



# Advent Guide

**2022**

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH LUFKIN





# Advent Guide

## 2022

The most glorious season of Advent is upon us once again. Oh, how I love this special time and season of the church year. By late Summer or early Fall, I find myself anxiously awaiting this time of renewal and reflection. I personally need and long for the inspired words of scripture to point me toward the hope, peace, joy, and love of Advent. The rich and diverse devotional thoughts written by my beloved church family always intrigue, enlighten, and make me so proud to be a part of this incredible church family.

Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning “coming or arriving.” Advent not only focuses on Jesus birth – his first coming- but also on his second coming, which is yet to happen. Advent is a season of waiting, anticipating, expectation, and longing for Christ’s return.

Christians have celebrated the various traditions of Advent since the 6th century. Advent is a four-week celebration beginning on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and continuing until Christmas Day. This year Christmas Day will be on Sunday which makes the season even more special. In worship we will light Advent Candles, with a new candle being lit each week in anticipation of lighting the Christ Candle on Christmas Eve. Advent is filled with symbolic colors and themes all which aid in worship and add a special significance to this season.

We are thrilled to publish this 2022 FBC-Lufkin Daily Advent Guide. During Advent 2017 we began this new First Baptist tradition which now has become a highly anticipated and significant part of the Advent season. This guide is written by our own First Baptist members and illustrated by our children. The guide contains 29 short devotional thoughts and a scripture passage for each day. The four traditional themes of Advent will take you on a journey toward Christmas day.

It is my prayer that Advent 2022 will be a most holy and worshipful time for you and your family. Do not rush through the Advent season and miss out on the beauty and glory of these days. We wait. We hope. We worship. As you read and reflect on the devotionals prepared, may you be brought into the very presence of Jesus our Savior.

A special word of thanks and appreciation to those who provided these sincere and heartfelt devotions as well as the children who illustrated the Advent themes so beautifully.

- Pastor Mark

# Hope

WEEK 1

**Jesus** - the Light of the World!



*Charlie Henderson, 6 years old*

Psalm 71:5-6 (NIV)

*For you have been my hope,  
Sovereign Lord, my confidence  
since my youth. From birth I  
have relied on you; you brought me  
forth from my mother's  
womb. I will ever praise you.*

*Hope*

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27

Hope can mean a lot of different things to a lot of different people. To me, hope is the reason to get out of bed in the morning, continue with my day in the face of adversity, and fall asleep at night full of the next day's dreams. Throughout scripture we are told to have hope in the future and the world we are molding through Christ, but this hope can feel like an impossible task. How can we build a better world when darkness swallows us and hate feels all consuming?

In Psalm 71, we hear an elder pleading for God to help in a time of great need. They are yearning for God's refuge from the wickedness of the world, and I'm sure we can all empathize with this feeling. But, the good news is that God has a hand in their life, my life, and all our lives. We should find hope in that fact. The author of this Psalm knows they are not singing into an echo chamber because beginning with their first breath and for every moment after, God has been present and listening.

The idea of finding hope through life experiences made me want to reflect on my own life and consider the tangible places I find hope through God. Immediately, my mind goes to my children. One is working on carbon capture technologies to curb the effects of climate change and the other is in the aerospace industry working to protect this planet and discover the next. Looking back on the 57 years of my life, I am so thankful for God's presence in every moment that has culminated in their lives. If God could do all that through my life, I have so much hope for our future.

With that, I challenge you to look back on your life and reflect on a tangible place you've found hope even in the midst of hardship. Whether it is a rainbow or a relationship, God has given us a reason to hope.

-David Todd

*Drs. David and Terri Todd continue to impact our community with their medical knowledge and commitment to health and wellness. They are proud parents of their young adult daughters, Jessica and Allison. David is a great Bible teacher who fills in for various Bible study classes.*

# Hope

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 28

The passage for this devotion is 1 Peter 3:15. Paraphrased in my own words this verse reads:

Keep the Lord at the center of your heart and mind, remembering that He is our standard of holiness. When others see that you are different, let it be because of your hope, and be prepared to give them an answer as to why you have it. When you give your answer be respectful and gentle with your words.

In this passage the Lord commands us to put Christ at the center of our hearts and minds. This leads to the question: Are we doing this, and if not, how do we do it? To me the answer is to spend time with Him. I've heard it quoted: "To be little with God is to be little for God." Spending time with Christ involves reading His word, prayer, scripture memory, and meditation on scripture passages. These practices place Christ at the forefront of our attention.

The next part of this scripture mentions being recognized as being "different." So, what is the difference? Is it our community involvement? Good deeds? Generosity? Church attendance? All of these are good things, but it's evident from this passage that the reason we as believers are different is our HOPE.

What is hope, and what does it mean to be different because of hope? In the passages before and after this verse, Peter speaks about suffering. Our behavior during suffering will be different from our peers because "after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." (1 Peter 5:10) As believers we have hope as we suffer and do life because God has made us a promise of restoration. Yes, we will suffer, but ultimately, we have hope because of our promise of salvation.

So, has anyone asked you why you are different? Has anyone recognized that you have a hope out of proportion with your peers? If so, be able to answer them truthfully and gently. If no one is asking you, invest time and energy in the spiritual disciplines that put Him at the center of our hearts and minds. He is the reason for our hope.

-Laura Buckner

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

*But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*

*Laura's connection to FBC is too long to write about, but it includes many generations: grandparents on both sides of her family as deacons, teachers, pianists, and even former pastor and grandfather, Charles McIlveene. Laura and Kolby are both young professionals in the medical community.*

Hebrews 11:1 (NASB)

*Now faith is the certainty  
of things hoped for,  
a proof of things not seen.*

*Hope*

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29

What is faith? It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we HOPE for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead.

Oh, how I love a good story...a book, a movie, a song, or a face-to-face retelling! So because of this, each year at Christmas time, I would read (secretly skipping over a couple of words) one of my all-time favorite stories to my fourth graders, *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* by Barbara Robinson. It is the story of a family of children called the Herdmans, and according to the narrator of the book, they were the "worst kids in the history of the world." The Herdmans ended up as the main characters in the local church Christmas pageant, and what a pageant it was. These children had never heard the Christmas story and played the parts the way that came naturally to them. But Imogene, the main character, was not satisfied with the version of the story told in the Bible. She wanted details, all the details.

As I get older, I feel a lot like Imogene. I'm just not satisfied with the way the stories are told in the bible. I want details, all the details, every little behind the scenes miracle that took place. As Pastor Mark said in his sermon a few weeks ago, "the Bible gives us the bare bones of a story," leaving us with many questions. But why...? But how...? But if...?

