



ADVENT GUIDE

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH LUFKIN

2025

Advent Guide

Advent is a Latin word that simply means “arrival” or “coming,” and for centuries, Christians across the world have entered these four weeks before Christmas with intention—preparing hearts, homes, and lives for the coming of Christ. The early church began observing Advent as a season of watching, waiting, and longing. It mirrors the anticipation of God’s people who waited for the promised Messiah, while also reminding us that we, too, are a waiting people, longing for Christ to come again and make all things new.

Advent is significant because it invites us to slow down in a season that often pushes us to speed up. While the world rushes from Thanksgiving straight into Christmas, Advent gives us space to breathe. It calls us to pause, to reflect, and to remember what we truly celebrate—God stepping into our world, into our mess, and into our humanity. Advent re-orientes our hearts toward hope, peace, joy, and love, not as sentimental ideas, but as gifts God imparts on us through Jesus.

This guide is one opportunity to enter this sacred season together as a church family. For nine years now, members of our congregation have prayed, reflected, and written beautiful devotionals with their own unique backgrounds and personalities. These pages are filled with real stories, questions, and encouragements from people who sit beside you every Sunday in worship and decorated with wonderful illustrations from our children.

Each of these devotionals contained in this guide have a short thought or reflection and a scripture passage for that day. My prayer is that these words will help you carve out some sacred moments along your journey, maybe a few quiet minutes in the morning, a meaningful conversation around the dinner table, or even a pause at the end of a busy day that will allow you some time to reflect and pray.

I am deeply grateful for every person who contributed to this year’s Advent Guide. Thank you for your time, your openness, and your willingness to share a piece of your heart with our church. As we enter this Advent season, may we prepare room, not just in our schedules or traditions, but in our hearts for the One who came and is coming again. May this guide help us watch with expectation, wait with hope, and experience the wonder of God’s love made flesh.

- Walker McWilliams

Hope

WEEK 1



Hebrews 10:23 (KJV)

*Let us hold fast the profession
of our faith without wavering;
for He is faithful that promised.*

Hope

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30

"Hope." What a funny word... It's a concept that seems almost unattainable in this day and age. It's so easy to look out into this community, this country, this world and feel a variety of emotions, but -more often

than not- "hope" just isn't one of 'em! But, it is exactly in these moments of hopelessness that we need to be reminded of the Word.

The prophet Isaiah foretold the coming Messiah an estimated seven HUNDRED years before He would actually be born. What a wait-time! Seven hundred years of hoping and longing for salvation. That's a long time to hold onto a promise. Generations were born and passed without seeing it come to fruition on earth. But, still, they hoped and prayed.

One of my favorite songs that we will sing in our Celebrate! Christmas concert this year is called "Light of the World," by artist Lauren Daigle. It really "caught my eye" when I was shopping for music with its poignant words. At its climax, the song says "For all who wait, for all who hunger, for all who've prayed, for all who wonder, behold your King! Behold Messiah; Emmanuel! Emmanuel!" I love this section because it reminds me of "why" the Messiah came and who He came for.

We all experience times of waiting, of spiritual hunger; times when we have prayed, wondered, and -admit it- even felt a hopelessness awaiting a response -ANY response from God. But, as the song suggests, it is exactly these feelings that Christ was born for; it is in these moments when God is closest. There IS hope in waiting. Why? Emmanuel - God is with us. He is the answer to seven hundred years of waiting. He is love incarnate; the fulfilment of the law and all the promises of God made manifest. He is the hope for all who put their trust in Him. Wait for Him, hope in Him, trust in Him without wavering; He was, is, and ever shall be faithful.

This Advent season, "may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." - Romans 15:13.

-Tate Ashby

Hope

MONDAY, DECEMBER 1

Psalm 31:24 is the last verse of this Psalm, written of course by David. This Psalm was written when David was going through a very difficult time, and had been abandoned by all of his friends. He saw trouble on every side, and was at a loss as to how to proceed. It is a prayer for deliverance from the anguish and torment he was experiencing. David is expressing his trust in the Lord that he will be delivered from these troubles, and will be strengthened. We're told in Luke 23:46 that Jesus quoted Verse 5 of the 31st Psalm while on the cross, "Into your hands I commit my spirit."

