redeemer. Though set "in the days when the judges ruled," Ruth speaks powerfully into our own time—a world marked by individualism, fractured relationships, and uncertainty. In this short but profound book, we see God weaving together a story of faithful hope, loyal love, restoring peace, and everlasting joy through the lives of ordinary people who trust Him in the midst of loss and uncertainty.

At the heart of Ruth is the theme of redemption. The same God who brought fullness out of Naomi and Ruth's emptiness is the God who brings life out of death through Jesus Christ. Because of Christ's birth, death, and resurrection, our stories have been redeemed.





Visit our Advent page for Christmas playlists, activity guides, and more! waysidechapel.org/advent

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"...and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

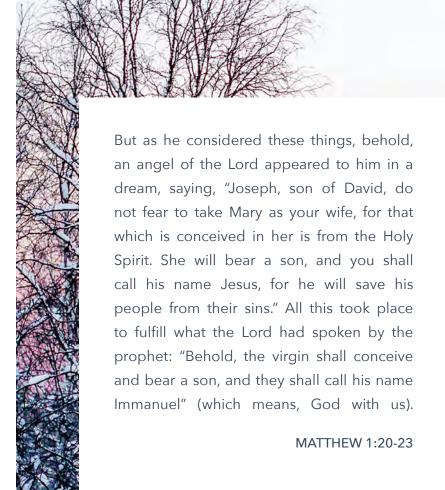




The first week of Advent invites us to rest in the faithful hope of our sovereign God. In the midst of humanity's brokenness, scripture reveals a God who actively redeems His people. In every generation, His watchful care, grace, and compassion have remained steady and sure.

As we enter Ruth's story this week, we're reminded that even when life is marked by loss, chaos, and uncertainty, our God is El Roi—the God who sees. When Ruth's story begins, hope was hard to find. Yet even in their uncertainty, God was weaving redemption through humble faith and steadfast love. He saw Ruth and Naomi, and ultimately all of humanity in our need for salvation.

Because our God keeps His promises, we have hope and can trust Him with our past, our present, and our future. The same God who saw Ruth in her faith and Naomi in her sorrow has now come near to see us face-to-face. He is the God who sees—the One who steps into our stories, bringing light and redemption even when He feels silent. As we begin the first week of Advent, let's remember that He is still weaving redemption in our stories—in the waiting, the longing, and the promise fulfilled in Jesus, our Wonderful Counselor.







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In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

LUKE 1:26-38

To be seen. This concept is all over our culture today. What does that mean to us? According to Google AI, "To be 'seen' means to feel authentically known, validated, and accepted by others for who you truly are, both the parts you show and those you hide. It involves feeling noticed, valued, and understood, leading to a sense of connection, belonging, and empowerment. Feeling unseen can result in feeling invisible, misunderstood, or neglected." Now that's a lot to unpack, but let's just look at the basic underpinnings of that definition, which is a desire to be known. To be seen equates with being known. This is huge in the lives of two women we see in scripture.

The first is Hagar. An Egyptian slave girl of Sarai, Hagar, was mistreated and abused by Sarai and Abraham when she was forced to have a baby with Abram. This woman thought her position had changed once she became pregnant, but Sarai then treated her harshly, and she fled into the desert to escape. And it is here, in the desert, that Scripture tells us "The angel of the LORD found Hagar." Did you catch that? He **found** her! It's implying that the LORD was looking for her. She was not alone in her suffering and in the pain of her mistreatment. He found her and acknowledged her position and circumstances and gave her a promise of what her child, a son, would become. In an act of faith, Hagar acknowledges the Lord by calling Him El Roi

the God who sees! So, this foreign woman, abused and mistreated, amid her pain and struggle, is met by the God who sees! He knows her struggle, pain, and frustration, and He answered it with hope and the promise of a future.

Fast forward a few thousand years, and we meet another woman whom God sees. Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary was met by God through the agency of His special servant, the angel Gabriel. Gabriel calls Mary "you who are highly favored" and unpacks for her that she is the one who will bring forth the Messiah. No doubt an overwhelming and life-altering assignment, not unlike what Hagar was tasked with as well. A fascinating thing we see here is how detailed scripture tells us of the narrow focus of God on Mary. God sent Gabriel to Nazareth, in Galilee, to a virgin, pledged to be married to Joseph, whose name was Mary.

In both cases, God knew the circumstances of these women's lives. He knew their very names, and He spoke directly to them! He **knew** them, He **saw** them, and He **cared** for them. So, what's going on in your life right now? Are you in a hard season or are you in a season of blessing? Do you know that God sees you too?

This Christmas season, my prayer for you is that you know that God knows you by name, He sees where you are and what you are going through, and He will enter it with you. Will you trust Him?

- In what areas of your life do you most long to be seen-to be known, understood, or cared for? How does knowing that God sees you reshape your perspective in that area today?
- When God's presence feels distant or His plans unclear, what would it look like for you to trust that He is still near, still watching, and still working for your good? How might this truth bring hope in your waiting?

We encourage you to take time to worship and thank God for His faithfulness in giving us a Savior which shows us our God can be trusted and is worthy of our hope as we begin this Advent season.

You can find a Spotify playlist of songs on our website at <u>waysidechapel.org/advent.</u>



After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, "O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head."

As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman. And Eli said to her, "How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you." But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation." Then Eli answered, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him." And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your eyes." Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.

They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her. And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked for him from the Lord."

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

LUKE 1:5-25

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There I stood in that small church office in Frankfort, Illinois, hearing words from my pastor that would shatter my understanding of calling and provision: He said, "I want your baby born back in Texas." Ten months later, with a six-month-old son and nowhere to live, we packed our dreams into a moving truck and drove back to Texas, back to our parents' homes, back to a future that felt like nothing more than question marks.

Was I truly called? Did I truly want to be in ministry after this experience?

Maybe your geography of doubt looks different than mine. Maybe it's the job that disappeared just when you thought you were finally stable. The relationship that ended when you were certain it was "the one." The diagnosis that arrived like an unwelcome visitor, rearranging everything you thought you knew about your future. Or perhaps it's subtler - the slow erosion of certainty as prayers seem to echo back unanswered, as doors remain stubbornly closed, as God's presence feels more like a distant memory than a current reality. We've all been there, where what we believed about God's goodness collides with circumstances that feel anything but good. In those moments, we find ourselves asking the questions we're almost afraid to voice: Does God actually see what I'm going through? Does He care? Am I on His radar at all, or have I somehow slipped through the cracks of divine attention?

The silence can be deafening. We find ourselves caught between what we've been taught about God and what we're actually experiencing of God. The questions multiply: Maybe I don't have enough faith? Maybe I'm not praying right? Maybe God is trying to tell me something, and I'm just not getting the message? The space between promise and fulfillment becomes a wilderness where faith feels more like an act of defiance than a natural response.

But here's where the ancient stories of Hannah and Elizabeth become more than religious narratives - they become lifelines thrown across centuries to those of us drowning in the gap between expectation and reality. Their stories reveal something profound about the architecture of faith and the character of the God who sees.

Hannah and Elizabeth inhabit this painful geography of unfulfilled desire, where barrenness becomes a spiritual metaphor for the human experience of waiting in what feels like God's silence. In ancient Near Eastern culture, childlessness carried the weight of divine disapproval, yet these stories subvert that narrative entirely. Their barrenness wasn't a sign of God's absence; it was the very stage upon which His presence would be most dramatically revealed. Hannah's "bitterness of soul" and Elizabeth's experience of "reproach among people" represent every believer who has ever wondered if God sees their deepest pain.

But here's what transforms everything: both women encountered El Roi - the God who sees. Not the God who occasionally glances our way, but the God whose vision penetrates the depth of our longing, who sees not just our present emptiness but our future fullness.

Hannah's prayer reveals something profound about the architecture of faith. She doesn't just ask for a child; she surrenders that child back to God before conception even occurs. Elizabeth, in her late-in-life pregnancy, surrenders her own timeline and expectations. Both women discover that sometimes our greatest acts of faithfulness happen when we can't see where they're leading.

You may be living in your own version of Hannah's barrenness or Elizabeth's reproach. Your prayers may feel like they're dissolving into silence. Your calling may seem buried beneath circumstances that feel more like endings than beginnings. But *El Roi* sees. He sees the tears, the doubts, the latenight questions about whether you heard Him correctly. This Advent season, as we hear the story of Ruth choosing to follow a bitter, empty Naomi into an uncertain future, we are reminded that God's greatest works often begin in wombs that seemed barren, in hearts that felt forgotten, in circumstances that appeared hopeless. The Wonderful Counselor doesn't just give us advice; He transforms our waiting into preparation, our emptiness into expectation.

Hannah walked away from that temple changed, even before conception occurred. Her faith preceded the answer. What if your current season of waiting isn't punishment but preparation? What if God is orchestrating something that requires this exact timing, this precise geography of longing?

Seven months after my termination, when hope felt like a foreign language, God showed up through miraculous relational connections that led me to a church that became home, and a rich season of ministry for the next twenty years. Sometimes the very thing that feels like an ending, becomes the doorway to a beginning.

- In what area of your life do you most need to trust that *El Roi* the God who sees is at work even in apparent silence?
- How might your current season of waiting be God's way of preparing you for something beyond your current imagination?



So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

GENESIS 45:4-8

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

ROMANS 8:28-30

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When you read a book, what gives the story a great ending? It could be a resounding victory, reaching the far-off destination, or maybe it's that misunderstandings or mysteries are finally fully resolved? There are many ways to tie a bow on a well-written tale, but my personal favorite is when the author brings about a resolution that advances the characters and their circumstances far beyond where they first started in chapter one. When their integrity has been refined, or their relationships healed, or they're finally removed from the bleak physical circumstances they started in, I am left with the mending emotion of hope.