So, what are we left with? HOPE, we're left with HOPE that someday we will get all the details. Won't that be glorious? To sit at the feet of Jesus like Mary did and get all our questions answered. Every detail, of every story in the Bible and in our own life story, explained by the One who orchestrated it all. Even though I can't see it up ahead, I know it's coming. I know it's going to happen. I have a confident assurance about it in my heart. I have been given HOPE.

—Darlene Allen

*Darlene is a retired, rehired, retired, and once more rehired teacher in Lufkin ISD and St. Cyprian's schools. Darlene and David are proud parents and grandparents and Darlene sings in the choir week by week.*

# Hope

WEDNESDAY, November 30

This scripture touches me deeply, but it may seem counter-intuitive at first glance. How can suffering produce hope!? I'll share my experience with suffering and the hope that sprang forth. While I was raised with a solid foundation in the Catholic church I slowly allowed "life" to come between myself and God. Over the course of several years I lost touch with my spirituality. Eventually this led me down a path of bitterness and resentment fueled by ever increasing alcohol consumption.

In Alcoholics Anonymous we have a saying that it can be very difficult to want to become sober until you've hit what we refer to as "rock bottom." Rock bottom is not pleasant. It is the epitome of suffering; where a person has lost, or almost lost, everything in life they once held dear. It is quite literally a feeling of hopelessness. However, this suffering and hopelessness leads to a jumping off point because once you've hit rock bottom you become willing to do anything to persevere through the suffering.

When we go through times of great suffering, we can sulk in sorrow and pity, or we can ask what we can learn from this experience. We can persevere. If we persevere through this suffering, our character builds. Shortly after I hit rock bottom, I had a life-altering experience while attending Celebrate Recovery, a faith-based recovery program. During the program we sang a song aloud, "Lay It All Down." As we sang the words aloud, I started to feel something build inside me I had never felt. I can hear the words now, "Lay it all down at the feet of Jesus!" This suffering, this worry, this grief, this pain...I finally realized I didn't have to carry it alone! From that moment I started down a new path. A new character as the scripture says. It was at that moment I truly felt I wasn't alone in my suffering, and Jesus was there for me to help carry the weight. I was filled with hope for the future.

Jesus did not make us to suffer alone, he is there with us through our suffering to help us carry the burden so we can persevere, build our character, and share our strength and hope! If our hearts are open to Jesus there is no limit to the challenges we can face with Him at our side!

-Victor Laporte

Romans 5:3-5 (NIV)

*Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

*Victor is a Brookshire pharmacist who drives to Livingston daily. Victor and Brittany are active in the Young Adult Bible Study class and proud parents of Adelynn, Logan, and Ava.*



Hebrews 10:22-23 (NIV)

*Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.*

*Hope*

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1

The Advent season is arguably when people have their strongest feelings of hope. There are so many opportunities to engage in the holiday, that you cannot help but feel that hopefulness this time of year. What if that feeling transcended beyond the holidays and you felt that feeling throughout the year? What do you feel would be

different about you or your community?

Hebrews 10:23 reminds us that our faith must be “without wavering.” As I reflected on this I thought about my professional work, my faith, and a major similarity between the two. As a therapist, I seldom see how my work impacts others. Often, clients will only come for a session or two, to get them through a major life event. Even with recurring clients, I am not able to see them actually apply our work in therapy into their daily lives. I have to have faith that our time together impacted them positively in some way.

This is so similar to the practice of our faith as Christians. There is rarely (if ever) any worldly award or recognition for practicing what we are taught by God. We simply have hope that God is working through us. We have hope that our work benefits others. We have hope that we will one day be reunited with God in Heaven. Just as God’s people hoped that Jesus’ birth was the salvation they had prayed for. Of course this is not without difficulty. There are events in our lives that will sow doubt in our minds, and cause your hope to dwindle. This is when it becomes most important to hold on to that “unwavering” faith.

I pray that you have hope and that your spiritual work aligns with God’s plan not only during Advent, but also throughout your life.

-Matt Craven

*Matt and Blaire are new members of FBC. They are parents to 3-year-old Margaret. Matt works at the Family Crisis Center of East Texas and runs/jogs many miles every day.*

# Hope

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2

How many ways do we use the word HOPE? How many ways do we think about HOPE?

As a child during the Christmas season, we hoped for Santa to bring us all the things on our list. We hoped that Christmas break would last forever.

As a teen, we hoped to get the vehicle we really wanted when we turned sixteen. We hoped we got accepted to the college we really wanted to attend when we graduated.

As an adult our hope tends to take on a different meaning. We hope for health and happiness. We hope for a safe world to live in. We hope for a job that is fulfilling and meaningful.

As a parent, our hope is that we raise our children to grow up to be good citizens for the community. We hope to lead by example.

None of these hopes are a sure thing. The one HOPE that is for certain was born on Christmas Day. Psalm 31:24: Be strong and let your heart take courage, All you who wait for the Lord.

Hope in the Lord. Sounds simple doesn't it. However, our world tends to challenge our courage. The trials and tribulations of our daily lives test our strength. But wait, there is hope. Hope that the Lord will conquer all. The meaning of the Advent season is stated in the Psalm. Spiritual hope that all believers who wait for the Lord will experience salvation. Stay centered in the meaning. Trust in the Lord. Hope for the day the Lord will return.

The Moss family wishes you and yours a very Merry Christmas. Our hope is strong and courageous because we are waiting for the Lord.

-Chris Moss

Psalm 31:24 (NASB)

*Be strong and let your  
heart take courage,  
All you who wait for the Lord.*

*Chris: Financial planner. Husband to Tracy. Dad to Sloan and Dean. Son to Sheila. Occasionally follows the Aggies. Chris recently finished a term on Trustees and Finance committee.*

Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT)

*"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."*

Hope

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3

This verse tells us that God knows what is happening in our lives because he crafted this plan specifically for us. It informs us that within his plan for us, he makes a promise of Hope. God does not promise that our lives will be easy or that he will immediately rescue us from any hardships or suffering, but he

continues to remind us of this hope. It took lots of prayer and acceptance for me to realize that God's hope might be seen through me as part of his plan.

Maybe his plan all along was to use me to give hope to other people. As I have learned to accept that, I feel that I have started to live my life the way that Christ has intended for me to do so, by sharing the hope. In this verse the Jews had been exiled to Babylon for 70 years, told to build lives and families, and not give up until the Lord came to take them home again. They endured great suffering, but they had hope. We too should have hope. We have been put on this earth temporarily, and we too will endure suffering while here, until God comes to take us home. We must not give up. We must trust that this is all part of God's plan. We have been given the promise of hope!