In our modern world, there are many times we may feel lost, fearful, anxious, or unsure of which direction to turn, just as David did. We may feel tempted to rely on ourselves to get out of troubling times. This Psalm reminds us that the strength and hope we are seeking is not generated through our own actions. God is the source of this strength and hope. Through this verse, we are reminded and assured of the promise of receiving God's strength no matter what life may throw at us. God promises that He will never abandon us and will always be with us. That is the true Hope of this Christmas season.

Psalm 31: 24 (NASB)

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

-Jeff Bates

1 Peter 3:15 (NLT)

Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it.

Hope

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2

Hope is a powerful word. It's more than wishful thinking or blind optimism—it's the quiet confidence that God is still working, even when we can't see how. During Advent, we're reminded that our hope began in a manger, wrapped in cloth, and laid in a humble stall. Jesus' arrival brought a light that no darkness can extinguish.

There have been seasons in my life where hope felt distant—when prayers went unanswered, plans fell apart, or the world just seemed heavy. I've waited on those beautiful words, "You're pregnant," and I've also waited beside a parent's hospital bed, praying for peace to come. Both moments—so different—yet both drenched in hope. Hope that God hears. Hope that He holds us close. Hope that there's something more beyond the waiting.

Brent and I have both lost parents, and through those hard days of grief and goodbye, we had to cling to the truth that our hope isn't buried in the grave. It's alive. It's eternal. Our parents' stories didn't end here, and neither does ours. That's the kind of hope only Jesus offers—the kind that doesn't crumble under the weight of sorrow, but gently carries you through it.

Peter reminds us to "be ready to explain" our hope. That means living in a way that others can see it—through our patience, our kindness, and our peace in the midst of chaos. Sometimes, the greatest testimony we can offer is simply showing joy when the world says we shouldn't have any.

So this Advent, may we be people of hope—rooted, steady, and expectant. When someone asks why we still smile, why we still believe, or why we still love despite it all, may we be ready to say, "Because my hope is in Christ—and He has never failed me yet."

-Tara Watson Watkins

Hope

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3

HOPE. How would you define it? For many of us, we use the word to describe something we wish for. "I hope I feel better soon." Or "I hope I win the lottery." But in the Bible, the word "hope" refers to a future certainty, an unwavering expectation of God's future blessings, the expectation of eternal life. The hope of the Christian faith is three-dimensional:

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.*

Oriented Toward the Future. In Isaiah 40, Isaiah prophecies hope for Israel, God's people, who have been ravaged by invading nations. As Isaiah 40 alludes, there is not only a coming King, there is also a coming kingdom. The Bible picks up this prophecy in the Gospels, showing us how Israel's hope and our own hope come together through the work of Jesus Christ. This is the hope of the Christian faith: Life together with God's people, under God's reign, enjoying God's rule and blessings through Christ the King.

This scripture all sounds wonderful, but its wonder quickly fades when we turn and look at our broken selves as we clumsily try to follow Jesus and when we look at our very broken world. So what makes our hope an expectation rather than a wish? This future hope becomes sure when we see how it's grounded in the past and sustained in the present.

Grounded in the Past. Our future hope is grounded in what has already happened. The apostle Paul writes, "Therefore, since we **have been** justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...and we boast in the hope of the glory of God" (Rom 5:1-2, emphasis added).

God has been faithful to his promises by sending Christ. And Christ's death has canceled our sin by nailing it to the cross (Col. 2:14). And His resurrection was a preview of the same resurrection all of God's people will experience in his kingdom—new bodies! (Rom. 8:19-21). Our future hope is grounded in what Christ has already done for us in history: He came, He died, and He rose.

Sustained in the Present. Our hope is not only grounded in Christ's past work; it is also sustained in the present. Paul writes, "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" (Rom. 5:5). The Holy Spirit is at work creating faith where it doesn't exist and strengthening the faith of those who do believe.

God is breaking into our present world through the Holy Spirit as he makes new creations out of people like you and me, bringing us to faith in Christ and enrolling us as citizens of this coming kingdom. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17).