In Genesis, we read about Joseph leading his brothers in the worshipful acknowledgement of how God used their evil intentions to preserve life. A family should love and seek the best for its members, and yet, Joseph's brothers actively sought out his harm and ultimately sold him to be a slave in Egypt. But through unexpected events and miracles, Joseph was appointed by Pharaoh to be his second-in-command, and in this position prepared Egypt for a seven-year famine. God took the evil that wrecked this family and used it to preserve them. God redeemed the mistreatment of Joseph by his brothers.

When we encounter God's redemption in the Bible or even in our own circumstances, it gives us deposits of hope because we are reminded that there is a sovereign God at work and He has the power to align all things to His loving will.

And let's not forget the most personal redemption you or I will experience is our own! God desires to redeem us. In the verses leading up to Romans 8:28, Paul says, "that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

This passage says we were born into bondage and held under the curse of sin. Even if we were born into a family with wonderful parents and our physical needs were cared for, we are still in need of redemption. God has a plan to restore us to His family. He purchases us with the precious and valuable blood of His perfect Son; He redeems us.

And He does not stop there. Once we are part of His family, He works all things together for our good, and that good is becoming increasingly more like Christ the Son.

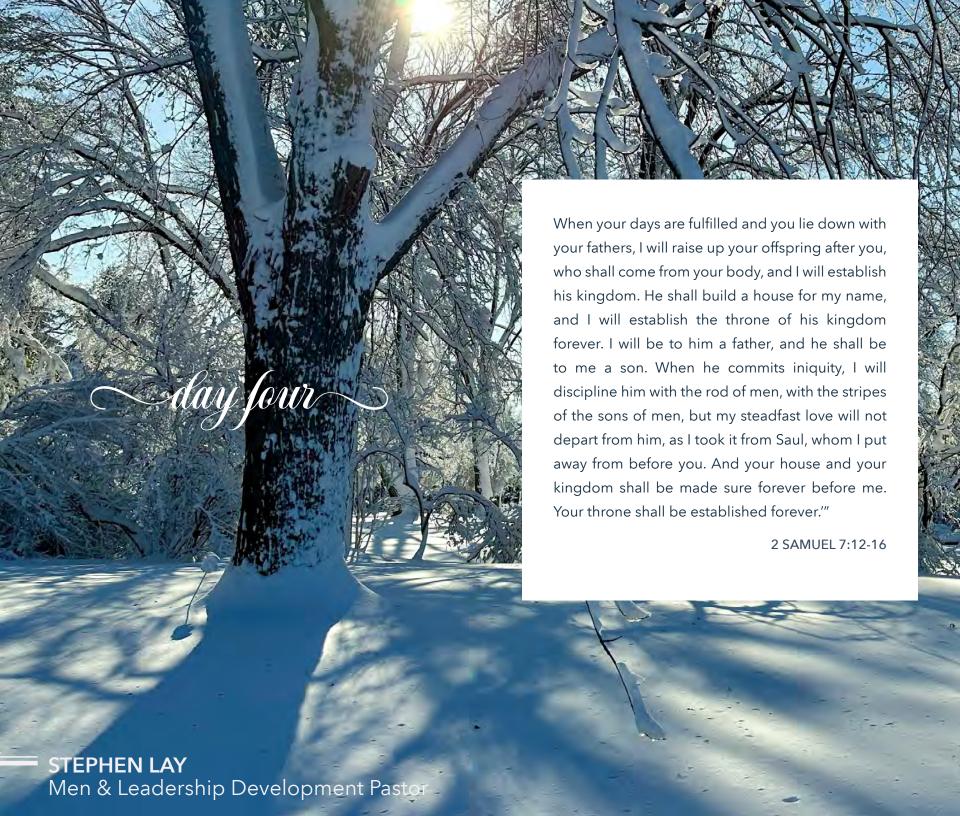
This Christmas, we worship a God who sees all our needs, who takes what is under the curse of corruption and redeems it according to His loving will. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!" Psalm 107:2

- When you think about your own life, where have you seen God bring redemption out of something broken or painful?
- How does knowing that God can redeem even evil intentions change the way you view difficult circumstances?
- Are there areas of your life right now where you're waiting to see God's redemptive work? How can you hold onto hope while you wait?



"let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful."

HEBREWS 10:23



The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

MATTHEW 1:1-17

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Why would a God who "sees" want to interact with His most precious creation if He didn't intend to keep His promises? The wonderful thing about our God is that keeping His promises is never an intention, something God sometimes gets around to, and other times does not. God is not arbitrary based upon His time, availability, or even His desire. Instead, God's Word is the foundation of His interactions with mankind. When it comes to God's character, His honest Word is His foundation:

"God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?

Numbers 23:19

God's promise to David becomes the cornerstone of Jesus' fulfillment of the line of David's eternal kingship. The covenant promise to David of an eternal kingship through His line was based upon the character of the one true God who keeps His promises. Through the line of David, a King would come, a Messiah, who would usher in an eternal Kingdom. This Messiah would be our "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." He will reign on David's throne and will uphold this Kingdom with justice and righteousness forever.

I can't imagine how amazing and confusing it must have been to see Jesus as Matthew saw him. God in the flesh, fulfilling God's promises, in the most unique ways. What would have been expected didn't happen, and what happened was not expected. But just in case Matthew's readers wondered, he tells us right up front about Jesus being the perfect fit in the line of David. In fact, Matthew shows us how the genealogy of Jesus was fulfilled all the way from Abraham forward.

God's promise to David was realized twenty-eight generations after the promise. Over a thousand years later, God's Word still stood, and it still stands today. Our God keeps His promises because it is part of what defines His very existence as God.

- Have you ever questioned God's promise-keeping ability or desires? How does the fulfillment of God's promise to David in Jesus encourage your faith?
- Consider that there are conservatively estimated over three hundred Old Testament prophecies Jesus fulfilled. Jesus' fulfillment of being in the line of David is just one. How does this bolster your view of how God keeps His Word?
- Reflect upon some ways God has kept His Word with you. Take a few moments to thank Him, and ponder the fact that God keeps His Word, then, now and forevermore. How will this affect how you approach worship this Christmas?



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During the Christmas season, we are flooded with messages about products that present a picture of a better future. Our culture tries to sell us things that claim to improve our lives: a new gadget, a perfume that promises to help us achieve the life we dream of, an idealized version of family, decorations, or even a false sense of peace or justice. We constantly long for those better days, but they never seem to arrive.

Sometimes, we look at our current situation and long for something more. We tend to think that having this or that will make our lives better—whether it's a bigger house, a spouse, a child, or something else. Yet, once we get it, that feeling usually fades quickly. We realize that the ideal in our minds doesn't match reality, and we start searching for the next thing that will bring us happiness, whatever that may be. Or, worse, we begin to complain about our situation or seek ways to improve it. Sometimes, it can even seem like God hasn't answered our prayers the way we wanted. In this process, our initial gratitude can turn into bitterness. No matter what we do or have, it often feels as though it is insufficient. So, we spend our lives waiting for better days.

In Jeremiah, God declares that better days are coming. In those days, a wise king from the line of David will bring peace and justice to his people. The long awaited Messiah will deliver God's people from injustice and oppression. Through Him, God will reveal Himself as a God of Justice–everything Israel had been waiting for.

God's promise is fulfilled in Jesus, and Mary witnesses that promise. God was drawing closer to His people through Jesus, and Mary proclaims that God is her Savior. I love how she reacts to her situation—she praises God and rejoices in Him. She recognizes the enormous blessing of being an instrument of God's purposes for her life and His people. Mary acknowledges God's mighty hand in her life when she says: "From now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me."

These verses in Luke are like a song of praise. Mary's focus is on God and what He has done. It's a beautiful song of rejoicing in God.

Today, we have the opportunity to reflect on a God who comes near—to prepare our hearts for how we will respond to His blessings. He has given us everything, but above all, we have been gifted with the Spirit of Jesus that indwells us. Mary's response to the Messiah is full of gratitude, humility, and joy. What is ours?

- Take a moment to write down four or five blessings or prayers that God has answered in your life. Then, in your own words, write a short song of praise to God.
- Using that song, pray with a heart full of gratitude.
 What does it mean to you that God has come near in your life? How can you become more aware of the Spirit of Jesus within you during this Advent season?



oh give thanks to the ford, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever PSALM 107:1

Jamily activities

Advent is a time when Christians prepare to celebrate the coming of Christ as the baby born in Bethlehem at the first Christmas. In Isaiah 9:6, there are four descriptions of Jesus: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Each of these descriptions has an adjective and a noun. Take time with your kids to look up the definitions of each word. For instance, "wonderful" means: great, awesome, fantastic, and "counselor" means: someone who give advice, helps, or assists. Knowing the meanings of these words will help your children better understand who Jesus is and how His unchanging attributes help us as we face challenges in our lives.

- Create a countdown to Christmas where you can mark off the days as you anticipate (hope for) the celebration of Jesus' birth. It can be as simple or as elaborate as you like.
- As a way to foster thankfulness and focus on giving to others, create an Advent Blessing Jar with your family: https://www.thirtyhandmadedays.com/advent-blessing-jar/
- Make Jesse Tree Ornaments to trace the hope of God's promise throughout scripture: https://awellpurposedwoman.com/jesse-tree-tradition-free-printable/

- Ask your kids what "wonderful" means. Have them list things that they think are wonderful. Then talk about what the word "counselor" means. Ask them who they think helps them when they have a problem. Discuss what those people do to make their lives easier or better. Isaiah 9:6 tells us that Jesus is our Wonderful Counselor. He knows exactly what we need and the Bible gives us the right advice on what to do when we have a problem. God helps us as we face challenges, and we can help others. With Christmas coming, think of someone that your family could assist. Make a plan to do something for that family (bring them a meal, write them a note, draw them a picture, etc.)
- Tear up pieces of paper, write down individual laments or prayers on them, then create a collage with the word "hope" from the torn-up pieces. The collage is a visual representation of how God sees and transforms sorrow into hope.
- Reflect on moments when you have felt seen by God. Document these experiences in a journal or a special "well" to return to when you feel alone.
- "I Spy" with a magnifying glass: Use a magnifying glass to examine the small details in a picture or object. Connect this to the story of Hagar, explaining that El Roi sees even the smallest details of our lives, no matter where we are.