When I first read this verse, I continued to get hung up on the "plan" part; My plan verses God's plan. I have always been a planner, so when my life started to turn out differently than I had originally planned, I had to remind myself that my life was already thoroughly planned out by God. What a beautiful thought. My internalized "plan" didn't matter. No matter how hard I tried or how discouraged I got when different aspects of my life didn't go as planned, I had to remember that there is a reason for everything, even if I didn't understand it. God's plan is bigger than just me.

-Linda Stafford

*Linda and husband Todd have been glowing for almost a year since the birth of their first grandchild Harrison. Linda is an inspiration to all as she presses on each day with love, grace, and determination.*

# Peace

WEEK 2



PEACE

Analeigh Watkins, 9 years old

Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV)

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Peace

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4

As someone who grew up in the Piney Woods of East Texas, my most wonderful and peaceful memories are from the banks of the nearby muddy Neches River. Nothing could surpass the peace I felt except during the holiday season when the aroma of my grandmothers cooking filled the house. I knew it would soon be time

to sit down with all the family and enjoy a perfect meal made with love, celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ.

Of course I would be surrounded by all the family members only seen once a year. My cheek pinching Aunt Linda was definitely one to remember. And then there was Aunt Wanda who felt it her duty to bring some type of disabled dog all the way from Houston just for everyone to enjoy. There were several Uncles and numerous cousins and at least one or two tag along acquaintances brought so they would not have to be alone during this wonderful celebration. Isn't that what Jesus would do?

Soon there would be 20 or 30 people swapping stories, comparing ailments and of course sharing an occasional bit of gossip. The roar of talk and laughter would be deafening. I could no longer smell the aroma of a 20lb. turkey cooking in a pan of sage-laden dressing or hear Grandmaw say "Baby come taste this and tell me what you think".

Where did the peace go? It was still there. It had just changed from what I was accustomed to, trickling water and rustling leaves, to the sound of fellowship. Peace is not always the same for each person. It is beauty is in the eye of the beholder. As a parent and grandparent, my heart is filled with joy when I see my loved one's fellowship. I can only imagine how much more peace, love and joy Jesus finds when he sees his loved ones in fellowship celebrating his birth.

-Reece Grayson

*Reece is faithful to so many areas of ministry at FBC. He sings in the choir, almost perfect attendance in Bible Study, loves missions and went to the valley for the house build as well as to Spain. Reece has been a faithful participant of FBC for several years.*

# Peace

MONDAY, DECEMBER 5

In May of this year my mother suffered a stroke and passed away. It was all so very unexpected and so fast! Believe me when I say "peace" is not a word that comes to mind when thinking of those 10 days. We were having to deal with so much and make decisions that we were not prepared to make! My heart was in such turmoil. But, one morning a trusted friend and medical professional came in to talk with Momma. I listened as he openly, honestly, and calmly talked with her about what she could expect for the future. In that moment, I could breathe again. I felt at peace about what was to come. His words didn't change the decisions, but I was no longer afraid of what those decisions would bring!

I believe that is an exact depiction of the peace we have (or can have) as Christians and believers in Christ. Even though there is chaos and turmoil all around, if we listen to the Savior's calm voice - through scripture, through prayer, even through the voice of a friend - we will experience peace. It doesn't make the turmoil go away. It changes the way we perceive and react to it. Isaiah 26:3 reminds us, "You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you."

During this season of joy and stress and beauty and chaos, trust in the Lord to provide your perfect peace. He's got your back! He will never leave you to struggle alone.

-Leslie Ashby

*Leslie has ALWAYS been a part of FBC. Leslie's dad was Glenden Sanders, a former beloved Minister of Music at FBC. All of Leslie and Wayne's children are musical (so is Leslie) and son Tate is our church organist.*

Romans 12:17-18 (NLT)

*Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.*

Colossians 3:15 (NLT)

*And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.*

Peace

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6

We live in a world of chaos. We crave to have peace. Peace according to the world, is the absence of conflict. Jesus told his disciples that "in this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33). However, Jesus follows this statement by telling them to "...take heart! I have overcome the world!" He told them this "...so that in me you may find peace." The Apostle Paul writes that "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) God's peace stems from a relationship with Jesus Christ and exists in the midst of conflict and hardship. In Colossians 3:15, Paul tells us that, as members of the body of Christ, we are called to "...let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts."

-Kelsey Gonzales

*Kelsey teaches school in Huntington, but these days her joy and special glow is all about baby, Preston. JW and Kelsey are so very active in all areas of ministry at FBC. This first Christmas with Preston will be very special.*

# Peace

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7

WOW! This was my reaction to finding out that I had been asked to write on these particular verses from Isaiah. Immediately, I recognized this Scripture reference. Maybe this was from singing selections from Handel's Messiah at Christmastime through the years.

G. Campbell Morgan, in his "An Exposition of the Whole Bible," says that Isaiah 9:1-7 "is one of the greatest Messianic passages in the Old Testament." Isaiah foretold the coming of Christ as Messiah or Deliverer. Well, the Prince of Peace is our focus or emphasis during this week of Advent.

There is a footnote in my Scofield Reference Bible(KJV) beside Isaiah 9:6 saying Christ's First Advent and another footnote beside Isaiah 9:7 saying Christ's Second Advent. Jesus Christ is called the Prince of Peace at his First Advent when he was born in Bethlehem of Judea. And Christ will be known as the Prince of Peace at the time that he returns from heaven in his Second Advent.

The Prince of Peace came into this world as a baby. Then Isaiah 9:7 says "of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end." The Prince of Peace will be with us forever. "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this." Think that this means that we can be confident in the Prince of Peace enduring forever.

During this Advent season as Christians or followers of Christ we should embrace the Prince of Peace. Amidst all of the Christmas hubbub, let us take time to remember that our Savior Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace. May we all know and draw close to our Prince of Peace during this Christmas season.

In John 14:27, Jesus says "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." May the peace of Christ be present with us all during this blessed season of Advent. Merry Christmas!