So this Advent season, embrace God's definition of HOPE and rejoice in the unwavering certainty of God's future promises.

(Adapted from "What is Christian Hope?" on CORE CHRISTIANITY)

-Jane Ainsworth

Jeremiah 29:11 (MSG)

*I know what I'm doing. I have it
all planned out - plans to take
care of you, not abandon you,
plans to give you the future*

Hope

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4

Hope is a powerful thing, but it often grows best in hard seasons. When we read this verse, it is important to understand it within its historical context: these words were spoken not in comfort, but in captivity.

The people of Israel heard Jeremiah 29:11 while living in exile. They were displaced, discouraged, and uncertain of what their future would hold. God did not instantly remove their struggle. Instead, He reminded them of His heart: I see you. I'm still at work. I have a plan, even here.

Sometimes hope arrives quietly. It does not always shout; sometimes it simply whispers, "God isn't finished yet." Advent teaches us to wait not passively, but expectantly. Just as Israel waited for the Messiah, we wait for God to move in our lives, our families, and our world. Even when the night feels long, the light of Christ is already on the horizon.

Maybe you are waiting for healing. Maybe you are praying for direction. Maybe you are believing for something that feels impossible. Advent reminds us that our hope is not based on our situation, it is rooted in our Savior. The same God who promised a Redeemer kept His promise in Bethlehem, and He will keep His promises to you as well

Prayer:

Lord, help me to wait with hope. When I grow weary, remind me that Your plans for me are good and that Your promises are true. Let my hope be anchored in You alone. Amen.

-Caroline Chance Corley

Hope

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5

Hope has always been one of my favorite words in all of Scripture. Of course, I love words like love, joy, peace, and patience, but there is something profoundly unique about hope. Hope reaches into the unseen—it anchors us when everything else feels uncertain.

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.

In our passage this morning from Romans, Paul reminds us that hope carries immense strength. Genuine hope originates from God alone, yet it is formed through the refining process of suffering, perseverance, and character. It's through God's love—poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit—that we are able to cling to this hope and face whatever lies ahead.

The truth is, it can be difficult to hold on to hope in today's world. Chaos, division, and uncertainty surround us. It can feel as though the promises of tomorrow are slipping out of reach. But our God is faithful. He is powerful. He loves us so deeply that He sent His one and only Son—born in humility, crucified in sacrifice, and risen in victory—so that we might live with unshakable hope. This is not a fragile or fleeting hope; it is a living hope, grounded in the very nature and character of God Himself.

I love how William Barclay describes it:

"When a man's hope is in God, it cannot turn to dust and ashes. When a man's hope is in God, it cannot be disappointed. When a man's hope is in the love of God, it can never be an illusion, for God loves us with an everlasting love backed by an everlasting power."

My prayer is that during this holiday season—and beyond—we would rest in that everlasting power. May we remember that our hope is not built on circumstances, but on the unchanging love and faithfulness of God. And may that hope steady our hearts, strengthen our faith, and remind us that in Christ, tomorrow always holds promise.

-Truett Newton

Hebrews 11:1 (CEV)

Hope

Faith makes us sure of what we hope for and gives us proof of what we cannot see. It was their faith that made our ancestors pleasing to God.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6

Every Monday morning after a college football Saturday, I eagerly await the new SEC Shorts episode on YouTube. SEC Shorts is a comedic recap of the weekend that was in college football – a parody that perfectly captures the drama, heartbreak, and passion of the SEC. The creators rarely mock the status quo; instead, they shine a humorous spotlight on the teams that either soar or stumble each week.

My favorite recurring character is “Hope.” She’s portrayed as a radiant, homecoming-queen type – sash, tiara, and all. She embodies the optimism, dreams, and “what could be” that live in every college football fan. My Aggies are no strangers to Hope’s visits. Since SEC Shorts began in 2014, she’s shown up in College Station more times than I can count. And every time, she leaves us right back where we’ve been before: 8-4 and bound for the GalleryFurniture.com Bowl.

Hope, in this sense, is fickle. She’s full of promise on Saturday morning and gone by Sunday morning. She reminds us how easily our earthly hopes fade – whether in football, our jobs, or circumstances.