Tag us on our social channels @waysidechapelsa and use #waysideadvent





The Sustaining Love of God

Exodus 16:2-15 & John 6:30-35, 48-51

The Merciful Love of God

Exodus 34:4-9 & Titus 3:4-7

The Faithful Love of God

2 Samuel 7:8-16 & Luke 1:30-33

The Sacrificial Love of God

Psalm 103:8-13 & Philippians 2:5-11

Family Activities



The second week of Advent centers on the loyal, covenant love of God-His hesed-a love that pursues, provides, and never lets go. From Abraham's obedience to mercy shown to Israel in the wilderness and the promises spoken through the prophets, we see that God's love is not limited by circumstance or dependent on strength. He is Jehovah Jireh, the Lord who provides – not just for our daily needs, but ultimately for our redemption.

As we enter Ruth 2, we see this *hesed* love on display through God's quiet provision. Ruth, an outsider in Bethlehem, sets out to glean in the fields with no assurance of favor or protection; yet the Lord directs her steps to Boaz, a man whose kindness reflects the heart of God. In Boaz's compassion and generosity, we catch a glimpse of divine redemption – a love that acts on behalf of others, even when nothing is owed in return.

This is the same love that came near at Christmas – the steadfast love that pursues the weary, provides for the empty, and holds fast to the broken. No matter what we face, the truth of Christmas declares something beautiful: we are fully known and deeply loved by God. His loyal love, mighty to save and faithful to provide, found its ultimate expression in Bethlehem, where the mighty God came near in humility, born to redeem and restore our brokenness.

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

LUKE 2:1-7



And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

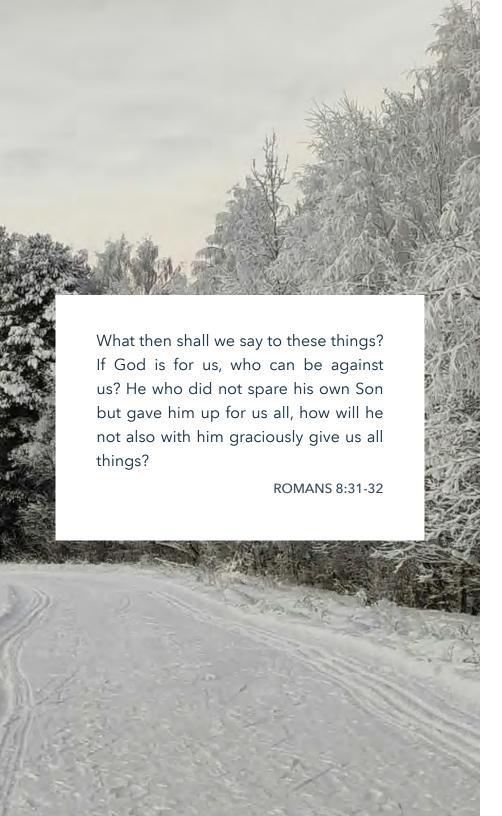
GENESIS 22:6-14



I love my daughter. She just turned one, and one of my favorite things I've gotten to experience as a father is the joy on her face when I give her one of her favorite foods when she's hungry. Not only am I meeting her need — I'm giving her something she loves (mac and cheese might as well be Perry's Steak House to her)! Her smile is priceless every time, and I love it.

Feeding her isn't always the most positive experience, though. If she's hungry, and it's taking me longer than she would like for me to feed her, she eventually loses all faith in me that I'm going to feed her at all. She cries and does this hilarious "collapsing" motion reminiscent of Charlton Heston falling to his knees at the foot of The Statue of Liberty in *Planet of the Apes*. She becomes the picture of despair, as if she'll never eat again, or as if I haven't faithfully fed her every day of her entire existence. Her need gets strong enough, the moment gets difficult enough, and the wait gets long enough, and suddenly, my character is in question, and everything I've ever done for her is forgotten.

I have a short memory too. I do this all the time with God! When things get hard, I forget His character. Grief and struggle cloud my vision to the point that all I can pay attention to is my need. Like my daughter, when dinner is taking too long, I forget who my heavenly Father is, and I forget that He's provided for



me abundantly all my life.

Romans 8 speaks directly into this by pointing out that God has already provided more for me than I could ever have hoped to obtain. He offered me His Son... "how will He not also graciously give us all things" (Rom 8:32)? I was a sinner – an enemy of God – and He still offered me salvation? He threw the proverbial life preserver out to me in the stormy waters, despite the fact that I was rejecting Him as he threw it to me. And yet... I question His willingness to provide and the quality of what He would provide me.

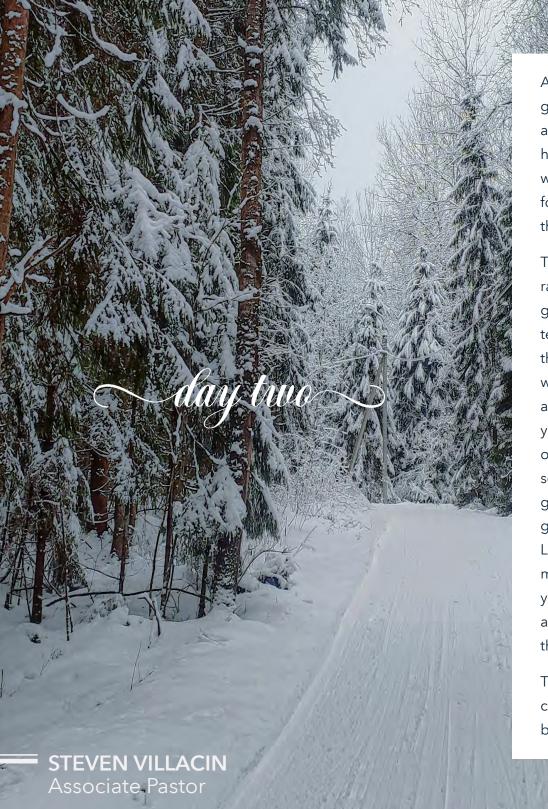
If this is the providing love that God has for me, why do I worry so much about the simpler needs in my life? He's already provided eternal security for me when I didn't deserve it. Won't He also take care of my resources and wounds? He's already removed the infinite gap between us and given me, His creation, the chance to have intimacy and closeness with my creator. Won't He also take care of everything else? If I, as an imperfect father, know how to give my daughter good things, then how much more does my perfect Heavenly Father know how to provide for me?

If I'm entirely transparent with you, I'm in a season of waiting and hardship right now. It's hard. I don't know how the provision will come, but I know where it will come from. I need to remember who my God is and who He has shown me He is through scripture and my

personal experience. The question isn't "will He provide?", the question is "will I remember who He has shown Himself to be over and over again?".

This Advent season, I'd like to invite you to join me – to remember with me. He's provided for us in ways we could never understand, and we know He is faithful to continue doing so.

- How can you relate to my daughter's despair when her dinner is taking a little longer than she'd like?
- Take a moment to remember five things that God has done to show you His provision. Include specifics: Is there a location tied to that memory? What people are associated with that moment? Why did that moment matter? Remember!



And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily." So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, "At evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against the Lord. For what are we, that you grumble against us?" And Moses said, "When the Lord gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the Lord has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him-what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the Lord."

Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, 'Come near before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling."

And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. And the Lord said to Moses, "I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.""

In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.

EXODUS 16:2-15

So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

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

I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

JOHN 6:30-35, 48-51

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When my boys start getting grumpy, one of the first things I check is when they last ate. If it's been a while, I know what's coming...short tempers, slumped shoulders, and quick tears. When they're hungry, it's as if their whole world falls apart, and suddenly the word hangry feels all too real. We've all felt our mood shift when we're running on empty. It's our body's way of telling us something is missing. Food sustains us, and when that need goes unmet, everything feels off balance.

The Israelites knew something about hunger too. In Exodus 16, they found themselves in the wilderness with no food to eat. Frustration and longing bubbled up quickly, and their hunger turned into grumbling. They even accused Moses and Aaron of bringing them to the wilderness to kill them with hunger! Yet instead of responding in anger, God answered their cries with kindness. He provided them bread from heaven each morning and meat to eat each evening. His provision was steady, daily, and enough for their needs. It was an act of merciful and loyal love.

Jehovah Jireh, the Lord will provide, did more than fill their stomachs. He revealed His character. His provision wasn't just about the Israelites' survival; it was about fostering their trust in Him. Every dawn, they woke to find evidence of His faithful provision scattered on the

ground like dew. In the rhythm of receiving, they learned dependence. God's sustaining love wasn't a one-time rescue but a daily reminder that His loyal love never fails.

Centuries later, a hungry crowd gathered around Jesus, filled with their own unmet needs, their own sense of longing. They asked for another miracle, another sign like the manna from heaven their ancestors received. Once again, Jesus answered their cries with kindness, lifting their eyes higher in John 6:

"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst". In that moment, Jesus revealed the depth behind God's provision in the wilderness. The manna had satisfied for a time, but it pointed to something greater—the true bread from heaven that would satisfy forever.

At Christmas, God's loyal love takes on flesh. Not only does **He** give us what we need to live, but He is what we need to truly live. Like Ruth gleaning in Boaz's fields, sustained by love she didn't earn, we too are sustained by our Redeemer's faithful love. He meets our daily needs, but more than that, He gives Himself, that we may believe in Him and have life in His name.