-Ina James Thames

Isaiah 9:6-7 (KJV)

*For unto us a child is born,  
unto us a son is given: and the  
government shall be upon his  
shoulder: and his name shall  
be called Wonderful, Counsellor,  
The mighty God, The  
everlasting Father, The Prince  
of Peace.*

*If you know Ina Jane, you know how much she loves her church, her family, and her community. Ina Jane sings in the choir and is faithful to all ministries of FBC.*



Psalm 29:11 (KJV)

*The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace.*

Peace

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8

The subtitle of Psalm 29 is "The Voice of the Lord in the Storm"

The first week of February, 1984, Jesse, my husband, came home from the doctor and said he had some bad news. He had a bone tumor in his left knee. It needed to be removed as soon as possible. The surgeon may have to cut his leg off and it could be cancer. On February 3rd, Jesse was admitted to Methodist Hospital in Houston. The nurse came in about 4:00pm to have him sign the release papers. Jesse would not sign them until he had talked to the surgeon.

It was nearly 11:00pm before a middle-aged, tall lanky doctor came in and said he probably wouldn't have signed them either. He had a tuxedo on and said he had flown into Houston and attended a banquet accepting an award and giving a speech. That was the beginning of a long personal and professional friendship with Dr. Richard Eppright, a renowned orthopedic surgeon.

The next day, Valentines Day, Dr. Eppright performed the surgery. He said it was a success but would have to wait on lab tests to know more. So, we waited. On the third night, I could not sleep. I had been praying fervently for the tumor to be benign. I was anxious and kept praying for a favorable outcome. I was reading "A New Day" by Anita Bryant. The part concerned her premature twin babies whose lives were in jeopardy. Her pastor was there. She told him she felt her prayers were going nowhere. He asked if she had given the outcome into the Lord's hands. He said she had to do that and acknowledge that God's will be done first.

Here I was reading this book and those pages now which told me what to do. I bowed my head and confessed I had been trying to pray without acknowledging God's will. I turned the whole situation over to him confessing that He was in control and would accept the outcome. I had the most incredible sense of pure, God given peace. I laid down and went right to sleep knowing that God was in control. The tumor was benign. Although, he would later have two more surgeries and bone grafts, I knew we could handle it with God's help.

-Suzanne Bradford

*Suzanne grew up at FBC and married into the Bradford family. After teaching and worshipping in Diboll for many years, Jesse and Suzanne came home to FBC.*

# Peace

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9

We live in a troubled world that seems so loud and upside down. Do you ever think or utter the words "I can't wait until Jesus comes again"? It's in these times that I realize I'm letting Satan steal my peace and joy.

Life is tough and living the Christian life is even tougher as the pressures mount to conform to this world, and we often try to solve problems in our own wisdom. This sin separates us from God and from being able to have that peace that Jesus gave us.

In John 16:33 Jesus didn't promise to eliminate trouble, He, in fact, acknowledged that we would have trials. As Jesus prepared for his departure he gave the disciples these words that were to bring reassurance, courage and hope. He gave us his most precious gift of peace to help us endure the storms knowing that he is with us and we will get through it. A peace that would provide inner tranquility where our heart, mind and soul can rest when we as believers commit our cares to God and worry about them no more. Philippians 4:7 says "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

God didn't want us to just have peace in death, but in life too. If that is so, then why as believers do we feel anxiety, stress, loss of hope in this world and in our personal lives with the challenges we face? God desires us to have that inner peace Jesus came to give us, but we have to seek to know Him and to ask for that peace.

I love to clean my house...sounds a little weird! But I put Dino (Christian pianist) on the cd player and turn the music up loud. And I spend time with God listening to some of my favorite hymns like "What a Friend We Have in Jesus, Have Thine Own Way, and Because He Lives." In our busy lives it's essential that we find time to spend with him. Perhaps we could invite him in as a friend to sit with us in a cozy spot with the Word. Maybe listen to a podcast as we're driving. Or put up the do not disturb sign and spend quiet time in prayer.

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus who came to give us peace, may we seek and find our peace not in the world, but in Him. He gave us a wonderful gift...untie the bow!

-Kari Patranella

John 16:33 (MSG)

*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

*Kari and Pat are both so faithful to their Sunday morning Bible study class and worship. Kari is also on the yard mowing crew and perhaps the best sidewalk edger and weed eater operator around!*

John 14:27 (NLT)

*"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid."*

Peace

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10

The last few years have brought tremendous challenges for many of us. As we put the COVID pandemic behind us, there seem to be more and more crises vying for our attention. Between runaway inflation, overseas conflict, and plummeting retirement accounts, it would be easy to lose ourselves in a sea of worry. I often completely neglect

the news because it is all too depressing to see the state our world is in.

How are we supposed to manage surrounded by a lost world that appears to be going full speed in the wrong direction? One of my biggest struggles is imagining what our young children will be exposed to as they grow, and what their world will look like compared to ours.

We can take heart that the road map left to us (the Bible) still works, even in a world as messed up as ours is. Strife is not new to our planet. Although we love to romanticize the "good old days", the truth of the matter is that the enemy has always been in the world, and the world has been broken for a very, very long time.

As Jesus was preparing his disciples for his departure, he gives us several truths that help us to find peace in the chaos of this life. In John 14:2-4 he tells his disciples (1) his father's house has many rooms, (2) he is preparing a place for us, (3) he will come back, and (4) we know the way.

The point is that all of the "stuff" we are dealing with is irrelevant. If we are forward looking, we understand that our hope is in Jesus, and he has made a way for us to come to the father.

Jesus states in John 14:27 that we are left with the gift of peace of mind and heart. Jesus also specifies that his peace is a peace that the world cannot give. Even in Jesus' day, the world was never intended to be our source of peace. Our peace comes from the Holy Spirit within us and the knowledge that our father has prepared a place for us. Instead of worrying about the world our children will inherit, let us prepare their hearts and minds that they might also accept the Holy Spirit and receive the peace that only comes from Jesus. Even in the extra broken world of 2022 Jesus remains unchanged. He offers his peace to all who would accept it, and that's enough for me.