But in Hebrews 11, we read about a very different kind of hope. This hope isn’t wishful thinking or blind optimism. It’s grounded in certainty – a confidence in God’s promises and the steadfastness of Christ. This hope doesn’t depend on the athletic performance of 18 to 22-year old kids or the opinions of a biased sportswriter. It won’t vanish after a tough loss. It’s eternal. It’s sustaining. It’s sure.

I love college football. I love the Aggies. And I love when my dad sends me the SEC Shorts skit and Hope drops by for another visit. Maybe, by the time you’re reading this, we’re 11-0 and she’s still our date at the dance. But if history repeats itself, she’ll probably move on – and that’s okay. Because the Hope we celebrate in Advent will never leave. The hope we have in Jesus Christ is undefeated and unshakable – and that’s a promise worth holding onto long after the season ends.

-Hall Henderson

Peace

WEEK 2



Cora McCall, 11 years old

John 16:33 (MSG)

I've told you all this so that trusting me, you will be unshakable and assured, deeply at peace. In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties. But take heart! I've conquered the world.

Peace

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7

If you have lived on this earth for even a relatively short period of time, it is likely you have seen your share of struggles along the way. Well, I can guarantee you that you

are not alone. In John 16:33, it says we will experience trouble during our time here on earth but will also have peace because God has overcome the world. Whether these difficulties you might encounter are from serious illness, death of a friend or relative, job related, relationships, or family issues, it should give all of us encouragement and hope that God is for sure sending peace soon!

If your life is anything like mine, it is likely you have experienced all the above and possibly more. I've discovered that as I navigate through life there will without a doubt be challenging times ahead for me, my family, and our church family. But it comforts me to know if we prepare ourselves by praying and asking God to put us in the right place each day so we can carry out HIS wishes, strive to be more like Jesus every day, and simply try our best to be a positive and encouraging person, peaceful times are ahead for us and others we love.

-Robert Sanders

Peace

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8

Proverbs 16:7 (NLT)

When people's lives please the Lord, even their enemies are at peace with them.

When the angels announced Jesus' birth, they sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." (Luke 2:14) That peace wasn't just for a holy night 2,000 years ago; it's for every heart that makes room for Him today.

In the bustle of the Christmas season, peace can often feel distant. Our minds spin with to-do lists, our hearts carry worries and aches, and the world around us often seems anything but peaceful. Yet, the peace Jesus offers is not the absence of trouble—it's the presence of Himself in the midst of it all.

Many of us live with quiet tension, caught between faith and fear, hope and uncertainty, joy and worry. Advent invites us to release that tension into the Hands of the One who said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

Peace begins when we surrender control. It grows when we trust that God is working, even when we can't see how. It flourishes when we fix our minds on Him instead of our anxieties.

Isaiah 26:3 reminds us, "You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in You." Perfect peace does not come from perfect circumstances—it comes from a steadfast heart that rests in the perfect Savior, the Prince of Peace.

Christ's peace guards our hearts, quiets our fears, and calls us to become peacemakers in a world that desperately needs it. This season we are invited to rest in that peace, to breathe deeply of His presence, and to carry His calm into every place we go.

"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ." Philippians 4:7

Peace be with you.

-Kelly Adams Williams

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, Counselor,
The Mighty God, The
Everlasting Father, The Prince
of Peace.*

Peace

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9

We often imagine peace as the absence of worries or troubles. However, this form of peace has become increasingly difficult to find in today's world. Our newsfeeds are constantly flooded with stories of tragedies and conflicts. However, as followers of Christ, this should not come to us as a surprise. "In the world you will have tribulation," Jesus told his disci-

ples on the eve of his death. "But take heart; I have overcome the world." The Apostle Paul further described peace not as the absence of worldly troubles, but as the comfort we can have in the certainty of our ultimate victory in Christ. "The peace of God," he wrote, "which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

God spoke of this peace through the prophet Isaiah when he foretold of the coming Messiah. "There will be no more gloom for those who were in distress," he promised, because "the people walking in darkness have seen a great light." The light he referred to is Jesus, described as "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his... peace there will be no end." Each Christmas, we can have peace in knowing that God kept his promise by sending Jesus. While the troubles of this world are only temporary, Christ's victory over them will last forever.