This Advent season, we remember that the same God who fed His people in the wilderness and who sent His Son into the world still provides for us today. His sustaining love never runs out. Whether our hunger is physical, emotional, or spiritual, the Lord invites us to come and be filled, to trust that His provision is enough for today, and that His presence will sustain us forever.

Let us go to Him, the true Bread of Life, who satisfies every longing of our soul. Let us draw near to *Jehovah Jireh*, our faithful Provider, and find rest in His sustaining love.

- Where do you sense "hunger" in your life right now?
 Is it an unmet need, a longing, or a weakness? How might God be inviting you to trust His provision for all your needs?
- How can you practice daily dependence on and gratitude toward God this week, remembering that He is your sustainer and provider?





So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone. The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. And he said, "If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance."

EXODUS 34:4-9

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

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Have you ever tried to sum up God in just a simple paragraph? Honestly, the idea of trying boggles my mind and makes my head hurt. And yet, in Exodus 34, the Lord Himself graciously tells us exactly who He is. Many of us who grew up in the church can almost quote the first part: God is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and truth. He keeps lovingkindness for thousands, forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin! It's an incredible description of who God is, and one that I have underlined in my Bible to draw my attention back to the truths listed over and over again.

But there is a second half to the Lord's description of Himself that we often skip over, where God says He will by no means clear the guilty and will visit the consequences of sin to the third and fourth generation. Honestly, that part is not underlined in my Bible because at first glance, it makes me a bit uncomfortable. It feels confusing—almost like a contradiction. But if we slow down, we realize something beautiful: God's justice is not in conflict with His love. His justice flows from His love. He is on a mission to remove sin and heal our broken world. And that is good news! Yet, the question remains: how can God be both merciful and just? How can He both punish and forgive?

We celebrate the answer to that very question every Christmas. Paul tells us in Titus that "the kindness of God and His love appeared" in the person of Jesus Christ – the One who came humbly as a baby and lived among us. Then, in love, He went to the cross and died the death justice demanded and rose again, conquering sin and death once and for all.

The cross is where God's justice and mercy meet. We are saved according to His mercy, washed and renewed by the Holy Spirit, and justified by His grace. The Lord has been faithful to provide in Christ a means of escaping the consequences of justice, and that it would be enough. His merciful love saves us from what we deserve: death.

But He doesn't stop there.

Titus 3:7 says that we are also made heirs. God not only withholds the punishment we earned, but the Lord provides abundantly more than we can ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). He adopts us into His family and gives us the full rights of sons and daughters. We now relate to God as Father and share in Christ's inheritance. (Romans 8:15-17). (If you want to reflect even more on what we have been given in Christ, check out Ephesians 1.)

So, how are we to respond to the Lord's merciful and gracious love? In worship and action.

First, we worship. Take time to slow down and remember the Lord's loyal love toward you.

"The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning, Great is Your faithfulness."

Lamentations 3:22-23

Second, we act. As followers of Christ, we are not called to sit on the sidelines – we are called to join Him in loving, serving, and caring for those around us. We forgive because we have been forgiven. We show mercy because mercy has been shown to us. We love because God first loved us. Friends, let's fix our eyes on our Savior, responding to His merciful love, and surrendering to His call to share that love with others.

- Where have you personally experienced the loyal, merciful love of God recently? Take a moment to remember specific ways He has forgiven, sustained, or provided for you. How might reflecting on those moments lead you to worship and gratitude this week?
- Who in your life needs to experience God's loyal love through you right now? Ask the Lord to show you one person you can extend mercy, patience, encouragement, or practical care to. What is one simple, intentional step you can take this week to reflect Christ's love to them?



for as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him > PSALM 103:11



Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.""

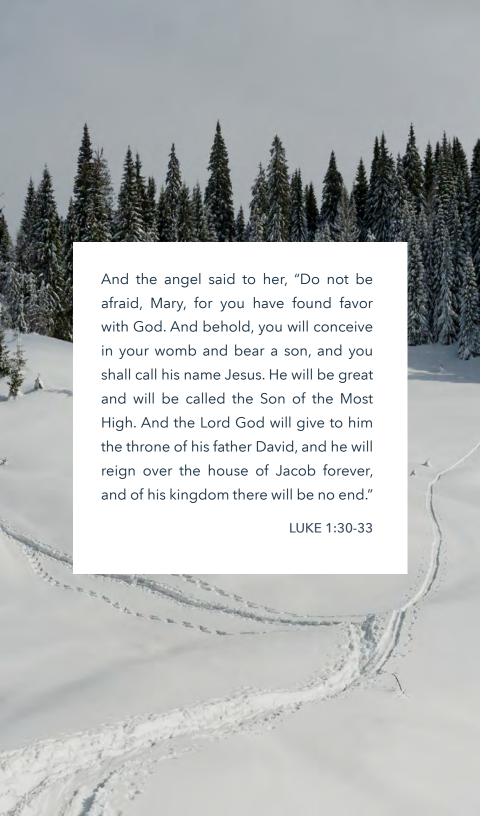
2 SAMUEL 7:8-16



If you have experienced unexpected changes in your life, and I'm sure you have, you know how unsettling change can be. Life change, both good and bad, is part of the human experience – relationships begin, babies are born, promotions are granted, relationships become strained, loved ones pass away, diagnoses are received, jobs are lost...the list is endless. Each change, even those that bring joy, brings questions. Where will we live? Can I handle these responsibilities? What's going to happen next? Why is this happening? And sometimes at the heart of it all is the question, Does God even care?

This struggle and these questions are not unique to us and our time. In the book of Ruth, we meet a woman who has suffered great loss. Ruth doesn't know how she and Naomi will survive. They are alone and without resources, but God sees them. God cares for them. We see the faithful love of God through Boaz, who allows Ruth to glean from his field, and who protects her from his servants. Through Boaz, Ruth experiences *Jehovah Jireh* – the Lord Will Provide.

In 2 Samuel, we read God's promise to David. David's life wasn't easy, but God was with him. God saw his circumstances, and God cared for him. God promised to establish, through David's line, a kingdom that would last forever. It wouldn't be a smooth or easy process.



David's son would fail, and hardship would come. But God declares, "My lovingkindness shall not depart from him...Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever." (verses 15-16). God's love endures despite circumstance and failure. Nothing and no one can thwart his plan or cause Him to break His promise. He is Jehovah Jireh.

In Luke 1, we see God's faithful fulfillment of this promise of an everlasting kingdom. The angel comes to tell Mary she has been chosen to be the mother of "the Son of the Most High," whose "kingdom will have no end". This Son, through David's line, will be perfect, and He will be the King forever. But Mary is just a young, unmarried girl. God knows how frightening this change will be, so the angel begins by telling Mary, "Do not be afraid". Even in fulfilling His promise, God cared for Mary's heart by reassuring her, "You have found favor with God." God said, "Mary, this change isn't random. I see you just as I saw Ruth, just as I saw David." Like Ruth and David before her, Mary experienced the faithful love of Jehovah Jireh. Even though being chosen to be Jesus' mother brought upheaval to Mary's life as she knew it, this change allowed her to experience God's provision for her in new and profound ways.

In the stories of Ruth, David, and Mary, we see a God who knows His people. He sees their need. He cares about them. We see Him provide and keep His promises. And so, at Christmas, through the birth of

Jesus, we remember God's faithful love to His people and to us. Do not be afraid. Change will come, but God's faithful love knows no boundaries and has no end.

- Where have you seen an unexpected change in your life?
- How have you seen God's faithful love through these changes?



The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear
him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.
As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

PSALM 103:8-13

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

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Have you ever misjudged someone you met for the first time, only to find out later just how wrong you were in your first impression of them? Unfortunately, in the case of a bad first impression, the first impression tends to be the lasting impression. But it does not always have to be that way. We can also make the same mistake with God. Perhaps your first impression of God was less than a good impression based either on bad theology, heretical teaching, or mistaken impressions from what other people have incorrectly said about God. So, what first and lasting impression does God make on us in how He describes Himself to us?

In Psalm 103, we read Davd's description of the LORD (Heb. Yahweh, self-existent) as being, "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness." This description is not original with David but is a restating of God's own self-revelation to Moses on Mt. Sinai around 450 years earlier (cf. Exodus 34:6). The significance of this description lies in the fact that this is how God describes Himself. In God's self-revelation, He describes Himself as possessing the attributes of being compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness.

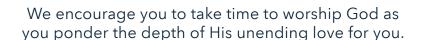
These attributes of God correspond to the reality that He does not always strive with us nor retain His anger forever. He does not treat us according to our sins or repay us according to our iniquities. His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him reaches higher than the heavens are above the earth—without measure. He has taken our transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west, and as a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him.

Returning to our original premise of God making a good first and lasting impression on us, what would be His greatest demonstration of the attributes He refers to Himself in His self-revelation? What act of His would fully communicate that He in fact is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness?

In Philippians 2:5-11, we read that Christ Jesus, God incarnate, emptied Himself (Grk. Kenosis, laid aside His glory), took on human flesh, and willingly subjected Himself to death by crucifixion. It is no wonder then that God the Father would highly exalt Him bestowing on Him the name which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Him as Lord to the glory of God the Father.

On that starry, silent night in Bethlehem, so began this single act of the sacrificial love of God fully demonstrating the mercy, grace, forbearance, and favor of *Jehovah Jireh* ...Immanuel.

- How would you describe God to someone who does not know Him and might ask you, "What is God like?"
- Recount the attributes of God's self-revelation in Psalm 103:8. How have you experienced each attribute of God's self-revelation in your own life?



You can find a Spotify playlist of songs on our website at <u>waysidechapel.org/advent.</u>



Samily activities

As we continue through Advent, let these activities help you talk with your kids about God's unending hesed love—a love that makes us His children, provides for our every need, and leads us to worship Him as our Everlasting Father.