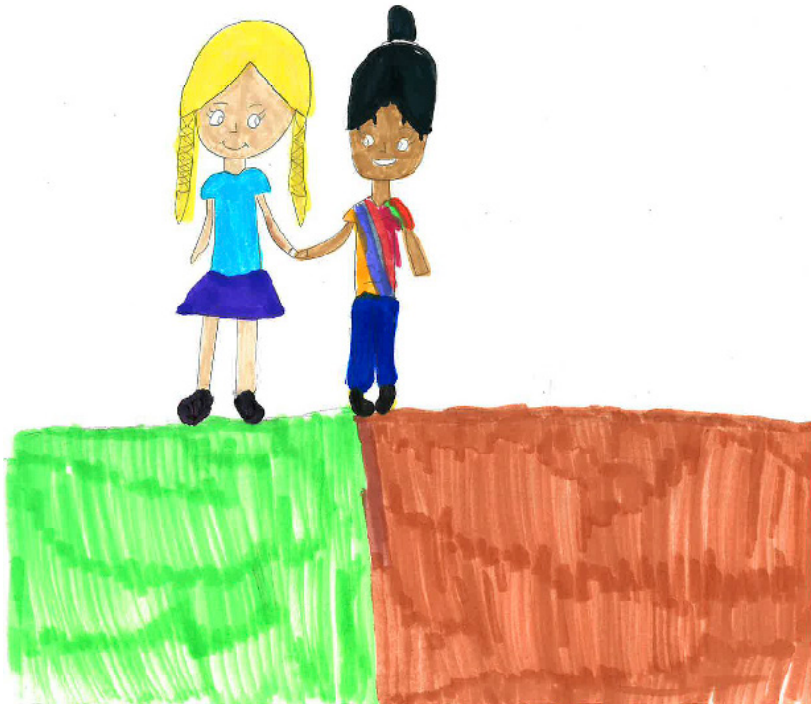
-Johnathan Williams

*Dr. Williams and Tanya are some of our newest members. The Williams are proud and busy parents to Hailey, Jacob, and Abigail. The Williams are faithful to their young adult Bible study class, worship, and to our Wednesday evening activities.*

Joy

WEEK 3

Joy



*Sylvie Baker, 8 years old*

Isaiah 9:2-3 (MSG)

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. For those who lived in a land of deep shadows—light! Sunbursts of light! You repopulated the nation, you expanded its joy.*

*Oh, they're so glad in your presence! Festival joy! The joy of a great celebration, sharing rich gifts and warm greetings.*

Joy

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11

Joy! Joy is something that most everyone seeks in life! Webster defines the word as “a feeling of great pleasure or happiness that comes from success, good fortune, or a sense of well-being.” During a recent conversation with our five-year-old grandson, he confirmed Webster’s definition. He happily revealed that his greatest joy in life at present is “donuts for breakfast.” While one might agree that donuts for breakfast undoubtedly can bring about great happiness, I

contend that the feeling is fleeting and may soon turn to despair upon stepping on the bathroom scales! That sweet, innocent little five-year-old is on the right track. He is just not quite old enough to comprehend the difference in joy and happiness. Apparently, Webster needs clarification as well.

Joy is not elation or excitement that escalates only to disappear over time. It comes from the Holy Spirit and resides deep within us. It allows us to be content and to rely on God’s word. Pure joy sustains us in spite of our circumstances. It is both consistent and internal.

Today’s scripture tells us of Isaiah’s prophecy of a coming Messiah. The people were walking in darkness and despair. They were angry, empty and shackled in sin. Isaiah told of a savior who would be the great light that would bring them out of their darkness. We are living in difficult times today. Darkness is all around us in many forms—violence, poverty, power conflicts and apathy are just a few to begin a long list. Darkness breeds anxiety, fear and despair. So, in a dark and desperate world, aren’t we thankful for the light that was sent to us from our Father in heaven? Our light—His son, Jesus!

As we approach the end of this time of Advent and the Christmas season, take the time to have that “donut for breakfast” while sharing your source of joy with someone who might be searching for it. Finally, let us not forget to thank God for sending His gift of Jesus to be our light in a dark world and our promise of hope and joy! Merry Christmas!

-Alesa Baker

*On most Sundays in worship, Alesa will have her mother, son, daughter-in-law, and 3 grandchildren all spread out in various locations in the sanctuary. What a rich heritage and legacy. Alesa and Kenny both play in the church orchestra.*

Joy

MONDAY, DECEMBER 12

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

Luke 2:10-11 (KJV)

*And the angel said unto them,  
Fear not: for, behold, I bring  
you good tidings of great joy,  
which shall be to all people.  
For unto you is born this day  
in the city of David a Saviour,  
which is Christ the Lord.*

What joy means to me is that you are forever loved and admired by Jesus. Plus, knowing that even when you sin, God always forgives you so that you aren't worrying about God's connection with you. I believe that only Jesus can give us true joy. The world can give you happiness, but it can also give you sadness. We can't count on the world for joy in our lives.

Everyone knows how much I love football, but I know that I can't count on football to bring me joy – that's why I have Jesus in my life. I have had really good games that bring me great happiness and pride and the satisfaction of success, but there is also so much stress and anxiety and regret when things go wrong. Stress and anxiety about keeping a starting job on the team, getting hurt, or maybe just getting hit can hold you back. You may throw a couple touchdowns or win a few games but that feeling at the end is just happiness, and it will never last. True joy will not come without God. What you have done on the field and in life will never be enough to fill your life with joy. When that angel came to the shepherds to tell them Jesus had been born, he told them to not fear, and that he was bringing great joy for ALL PEOPLE FOREVER. Through our salvation in Jesus, we don't have to be fearful anymore. We know that, through him, regardless of what life brings us, we have joy in knowing that He has a plan for us and He will be with us through life's ups and downs. When we trust in God's plan, that lingering anxiety goes away and stops holding us back. Without God, you will throw interceptions, and make mistakes. But with God, you will start throwing touchdowns in life. THAT IS JOY!

-Nate Sanders

*Nate just finished the season as quarterback for the 7th grade Apple Springs football team. He is a 6th generation member of FBC. His parents are Robert and Jenny Sanders and his younger brother is Cade. Yes, that means that Carolin and Raymond are his grandparents.*

Philippians 4:4-5 (NLT)

*Always be full of joy in the Lord.  
I say it again—rejoice!  
Let everyone see that you  
are considerate in all you do.  
Remember, the Lord is coming  
soon.*

Joy

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13

Our world is full of hard realities; we see these when watching the news or scrolling on our tiny screens daily - another school shooting, a world conflict that we cannot solve, a humanitarian crisis we wish we could end...it is often a giant mess! And though the Christmas season itself can sometimes

be the cause of its own stresses as well, it is also a great reminder that authentic joy does not come from this world. No material item or achievement can lead to joy. We often use the words "joy" and "happiness" interchangeably, but joy is so much more than momentary happiness. We can joyfully cling to the confidence that though we will trudge through hard seasons (and sadly yes, those seasons can last a long time) we do not have to sit in that feeling forever. God sent His son to our broken world to give us joy.

This past year we lost my grandmother unexpectedly. When I think of joy, I think of her and the truly joyful example she was for our family. No - things were not always easy for her. Her favorite word was "whatever" and she would most likely tell you about the state of the world if you sat there long enough. However, SHE had joy. She chose to spread joy through acts of kindness and service, and she is now able to see her joy fulfilled through Christ. I cling to the hope that through her example I am able to spread joy as well, and be a light to our broken world. Our verse today says to ALWAYS be full of joy in the LORD: not joy in others, not joy in things, but joy in our deep rooted belief that the Lord knows what is best for us. And are we to hide that joy?? Absolutely not! Others are to see Christ and His everlasting joy through us.

After Gram's passing, we found gifts she had intended to give to the children at Buckner for their birthdays for this entire year. Through this she wanted to bring happiness to others, and in turn share her internal joy. May we go through this Christmas season remembering that yes, days are hard, and yes, bad things will inevitably happen. But absolutely, without a doubt, our joy in the LORD will carry us through. Let us now go and show joy to our world today; our Christ has come and for that reason alone we may rejoice!

-Natalie Jansing

*Natalie literally grew up at FBC from birth. She teaches at Hudson, puts up with husband Trey, directs teenage son Aaron, and diligently tries to keep parents Laurie and Robby in line.*



Joy

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14

This past year was a trying year for so many of us. Well, actually, I think it's safe to say that the past couple of years haven't been the easiest. For me personally, I experienced stressful family problems and most recently, the death of the woman who raised me—Gran, my sweet grandmother.

When I read this verse, I think it would be easy for many of us to stop with the trees not budding and the vines not producing any grapes, or the crop failing and no sheep or cattle to be found. Because if we let it, life can feel like that. Little things and big things can pile up, and if I'm being honest, sometimes they can leave me feeling a little hopeless, or at least sad and stressed.

But as I read these verses in Habakkuk, I am reminded of what I know to be true. That no matter what life brings us or how difficult the situations we find ourselves in can be, I can rejoice in the Lord and I can be joyful in God my Savior. I can rejoice this season specifically because I know that we are celebrating that Jesus was born on this earth to live among us, and that he still lives among us. I can trust a God who never leaves me and who loves me enough to have come live on earth.

The truth is that life is probably always going to be somewhat hard, because it will never be picture perfect. But I can easily look around and see so many things that give me joy—baking with my daughter, a girls night out with my friends, or a service Sunday with my church. Rejoicing in the hope of the Lord doesn't mean I always have to have a smile on my face or ignore the hard things in life. It simply means that no matter what comes my way, there is still so much to be thankful for all around me, and that I can always find joy in my relationship with God.

-Jessica Cobb

Habakkuk 3:17-18 (MSG)

*Though the cherry trees don't blossom and the strawberries don't ripen, Though the apples are worm-eaten and the wheat fields stunted, Though the sheep pens are sheepless and the cattle barns empty, I'm singing joyful praise to God. I'm turning cartwheels of joy to my Savior God. Counting on God's Rule to prevail. I take heart and gain strength. I run like a deer. I feel like I'm king of the mountain!*

*Realtor. Mom. Best Friend to All. Jessica is active in all areas of FBC and Lufkin, but primarily tries to just keep up with 2nd grade daughter, Tinsley.*



Hebrews 12:1-3 (NLT)

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up.*

Joy is promised by God and something we should strive towards. When you feel like quitting and you think you're unworthy to even compete in this race, remember, heaven's stands are full of those cheering you on.

-Lyndy Vines

Joy

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15

Jesus Christ has loved me unconditionally despite my shortcomings and weaknesses. He has bestowed on me His holy Grace, mercy and fatherly love.

In Hebrews chapter 11, the writer of Hebrews described all the great men and women of faith who have gone before you. Abraham, Noah, Moses, and thousands of others who ran their good race of faith. Now they sit in the stands of heaven, cheering you on to finish the race God has put before you. They cheer as you press on toward knowing the fullness of Christ.

Your spiritual race isn't always easy, and sometimes you feel like giving up. Thoughts of fear, failure, and discouragement may crowd your mind.

*Many know Lyndy as a professional photographer, wife to Davy, and mom to Nealee and Victoria. Did you know however, Lyndy is board certified Chiropractor? The Vines are active in all areas of ministry at FBC, including worship, Bible study and Wednesday evenings.*

Joy

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16

Christmas is my favorite holiday, but if I let it, my schedule can stress me out during the holiday season. Extra activities on top of my usual schedule can throw me off my game. A few years ago, I was preparing to take my daughter, Sarah, to a weekend dance convention at the Houston Galleria. As Sarah gathered all her costume pieces and packed her things, I spent the afternoon trying to finish cleaning the house before we left. I was already dressed and packed but tried to keep my clothes clean and dry by wearing an apron as I cleaned. I was finishing the dishes when Sarah ran into the kitchen because she couldn't find one of her costume pieces; I immediately stopped and helped her look for the missing headpiece. We looked everywhere in the house for the missing piece, but finally had to give up, throw our bags into the car, and immediately start driving to Houston. Fortunately, we arrived just in time, and I was able to walk her briskly into the hotel to meet her team and instructors (who had an extra headpiece). I hastily returned to my vehicle, which was illegally parked in the hotel driveway, and made my way to our hotel which was nearby. As I walked through the hotel lobby with my cart of luggage, I noticed other hotel guests looking at me and smiling; I remember feeling confident and wondering if I had done an exceptionally good job applying my make-up or if I looked particularly nice in my outfit. When I got to my room and unloaded my bags, I caught sight of myself in the full-length mirror. I was still wearing my full-length, red floral apron! The stress of the crazy, rushed day melted away as I stood and laughed at myself in the mirror.

If we aren't careful, we can get so busy and stressed that we lose our joy; even little things can seem overwhelming. Like the disciples in the boat during the storm, we see the waves around us in our stressful circumstances and take our eyes off the Lord as we focus intently on our current situation. A shift in our focus is needed. In 1 Peter 1:8, Peter says, "...even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy." We can trust in Christ as our living hope and solid foundation. If our focus is on Him, we can find our joy, even when we are stressed.

-Melissa Handley

*Dr. Handley stays just a little busy as one of Lufkin's Pediatricians. John and Melissa are parents to grown children John, Eric and Yin, and Sarah.*

Psalm 71:23 (NASB)

*My lips will shout for joy  
when I sing praises to You;  
And my soul, which You  
have redeemed.*

James 1:2-4 (NRSV)

*My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.*

Joy

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17

When people solve a big problem they feel Joy. When people solve a small problem they feel Joy. But sometimes, when in the middle of facing problems in your life, you may not feel Joy at all.