- Donate to <u>Wayside's Christmas Project</u> as we continue to partner with South Texas Alliance for Orphans
- As a family, think of someone you know who might be lonely this Christmas and needs to be reminded that Jesus loves them – maybe a single mom or dad or an elderly neighbor. Make a goody bag for them – include whatever you think they would like. Leave the package on their front porch, ring their doorbell, and leave.
- Make a birthday card for Jesus and thank Him for all the ways He has shown love to you
- Color these "Names of Jesus" ornaments and hang them on the tree to remind you who Jesus is and how much He loves you.

- Gather items from nature (like seeds, flowers, rocks) and discuss how God provided them, their purpose, and His abundance.
- Have children draw or collect pictures of things God provides for them and put them in a scrapbook or on a poster.
- Dedicate time to specifically praise God for His provision, using the Wayside Advent playlist
- Bake Christmas cookies to enjoy and share

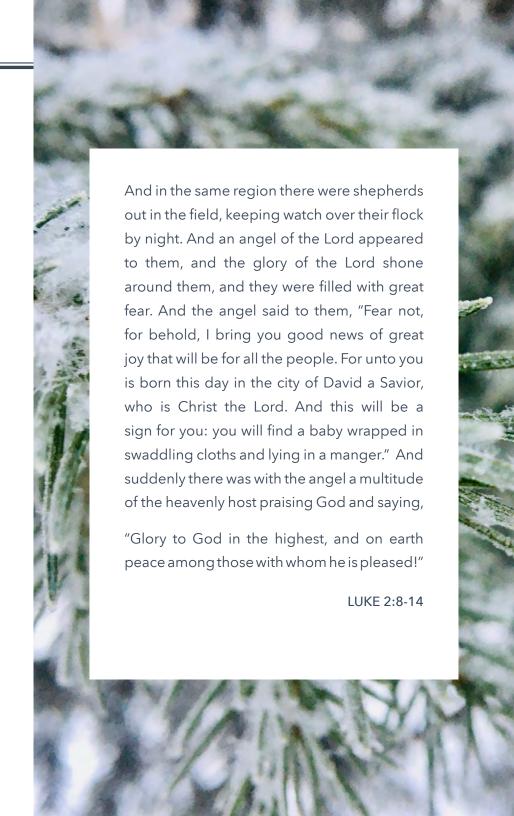


week three

The third week of Advent invites us to rest in the restoring peace of our Redeemer. God's peace is more than the absence of conflict—it is the wholeness and stability that come when He makes right what has been broken. From Gideon to the angels' announcement to the shepherds, God reveals Himself as *Jehovah Shalom*, the Lord is peace.

As we enter Ruth's story this week, we witness this restoring peace take shape through God's gentle guidance. Ruth steps into a vulnerable and uncertain situation at Naomi's instruction, yet Boaz responds with integrity and honor, offering reassurance instead of fear, and covering Ruth with a promise of redemption. In their midnight encounter, we see the peace that flows from trust in a God who is faithful to His Word and present in every unknown.

This is the peace that came near at Christmas – the peace that steadies anxious hearts, restores fractured stories, and brings wholeness where there has been loss. No matter the turmoil or uncertainty we face, the truth of Advent invites us to rest in the One who has drawn near: Jesus, the Prince of Peace, who came to reconcile us to God and restore what sin has broken. In Him, we find a peace that meets us in every season.





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Have you ever known in your head something to be true, but had a hard time getting your heart to agree? For me, this happens regularly... I know the right thing is to forgive, but I have a hard time softening my heart to actually do it. I know God has a good plan for my life, but my heart often wants step-by-step instructions or a guarantee of a certain outcome. I know my everyday work matters, but my heart longs for assurance that what I do is important, or I'm not wasting my time. Without God and His truth, the human heart is hard, distrusting, rebellious, and anxious. It's our natural, fallen bent away from the Lord, and listening to it alone often leaves us without peace.

The Old Testament prophet, Ezekiel, brings hope to the nation of Israel while in exile, proclaiming that one day God himself will remove their heart of stone and give them a new heart, one of flesh, and a new spirit, one of obedience. At the time, God's people were in a state of rebellion. They had forgotten the Lord and were being punished for their sins. But in the midst of judgement, there was hope on the horizon that God would intervene. It was promised that one day the Lord would help His people be free from their hardheartedness and instead walk in devotion to Him.

Centuries later, shortly before Jesus went to the cross, He told the disciples about the advocate that was coming to help them in his absence, the Holy Spirit. This Spirit would remain with them, teaching them all things and reminding them of what Jesus said and did. Though Jesus' time on earth was coming to an end (for now), His followers would not be left orphans. They would have the Spirit of Truth with them always, guiding and comforting them.

Through the Holy Spirit, God fulfills the promise He gave through Ezekiel. He takes our hard, restless hearts and softens them. He makes them alive and responsive to Him. The peace Jesus offers isn't just a feeling of calm when life is going well; it's the deep assurance that God is with us, working even when we don't see it. This is a peace the world can't give because it doesn't come from circumstances, it comes from the nearness of our God who dwells within us. While the world offers temporary and shallow comfort, Jesus offers deep, lasting, and abundant peace.

When Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid," He's not promising a worry-free life. In fact, the disciples were about to face fear, loss, and persecution like never before. Yet, through the Spirit, they would also experience a new kind of peace, one that the world cannot shake. This peace grows as we yield to the Spirit, when we listen to His voice instead of our anxious thoughts, when we trust His leading instead of wanting control, and when we let His truth remind us of who God is and who we are in Him.

God's peace isn't a quick fix; it's a transforming presence. The Spirit does the work of continually teaching us and softening our hearts to the truth of His word. Where our old hearts were hard, defensive, and skeptical, the Spirit gives us hearts that are teachable, tender, and secure. Peace becomes not just a feeling, but the presence of God Himself living in us.

So when your heart feels unsettled, stubborn, or anxious, remember you don't have to manufacture peace. You have been given peace through the Spirit who lives in you. He is the fulfillment of God's promise, the softener of hard hearts, and the steady reminder that we are never alone.

- Where do you sense your heart growing hard or restless, and how might the Holy Spirit be inviting you to let Him soften it?
- What would it look like for you to experience Jesus' kind of peace, not peace that depends on circumstances but peace that comes from His presence, in your life right now?





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Advent season is upon us, a time of reflection, a time of affirmation of our beliefs in the Son sent to save a broken world. A broken world. That is what we live in. It is everywhere, all around us, in ways that we directly and indirectly experience. In fact, in John 16:33, Jesus assured us that we will all have troubles in this world. The sin of man has caused a never-ending snowball of problems and consequences. I cannot speak for everyone, but in my life, it is quite unsettling to be reminded that each day will have its share of suffering, and each day will be filled with unknowns.

In a modern world, famous for regurgitating partial statements or a world known for out-of-context summarizations, it would be quite agonizing to imagine that the Word of the Lord simply left us to imagine our own destructive ways and the troubles we will face. This week, we are focusing on the Restoring Peace of the Redeemer. How reassuring – there can be peace, but how? We find ourselves in conflict with our neighbors, conflict with parking spot thieves, and disagreements with coworkers or "friends" on social media. Our internal biases create immeasurable problems that spill over into everything and everyone around us. When expecting peace isn't enough, when the mere thought of the absence of conflict or troubles seems too much, we turn to the Word.

Think back to the troubles mentioned in John, finish the quote, get all the context that Jesus intended! We read "But take heart! I have overcome the world". Peace can be had, the Son of the Almighty came to restore balance in the world, to give us hope and a chance for peace beyond all understanding. This doesn't mean that life will be easy, that we will have all the answers to the problems we face – but time and time again, the Lord has provided us with the peace and the understanding of peace that we need.

In Numbers 6:22-27, the Lord spoke to Moses, in the midst of trying times: "The Lord bless you and keep you... the Lord lift up his face to you and give you peace". Scripture is so incredible, in that it never seeks to sugarcoat the trials of life, but in each situation, the Lord offers peace — a path to peace, words of peace, an understanding of the hedge of protection our Lord provides. Will we simply accept the Savior into our lives and the peace He offers through following Him and the life he has laid out before us?

The Prince of Peace brings healing and restoration into our lives, and an immeasurable calm washes over those who believe. This isn't to say that all in life will go perfectly, or that we will be without struggle. Sin grips the world, but the peace of the Lord overcomes all sin. *Jehovah Shalom*, the Lord is Peace, one of the most incredible reminders we have that in the hardest of times, He is with us. He is greater than our struggles and greater than the sin or suffering we find.

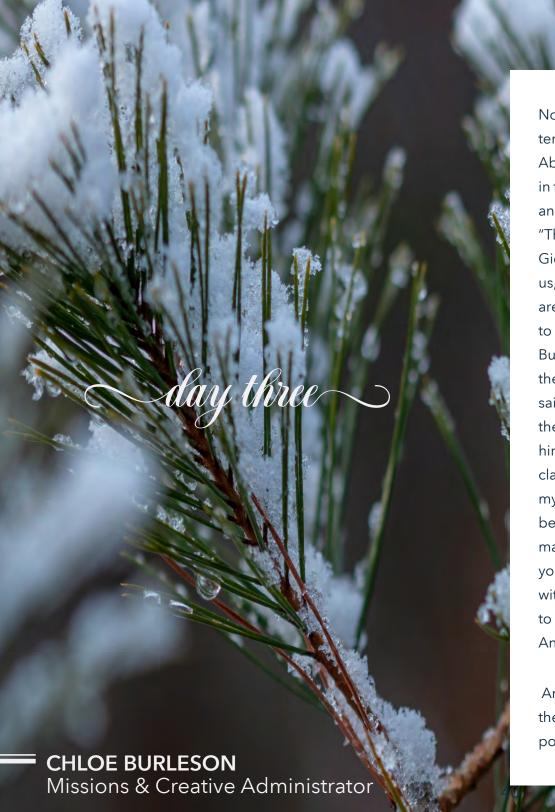
Peace, everlasting peace, awaits those who will follow and believe. Throughout the Old and New Testament, through trials and tribulations, peace helped all who believed to persevere. Abiding in the peace of the Lord goes beyond ourselves. Remember to be that reflection of love and peace into the lives of those around us as well. We are a recipient of the Lord's blessing and an instrument of His, intended to share His love and peace with all we encounter.