When I think about the word Joy, the first thing I usually think of is the Christmas Song, "Joy To The World." With Christmas right around the corner, there is not a better song to sing. Joy brings feelings of hope, love, happiness, and excitement to us. You not only see joy in your personal life but in others as well. Joy can come in small packages such as a card in the mail, a text message, or a simple wave, or in big packages such as a baby being born, getting hired for your dream job, or finding out you are cancer free.

Joy helps you get through the ups and downs in life, the hills and valleys, the trials and tribulations. When life throws you a curveball and you do not know what to do, knowing Christ is with you and will help you no matter the outcome should bring you Joy.

When reading James 1:2, you may be in doubt about finding joy when facing trials. Why should you be happy in difficult times? The next two verses answer this question. Testing your faith produces endurance. If you let your trust in Christ take over, you will have Joy because you know anything can be accomplished with Christ in your life.

As you sing Joy to the World during this holiday season, remember the real reason for the season. Joy to the World, the Lord is come!

-Brian Bramlett

*Brian and Elizabeth are proud parents to Brice, a student at St. Cyprian's. The Bramletts came back to Lufkin where Elizabeth grew up. Brian sings in the choir and does IT for Pineywoods Academy.*

# Love

WEEK 4



*Deacon Hill, 7 years old*

1 John 4: 7-10 (NIV)

*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

Love

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18

One of my favorite individuals on planet Earth is famed American astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson. While possessing as much an intellectual grasp of the cosmos as a human is able, Tyson magically demystifies complex topics like black holes or infinity with accessible imagery that creatively yet unpretentiously illustrates the theoretical—plus he's really cool.

Please allow me, in a very Neil deGrasse Tyson way, to recycle a simple thought experiment I once read that so cleverly reveals the love of God.

Consider a triangle with two points along its base and one at its apex. Suppose the base points represent two people in relationship; as they travel toward the apex of the triangle they grow closer together while simultaneously growing closer to the apex.

The apex in this illustration is clearly God. Because God is love and love is God, when we show love to each other, we exhibit the character of God. God enables our very capacity for love. At the root of God-like love is sacrifice.

No parent I know at Christmastime has ever substituted a note for presents under the tree that read, "Dear child, in lieu of gifts this year please know I really, really love you." Instead we budget, save money and often set aside our own needs or wants in favor of our kids' happiness.

I know this example seems elementary and a little frivolous but the principle of sacrifice is there. Real love is the mother in Solomon's court who would rather give her child up than have him harmed.

Real love is Mary letting go of her earthly plans to fulfill a heavenly calling by birthing and mothering the Son of God. Real, sacrificial love is a God willing to take on human flesh and die a horrific death to rescue His people from our self-imposed demise.

This Christmas, as we honor the apostle John's urging to love one another, let us recognize the One who became the ultimate sacrifice and is the very definition of the love we express. And maybe we start a new trend: triangle tree toppers. Neil would be on board.

-Matt Baker

*Matt is married to Katie. (We could just end there!) Matt is also grandson to Bartha, son to Kenny and Alesa, Dad to Natalie, Elizabeth, and Sylvie and a Brookshire pharmacist.*

# Love

MONDAY, DECEMBER 19

I can recall several years ago my mom was struggling as we approached the holiday season. That year was the first time I was not going to be in attendance for Thanksgiving or Christmas which undoubtedly made things difficult for both of us. To make matters worse, the time difference at the time between our two locations was 9 hours, making even a call over Skype or messaging in real time over Facebook tremendously difficult. My method for staying in contact with my friends and family back home was to write a daily blog and post it to Facebook before I went to bed each night. This allowed me to keep everyone posted and communicate asynchronously in the event we couldn't coordinate live conversation.

My mom and I were lucky enough to chat a bit that week, but I could tell she was having a hard time. My mom was a 2nd grade teacher at the time, and the parents that year seemed to find any excuse to throw hate her way. It seemed like everywhere she turned, she became affronted by needless hatred. Frankly, it was steering her down a path of melancholic defeat. Being a world away, I felt helpless to her plight. So the next day I decided to try a new format for my daily blog and instead write a direct appeal to my mom. The theme revolved around the fact that coldness and cruelty are no match for Christmas. Although the post admittedly had a bit more of the colorful language that I used in my college days, my favorite quote is towards the end: "I want you to read this letter Mom, and remember that the cold will always be there, year after year, relentlessly trying to steal your warmth. (...) Nice thing about the cold though, is that it gives up quickly. All you need is some patience, some caring hearts, and some Christmas."

I couldn't help but return to that blog post for this devotional. I didn't realize at the time, but my appeal to my mom revolved around the love that comes from the advent season. Hatred seems to permeate our lives more often these days and as a result conflict is not far behind. Love, advent love, is our solution. "Don't hide from the wind(and)the cold. Build the fire(of love), and fight it with Christmas."

-Andrew Roybal-Cano

Proverbs 10:12 (NIV)

*Hatred stirs up conflict,  
but love covers over  
all wrongs.*

*Andrew, along with his wife Alex, is active in the music ministry at FBC. Not only does he sing in the choir, but he and Alex are part of the worship praise team.*

Ephesians 4:2 (KJV)

*With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.*

Love

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20

Throughout my day, I always try to seek the good in all situations and know in my heart people truly mean well. My days consist of teaching the sweetest, but busiest people on the planet...Kindergarteners. They are full of joy and spirit but with that comes the chaos. There is always a mess or someone who has lost the red crayon. As crazy as it may be, my heart is always full at the end of each day. Five-year olds don't hold grudges. They are always forgiving and loving towards each other. I am in constant awe at how they truly believe and seek out the best in each other. They color paper hearts for friends when they hurt their feelings and cheer each other on when they're racing on the playground.

If you ever question or wonder if there is still good in our messy world just visit our Kindergarten classroom. You may see chaos but more than that you'll see little ones taking turns and practicing patience. You'll see kindness and forgiveness...even when someone cuts in the line on the way to recess. More importantly than all of this, you'll take away the understanding that when life drives you crazy or people make you upset, you can choose to LOVE others as God loves us. By choosing to see the good in all situations, your heart will be as full as a Kindergartener with chocolate chip cookies in their lunchbox.

-Ashley Rothhauser

*Ashley and Will are new to FBC but ever so faithful. Ashley is a teacher at Hudson. The Rothhausers came home to Lufkin after a few years living in Austin. They are proud parents to Emmy.*

# Love

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21

As a student in highschool I have witnessed and experienced many different types of love. My parents tell me they love me everyday. I love my friends and my sport. I can't walk in the hallways without my path being blocked by couples that are "in love".

1 Corinthians 13:13 (NLT)

*Three things will last forever—  
faith, hope, and love—  
and the greatest of these  
is love.*

But these types of love are nothing like the love that we are shown by God. God's love is unconditional. It is passionate and selfless. When Jesus entered our sin-ridden world and gave His life for us, He demonstrated how vastly He loves us. In the safety and fullness of His love, we can love others. As Christians, we are meant to spread the Gospel, and what better way to do this than with our actions? As we move into Christmas, we should be reminded of the distinguishing mark we carry as followers of Jesus. We must ask for his love to be evident in our words and actions as we interact with others. We must seek to bring unity and balance into relationships or situations, listen to people with sincerity and interest, and ask for a graciousness that comes from his Spirit as we mingle with those in our circles. Sometimes the only thing a person needs is to be shown love and compassion. Knowing that there is even one person that cares for you can make all the difference in someone's life.

So our mission this Christmas is to be that person. Be the one who shares the love that God so graciously shared with us. Wear the love of Jesus as your distinguishing mark as his follower.

-Briley Stevens

*Briley is a senior at Lufkin High School. Many of us have had the privilege of watching Briley grow up to be the kind, precious, beautiful young lady she is. Briley is a key leader in our youth student ministry as well as a part of Sunday worship praise team.*



1 John 4:19 (ESV)

*We love because  
he first loved us.*

*Love*

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22

God's love is amazing to me because he showed me love before I was even created. I think that if we love like God loves us it can strengthen our relationship with him and others. By following God's word and setting an example for others, we are spreading the love of God to the people that really need it. In the Bible it says that love can overcome fear and hatred. I feel that love can overcome anything if you let it. A lot of people don't know God's love for them, which can make them have a bad perspective on things and look at the evil rather than the good. God's love can teach us how to look at the good things in life and also teach us how to love others.

In my life there are a lot of opportunities to love that can pass me by. I always try to love others and be kind to them, but sometimes it can get hard. The fact that I know God's love helps me find the love and good in people that they don't always like to bring out. Also, by knowing his love it can help me in the bad times and sorrow. Just knowing that God loves me no matter what can help me overcome my mistakes to be a better person. His love also helps me with forgiveness because I know that God loves me so much that he will forgive me for anything. I use my knowledge of that to forgive others for their mistakes because I know that's what he would do. My advice to you is to always remember 1 John 4:19 and that we can love because he first loved us.

-Leighton Belshaw

*Leighton is a 7th grader at Lufkin Middle School. Leighton's Great- Great Grandfather was pastor at FBC from 1943-1953 and her mom, grandparents and brother are in worship with her each week.*

1 Peter 4:8 (NIV)

*Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*

Love

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23

Love is great, love is awesome, love is cool, but love can also be bad. I personally have dealt with my friends making poor choices. Some friends that I thought were true friends fell in love with not so good habits. Experiencing these things has taught me to have appreciation for what I have. It made me realize what I love the most - fishing, my pets, and my family. My brother, Austin, is my best friend. I love him with all my heart. He has taught me how to cope through tough times, choose the right type of friends, and be smart with my money. These are all things that I love, but the most important one is God! I know that when I have done something wrong, I can turn to God. I know that I can turn to God and not be judged. One thing that I've struggled with and continue to struggle with is being judged. Wondering what people think of me when they look at me, caring about what I look like, caring what people say about me behind my back. I know that I can turn to God and will not be judged. I can turn to God and express all my love for him. I know that God loves me with all his heart and that's all that matters. God loves everyone, including me and you.

1st Peter 4:8 states, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." This means that no matter what sins you, your family, or your friends make, God will love you for eternity. This is a great verse to come back to when you struggle with finding things that you love. God states that we should love each other as ourselves. This advent season, if you struggle with finding things you love, turn to Him and ask for His guidance and He will see you through. I pray we all remember the true meaning of advent LOVE this holiday season and show it to everyone around us.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year with much love.

-Hunter Belschner

*Hunter is a Junior in high school who is a great leader in our student youth group. Hunter sits on the front row pew on Sundays with the other teens. Hunter is a bass fisherman who continues to win contest after contest. Hunter is the son of Leigh and Jeremy and brother to Austin, Adalyn, and Haegan.*

A decorative wreath made of dark wood branches and large, dark green leaves. Four lit candles in gold-colored holders are arranged around the wreath, with a glowing white orb in the center. The background is a dark, textured wood.

CAROLS  
CANDLES  
& COMMUNION

*Christmas Eve*

12/24  
5:30PM

Psalm 89: 1-2 (NIV)

*I will sing of the Lord's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations.*

*I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself.*

Love

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24

Love and Faithfulness. Two of the strongest, most essential ingredients in any lasting personal bond. Why are they so important? Together they make up the strong foundation of any relationship. As long as Love and Faith are interwoven into our lives with our family and loved ones we can take comfort in knowing we are not alone.

And what makes Faith and Love so significant? Together they transform into Trust! Even though we are imperfect creatures, nev-er batting 1000, how reassuring is it, still, to be confident that those we love and who love us have our backs, catch us when we stumble or fall, and still give us a hug telling us "I got you. I love you. You're okay. I forgive you." That is something that makes your heart sing!

But as wonderful as that is, how much greater is it knowing that our Father in Heaven FAITH-FULLY LOVES US! No matter our mistakes, missteps, or intentional foul ups, God still loves us, and will accept us—bumps, warts, and all—if we will only ask for forgiveness and turn away from our sins and towards Him. Paul explained to us, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved." Because of God's Love and Faithfulness, that's a promise He has made to us. And what makes Trusting God so incredibly easy? He's never broken a promise! Kind of makes you want to "...sing of the LORD'S great love forever...." and "...make your faith-fulness known through all generations." Now that truly does make your heart sing, doesn't it?

-Rex Keese

*Rex is a retired commercial airline pilot who with his wife Gabe made it to Lufkin to be near his girls and grandchildren. Rex shares Bible study teaching responsibilities with others in his Sunday morning class.*

Love

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25



May God's indescribable gift of Jesus be ever present in your life today and all the days ahead of you. Allow the HOPE of Christ to sustain you, the JOY of Christ to overwhelm you, the PEACE of Christ to indwell within you, and the LOVE of Christ to be shared to all those around you.

-Pastor Mark

*Mark and Aurelia came to serve as our pastor in January 2016. Mark loves the Lord, his family, FBC, Lufkin, and Baylor...pretty much in that order. Usually.*











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