- Jehovah Shalom, the Lord is Peace. Am I willing to bring myself to the feet of Jesus, surrendering my trials and tribulations to the Lord and accepting the peace he has offered me here and now, without concern for the fear of the unknown?
- To free yourself of unnecessary turmoil and destruction, who in your life do you need to extend peace and compassion to?



And the Word became flesh and *dwelt among us*





Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, "The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor." And Gideon said to him, "Please, my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian." And the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?" And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." And the Lord said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man." And he said to him, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. Please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you." And he said, "I will stay till you return."

And the angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour the broth over them." And he did so. Then the angel of the Lord reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of the Lord vanished from his sight. Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the Lord. And Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face." But the Lord said to him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die." Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and called it, The Lord Is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.

JUDGES 6:11-24

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-9

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What does it mean for peace to be with you? Is it the absence of suffering, the absence of hardship or oppression? Does it come when we have victory in battle or experience justice?

As we read in Judges 6, the people of Israel were now in their own land after hundreds of years of oppression in Egypt. Yet, because they did what was evil in the sight of God, they were overpowered and abused by the Midianites. Their freedom was short-lived, for they were again oppressed by a power they could not fight.

The people of Israel were looking to be saved when they decided to call out to God. However, God did not swoop in right away and declare war on his people's enemies. No, instead God responded by revealing to them that they had turned their back on Him in disobedience and therefore allowed Israel to be brought very low.

Maybe this feels familiar to you...it does to me. I can see where God has brought me, what He has provided for me. I know that He is my God, and because of this, I shouldn't fear other things, like money or man's approval. Yet, I often have. I have experienced freedom and been empowered to walk in victory, then all of a sudden, my life has turned upside down, or someone has sinned against me. I let fear take over, and I am

filled with anxiety, wondering if I will have enough. Wondering if I am just subject to being trampled on and ruled over by this oppressive thing or that oppressive thing. Will I ever walk secure again? What work do I need to do to protect myself so that I am safe from hardship?

When Gideon received this powerful word from God, we can see that it was the angel of the Lord who appeared, which is often attributed to Jesus himself being the One who came. Gideon was preparing to hide food from the Midianites. I wonder if Gideon, when questioning God's presence in the Israelite's suffering, was so accustomed to operating in fear that he confused the angel of the Lord for an encouraging stranger. I wonder how many times Jesus has revealed himself to me in the middle of my suffering, and I missed it because I was grumbling about my circumstance. Leaving me in a constant cycle of asking questions like Gideon - Doesn't God see me in my suffering? Doesn't God see me in my oppression? Doesn't God witness all that I am facing and all of the work I have to do to protect myself?

In the past year, as my suffering was both a consequence of my disobedience and oppression from the Enemy, I began to realize that peace was not attached to anything but God. Even now, after coming out of back-to-back seasons of defeat, I am seeing more clearly that Jehovah Shalom himself is with me through every valley of darkness I may face.

In this season, may you know that God does see you. He sees your suffering, your oppression, your fears. God responds to you by giving you His peace, and eventually by bringing justice to what was broken, like we see in the following chapters of Judges. Though Gideon questioned where God was, God revealed that Jehovah Shalom was very near and had not changed. In fact, it is we, His people, who separate ourselves from Him and change. We forget that God is continually drawing near and calling us into purposes that are far bigger than we can dream. Because we don't see Him rightly in the middle of our battles, we strive to find comfort and forget obedience. We spend more time hoping that we have enough than trusting that God is more than sufficient in every season.

Wherever you find yourself getting mixed up and forgetting God's character, know that He always has been the Lord is Peace and He always will be. Find refuge in Philippians 4, which encourages us to exchange our anxiety for prayer. It's then that the Peace of God will guard your heart and mind. When you are alone, when you are afraid that your needs will not be met, know that your cries to Him are not in vain.

So the answer then, to the question at the beginning of today's devotional, is found in Judges 6 and Philippians 4. Peace is not the absence of suffering. It is not the absence of hardship or oppression.

It does not come with victory or justice. Peace is God, and when you have Him and place your fear in Him, you will find that Peace is with you, no matter your season, your circumstance, or your mindset.

• What practical steps can you take this week to anchor your heart in God's peace, rather than in control, comfort, or self-protection?

We encourage you to take time to worship God as you consider the peace that is ours because of Jesus.

You can find a Spotify playlist of songs on our website at <u>waysidechapel.org/advent.</u>





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I think of my youth pastor every year at Christmas. One year, he gave us a Christmas Eve assignment that I remember vividly. He told us to find some time on Christmas Eve to go outside, stay there for a minute, and just listen.

He believed that the world slowed down just a little bit on Christmas Eve. The literal and figurative traffic was a little lighter or slower, and calm replaced the busy. He thought we would be able to feel the peace.

Every single year on Christmas Eve, I go outside and hang out for a few minutes by myself. I've probably done it every Christmas since he first told us. The part of me that craves that peace in life wants him to be right, but I've concluded that other than fewer cars on the street nearby, I don't always feel it.

I connect more with Bono who wrote in the U2 song Peace on Earth:

Peace on Earth
Hear it every Christmas time
But hope and history won't rhyme
So what's it worth?

The fact that there is no peace is not a surprise to any of us who are paying attention at all. This world is broken, we are broken, and that brokenness is evident in separation. Separation means no peace.

The people of the Old Testament knew this separation and this lack of peace very well. They needed salvation from God. They needed peace in their land. God promised both.

God promises His people that a King is coming. That King is just, will bring salvation, be humble, and He will do what a king did when there was peace: ride on a donkey or a colt. As you probably already know, that's exactly what Jesus did on Palm Sunday when He rode into Jerusalem.

Jesus brought reconciliation. Our sin separated us from God, but Jesus' death reconciled us to God. He made peace when there was no peace. If you have faith in Jesus, His death and resurrection, you understand that you are reconciled to God. That's the promised salvation. The humble King brought peace between God and man. We have that now. But what about peace on earth?

That takes us back to verse 10 in Zechariah 9. There's a lot crammed into the space between verses 9 and 10.

Yes, Jesus reconciled God and humanity in His death. Those that Zechariah prophesied to were awaiting the peace we now know in Jesus. They were awaiting the advent, or arrival, of the Messiah. There's more though. There's a promise of peace on earth. He's just going to

speak it. He's going to speak it to all the nations. His Kingdom will be the entire earth. He will reign.

Jesus is returning. He will cut off chariots and bows. He will speak peace and reign over all the earth. That peace is what we await at Advent – the arrival of true, lasting, and final peace through Jesus.

We have a picture of the promised peace in right relationship with God through Jesus. He's not done with reconciliation. We await His second advent when He returns to reign. Then we will know His peace fully.

- Where in your life do you most feel the tension between the peace Christ has already given you and the brokenness that still surrounds you?
- In what relationships or circumstances do you long to see Christ's restoring peace take root? How might God be inviting you to embody His peace through forgiveness, reconciliation, patience, or prayer, as you wait for the fullness of His Kingdom to come?





And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,

for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us

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

LUKE 1:67-79

to guide our feet into the way of peace."

of death,



But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

EPHESIANS 2:13-18

One of my favorite Christmas carols is Silent Night. I have wonderful memories of gatherings where different friends and family members would sing this song in their native language – Greek, German, Spanish, and English. I loved to hear the many different voices harmonizing to announce the Good News of our Savior's birth. Envision with me the scene about 2,000 years ago, a dark sky filled with stars. One enormous star points out the miraculous event. A young girl and her husband stand mesmerized by the newborn just delivered into their hands in a humble stable. Animals are quietly attentive. Visitors come by to share in the Holy moment. God had chosen this night to give us His Son, the Prince of Peace, to restore our peace.

In our passage for today, we read about one of the final prophecies of the coming Redeemer that happened mere months before Jesus' birth. These were some of the first words Zechariah had spoken in about 9 months. He had been mute because of his disbelief that God was going to bless him and his wife, Elizabeth, with a baby in their advanced age. When the baby was finally born, he named the child John, as he was told to do by the angel Gabriel. Immediately, Zechariah's "mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God." (Luke 1:64) He gave the prophecy in Luke 1:67-79 that God was sending the Israelites redemptive peace through our Prince of Peace.



They would now and forever be delivered from the hand of their enemies! This had been a long time coming. Zechariah went on to say that his own son, John, would be called "the prophet of the Most High" who would go before the Lord to prepare the way for Jesus. Throughout the Old Testament, there were many prophecies pointing to the birth of Jesus, and these final ones were hundreds of years after God had spoken through Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, and others. Zechariah and his son, John the Baptist, were the final prophets of the Old Covenant as they shared the prophecies of our Prince of Peace.

But why do we need a Prince of Peace? As humans, I think we all crave peace. Most people do not want to live in conflict, but the world we live in is not a peaceful place. A long time ago, in the Garden of Eden, true Peace existed. Unfortunately, that did not last long. Sin entered into the world, and conflict was born. Man would now have to live in a world filled with sorrow, grief, and discord. Since God is absolutely holy and just, this caused a vast separation in our relationship with Him. God was greatly grieved by this, but all along, He had a plan to restore that relationship. God's only Son, Jesus, came to bring restorative peace, which goes way beyond an absence of conflict. Restorative peace is a state of wholeness, right relationships, and constantly draws us closer to our Creator. It heals wounded hearts, which is the only way to truly mend relationships.

In Ephesians 2:13-18, Paul reminds us that restorative peace breaks down the barriers between people and God, as well as between fellow man. Through faith in Christ, all believers, regardless of their background, are reconciled to our Creator. The gift of Jesus comes with no strings attached – it is free for all who believe. We could take this gift and keep it to ourselves. But as we mature in our faith, we have a responsibility to grow more Christ-like. In Matthew 5:9, Jesus calls us to be peacemakers and to love our enemies. As believers, we should be doing whatever we can to avoid strife and hostility by instead sharing the good news with those whom God puts in our lives. Every day, we are presented with opportunities to either build barriers or form bonds. Responding to differing opinions in anger or frustration only increases those barriers, causing further separation. But when we approach a conflict in love, with open eyes and listening ears, we can build a bond that will allow us to share the restoring peace that God willingly sent to us in the form of His precious Son. As followers of Jesus, we should always choose to respond in love to all.

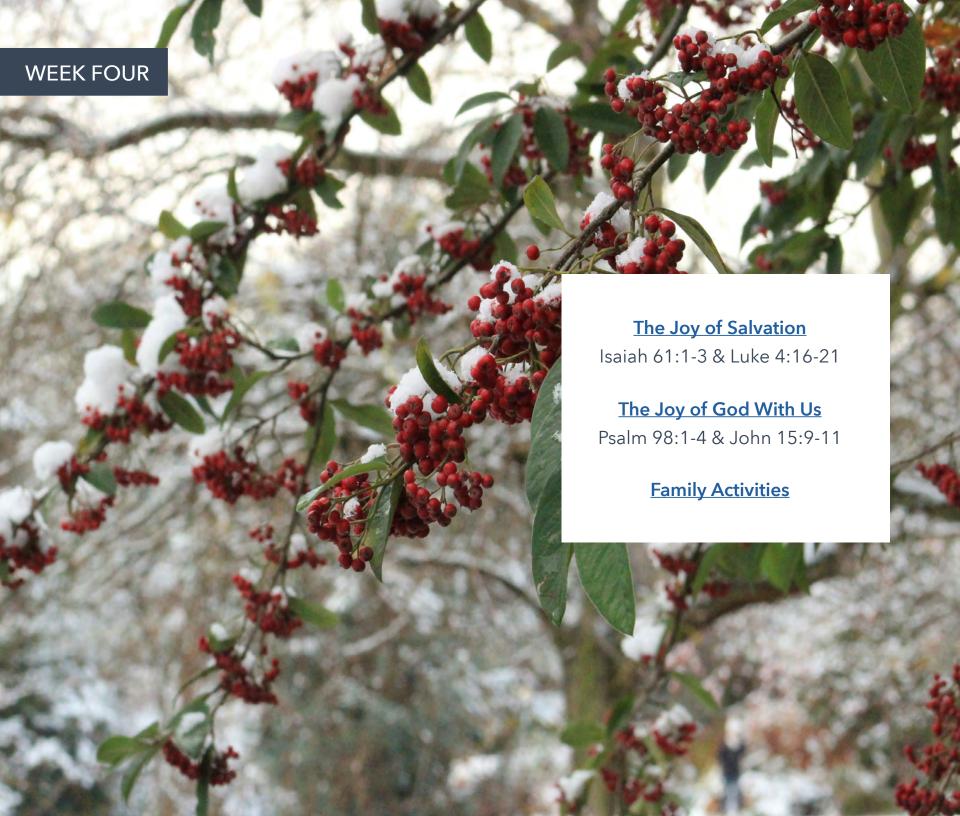
- What are some barriers that divide people in our communities? What can you do to actively break down barriers?
- Christ's sacrifice has allowed us to be fully reconciled to God. Who are some people in your life that you could share redemptive peace with this Advent season and all year long?

Jamily activities

As we continue celebrating Advent, use these activities to have conversations with your kids about true peace that comes from the One who IS peace...Jesus, our Prince of Peace.

- Turn on Christmas carols and have your kids get their wiggles out and dance to the music. After a while, stop the music and say, "Peace be still". Everyone needs to freeze in place until the music starts again.
- Eat dinner by candlelight and soft music. Talk about things that are "peaceful"
- Spend time as a family talking about things that are bothering you right now. Write them down on sheets of paper. Then spend time praying together -- praise God for who He is and tell Him about your troubles. When you are finished, crumple up your "troubles" and throw them in the trash (or in the fire if you have a fireplace and it is cold enough to have a fire).

- Draw "storm clouds" and write different life storms on them. Then, add a sun to the paper and write "Jesus gives peace in the middle of a storm" in the center.
- Play a game where kids say "stress, stress, stress" as they run and flail their arms. The person who is "it", tags people and makes them safe by saying, "Here is God's peace". Follow the game with a discussion about not worrying but instead asking Jesus for peace.
- Trace and cut out a hand, fold the finger inward to create the peace sign. Glue the hand onto another paper. Write or attach a verse like John 14:27 to the craft to serve as a reminder of peace.

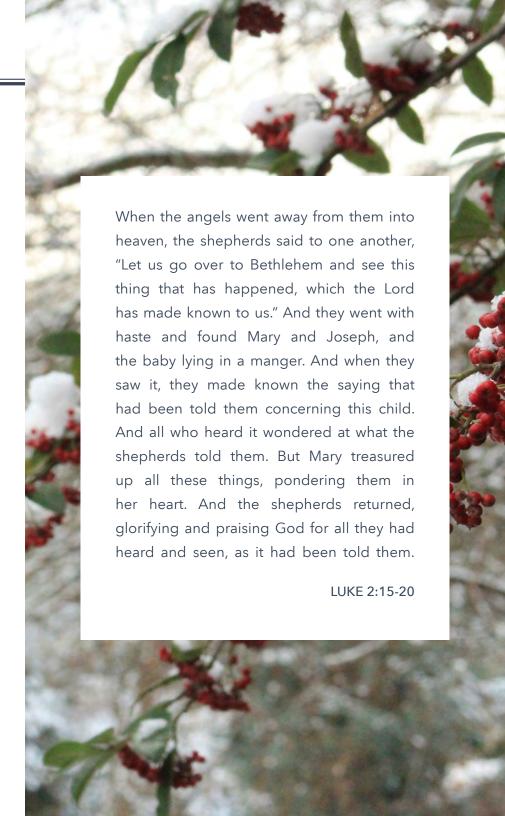


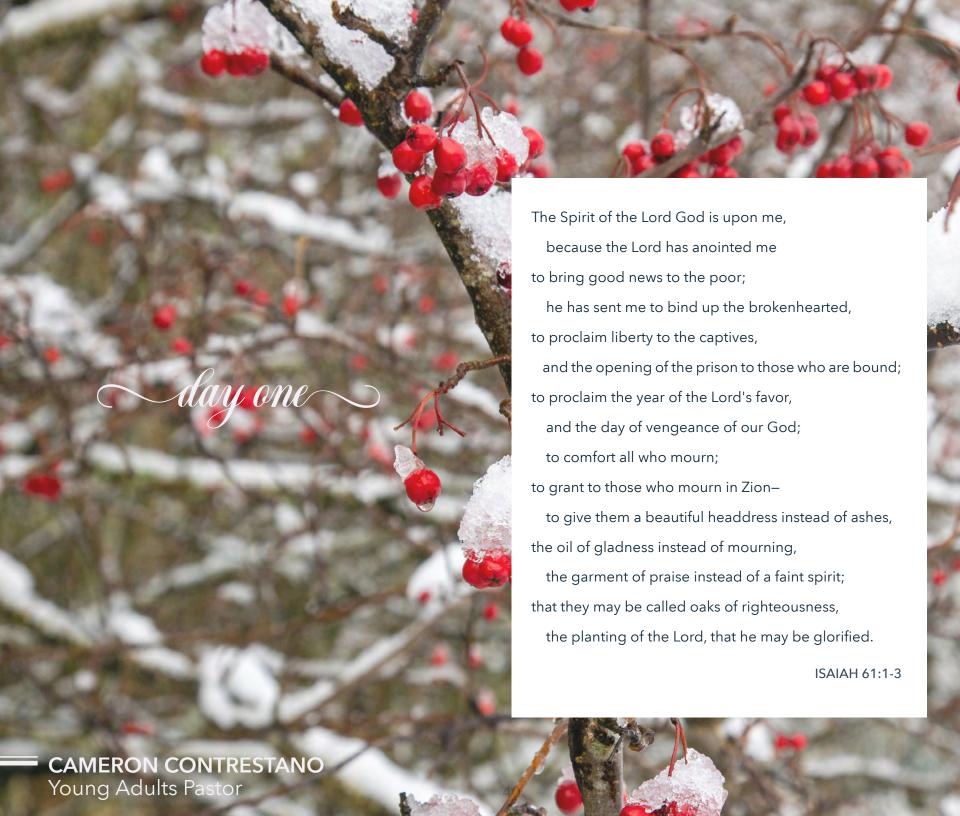
week four

The fourth week of Advent celebrates the everlasting joy that flows from redemption. In scripture, joy is the natural response when God fulfills His promises and restores what was lost. The prophets spoke of this joy long before Christ's birth. Isaiah declared that the Spirit of the Lord would bring good news to the poor and bind up the brokenhearted, and that promise burst into song on a hillside outside Bethlehem as shepherds heard the angels proclaim "good news of great joy."

As we step into Ruth's story, we watch joy slowly rise out of circumstances that once felt hopeless. What began with loss and uncertainty ends with a renewed future and a family restored. God brings stability back into Naomi's life and gives Ruth a place to belong. Their joy isn't a surface-level celebration, it's the deep relief and gladness that come when God steps into real, broken situations and brings something good out of them.

This is the joy that came near at Christmas – the kind of joy that steadies our hearts, fills what feels empty, and reminds us that God hasn't stopped working in the places we need Him most. Even when life feels heavy or uncertain, lasting joy is still possible because Jesus has come. The Redeemer born in Bethlehem is the One who meets us in our stories and brings light into the places we thought were beyond repair. In Him, our joy has a foundation that doesn't shift with circumstances.







And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives

and recovering of sight to the blind,

to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

LUKE 4:16-21

The prophet Isaiah lived through some of the darkest days of God's people – days when they were divided, harassed, and lost. During his life, the Northern Kingdom of Israel fell, and the seeds that would one day destroy the Southern Kingdom of Judah were already taking root. Isaiah could see the storm gathering on the horizon – judgement, exile, heartbreak. He worried and wept and warned the people about what would surely happen if they didn't repent, but he couldn't hold back the flood of destruction. It wasn't enough to see and sound the alarm. Isaiah was powerless to fix it.

I resonate with Isaiah, and maybe you do too. I see the destruction in my own life – poor decisions, difficult relationships, words and actions that can't be taken back. Whether by my own doing or the choices of others, I feel the weight of sin's shackles. I look at the world around me and feel helpless to stop it all from unraveling. I see pain, injustice, division, and I ache because I can't set it right...not for myself, not for my family, or for anyone else.

But, for all the weeping and words of warning, Isaiah also spoke words of hope to the helpless heart. The Spirit of God filled his imagination with a vision for the solution to it all. Isaiah saw a Redeemer, a champion, one who would step into our devastation and do for us what we could never do for ourselves. Of all the



beautiful, meaningful words in Scripture, "redeemed" is precious to me. It means "to buy back," "to recover what was lost," "to free by paying the price."

Isaiah predicted the Redeemer's own self-disclosure. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," he says, "because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners."

Centuries later, in a small synagogue in Nazareth, a humble craftsman named Jesus stood up, read those very words, and claimed to be their fulfillment — a brash and blasphemous claim. And yet, Jesus didn't just speak about God's redemption. He embodied it. He touched the untouchable, healed the sick, set free the oppressed, He even raised the dead. Everywhere He went, He reversed the curse. Each act of mercy and each word of truth was the world slowly but surely being made right again. And through His death, Jesus paid the ransom we owed but could never pay. And through His resurrection, He proved that he was indeed the promised redeemer with power over death itself declaring, the freedom of every captive heart.

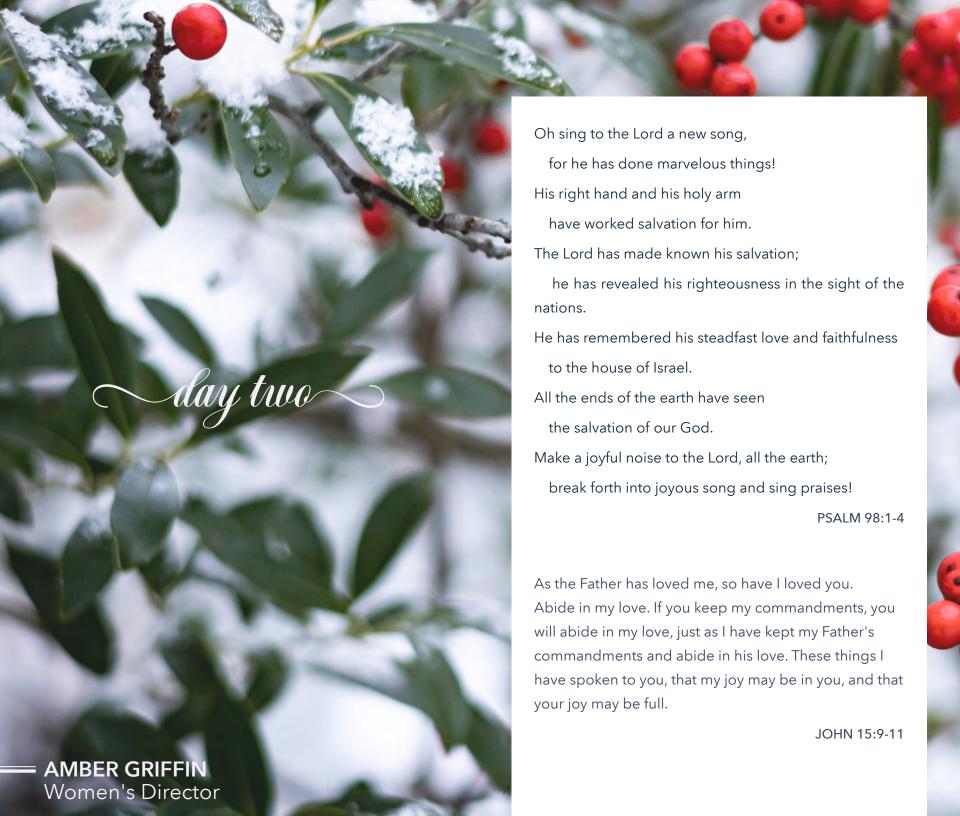
That's the joy we celebrate at Christmas – the joy of knowing that the Redeemer has come, not as a distant rescuer but as one of us. He entered into our story, felt our pain, carried our guilt, and bought us back with His own precious life. The baby who reached for His mother in the manger spread His arms reaching for the whole world on the cross.

Today, I'm learning to see His redeeming work around me. In small but unmistakable ways, He's pushing back the darkness...in reconciled relationships, in hearts once hard now softened by grace, in moments of courage and beauty that defy despair. These glimpses are signs of an even greater redemption to come.

Because the story isn't finished. You and I live in the inbetween, the tension between "now" and "not yet." We believe that one day, the Redeemer will make all things new – every tear wiped away, every injustice undone, every broken heart healed. Until then, we wait...not in dread or fear, but in joy. Because Jesus lives. His Spirit is upon us. And He's continuing His perfecting work through us. Now, every act of mercy, every word of forgiveness, every flicker of hope is evidence that He's near.

As we draw closer to Christmas, may we experience the joy of knowing the One who has, who is, and who will one day make right everything that's wrong. May we enjoy the joy of the redeemed – those who live in freedom because of the Redeemer.

- Where in your life do you most need to experience the Redeemer's restoring work right now (something only Jesus can heal or make right)?
- How might you join in His redeeming work this Advent season-bringing light, forgiveness, or hope into a dark or broken place around you?



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I recently had a thought-provoking dream that has left me pondering about joy, and more specifically, the joy we receive because God dwells with us. In the dream, I was discussing some hardships I was experiencing with a dear friend of mine. She basically said that the 'secret ingredient' to these hardships is joy. She then (still in the dream) proceeded to point me towards a Bible on her lap to continue to encourage me. The scripture was faint in the dream, but when I woke up, all I had on my mind was Psalm 48:2.

Joy is often defined as a deep contentment and happiness regardless of circumstances. The reason circumstances of our lives do not factor into possessing or experiencing joy is because true joy comes from God dwelling within us. As believers, 'God with us' is eternal and not based on what is happening around us because what is happening around us cannot shake or remove God dwelling within us. We are secure, we are cared for, we are unbelievably loved...eternally.

Psalm 48 is a psalm about "Zion, the City of our God." Verse 2 describes Zion as "beautiful in elevation, the joy of all the earth ... the city of the great King." Zion is called the joy of "all the earth" because of who dwells there. And because of that, the earth can feel joy. The magnitude of Zion is not the city itself, but the One dwelling there that makes the city beautiful.

Psalm 98:4 instructs "all the earth" to make a joyful noise to the Lord. Essentially, the joy that goes out into the world because of the great King is then given back to Him in joyful noise and praise.

Psalm 48:2 has made me ponder about the awe and wonder of what it deeply means that God is with us and the implications personally and for all the earth. We have a yearly reminder of what God the Father did for the world during the Christmas season, but I wonder how often we think deeply on this overwhelming truth. God the Father sent His perfect Son, incarnate, to redeem the world. When we surrender to the Son's lordship, His Spirit indwells within us ... we are with Him and He is with us forever. We are then agents for joy to go out into the world and to give that joy back to the King in joyful praise.

In John 15:9-11, Jesus ties the completion of our joy to obedience to His commandments as we abide in Him and He abides in us. These verses come from a passage where Jesus teaches the importance of abiding in Him, and those who abide in Him will be pruned to bear much fruit. This pruning is the hardship we experience. In the abiding, in the pruning, we are called to keep His commandments. These commandments are not circumstantial based on our situation, emotions, or desires. Yet, even in the hard, that close obedient relationship with the great King completes our joy.

It is often taught that joy comes from what we can control and chasing after our desires. But true joy comes from God with us and out of that deep loving relationship. Take a few minutes to ponder on what it means that God is with you and how that produces joy in your own life.

- The joy of the Lord is with us always, but there are aspects of life that try to quench or cover it, where we can feel joyless. Is there anything in your life that wants to compete with the joy that God has given you?
- Is there an area of your life where you may not be obedient to Christ's commandments? How may it be affecting the joy we receive in Him?



Jamily activities

As we continue celebrating Advent, use these activities to have conversations with your kids about joy as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, who is the author of joy and gives us access to true joy.

- Make and decorate a birthday cake for Jesus and eat it on Christmas Day as we celebrate the joy of His birth: https://littleshootsdeeproots.com/kids-ideas-blog/creating-advent-birthday-party-jesus/
- Go caroling in your neighborhood. Knock on doors and when someone answers, sing songs that share the joy of Jesus' birth.
- Create a "redemption" timeline: As a family, create a visual timeline of your life, marking moments when you felt God's redeeming power.
- Use an old, plain, or broken item to create a new, vibrant, "restored" instrument or decoration. Talk about how God can take something old or damaged and make it new and joyful.

Tag us on our social channels @waysidechapelsa and use #waysideadvent



Wednesday, December 24 | 3:30 & 5:30 pm

Join us for our Christmas Eve services as we celebrate the beautiful gift of Immanuel, our Redeemer. Each service will last an hour and families are invited to attend either service together. The first service will include our Kids Program and the second service will be led by our worship team. We can't wait to celebrate with you!