-JW Gonzales

Peace

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10

Peace is something we all desire. To be free of problems, trouble, and worry would be great but is not at all realistic. Unlike peace, nobody wants the storms of life. Sometimes, I think we even define peace as not experiencing conflict or difficulty. Peace is not the absence of storms but being able to trust God in the middle of storms.

God's peace is different than the world's peace. The peace of the world vanishes when trouble comes but God's peace is always there. When the rain clouds form overhead, we can reflect on the fact that Jesus conquered sin on the cross. Standing firm in what Jesus overcame can give us the strength to face whatever comes our way.

The world's peace is fleeting and temporary. God's peace is always with us.

I think its interesting that of all the things Jesus could choose to leave the disciples before he was crucified, he chose peace. He could have chosen to equip them with anything: preaching ability, money or resources for their ministries, knowledge and understanding.

Why peace? Could it be that peace in the midst of pain and suffering, peace that surpasses understanding may have been the most powerful gift Jesus could have ever given his friends? That same peace is available to us through the Holy Spirit. When the storms of life inevitably come, do not let your hearts be troubled!

John 14:27 (CEV)

I give you peace, the kind of peace only I can give. It isn't like the peace this world can give. So don't be worried or afraid.

-Natalie Baker

Romans 12:17-18 (NIV)

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Peace

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11

Advent invites us to wait, not just for the coming of Jesus, but also for the coming of peace. Waiting for peace seems like an honest and accurate description of life for so many right now. Where is the peace in the schedules, peace in the mind, peace in the heart, peace in the friendships, peace in the politics, peace in the broken systems, peace in the sorrowful friends and the suffering world? I know peace is not yet fully realized, but these days I'm often looking around to witness any at all.

In these verses, Paul tells us "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." Paul is acknowledging here that peace is difficult, that peace takes effort, that peace is active participation not passive acceptance. He does not ensure that peace will always be reached, but he does emphasize that we bear responsibility for pursuing it. "As far as it depends on you," recognizes that we have no control over the choices of others, but we can choose our own posture toward the world in our tone, our openness, our willingness to listen and forgive and show compassion. Peace flourishes not in the waiting, but in the practice.

When much feels out of control, may we control what we can through the peace of Christ in us. When anger arises, let compassion speak first. When judgement springs forth, may a listening ear be ready. When frustration boils up, may patience settle us down. When hatred feels real, may love remind us of their own belovedness.

So as we wait for the Prince of Peace to be born, may we create peace in our midst, one act of love at a time.

-Katelyn McWilliams

Peace

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12

As I put my youngest daughter to bed last night she was just bursting with excitement because at the time I wrote this Halloween was just a few days away. She could barely contain the anticipation of the upcoming holiday. While I reminisced about my own childhood and the joy of the holiday season, I pondered when that change happens. You know, the change where the holidays shift from pure magic to dare I say it, the anxiety of the upcoming season. The list of the to do's and must buys and scheduling out each day to make sure we have the house decorated and the Christmas cards sent out. That we make it to the parade and bake the cookies. Buy and wrap the presents, make it to the Christmas parties. That we of course listen to Christmas music and drive around to see the Christmas lights. That we have the menu planned for Christmas Eve, Christmas morning and after we open the presents on Christmas day. The list goes on and on and we do it every year.

After I tucked my youngest into bed, I found my oldest daughter and asked if the magic was still there for her. She said yes. Of course it is! She still gets to be the child and soak up and enjoy each moment. She's not in charge of the planning or the gifts. So how can we do the same? We have to remember to be the children. We are our Father's children. He has done the planning. He had the plan in motion from the very beginning. And on Christmas we get to celebrate the plan coming to Earth. It is magical. It is special. It brings tears to my eyes when I really think about it. The baby Jesus coming to Earth to carry out the plan that was there all along. The greatest gift we can ever receive- that of our Savior. The plan has already been laid out and the gift has been given. We can be the children and just receive it and enjoy it!

Psalm 29:11 (KJV)

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

-Tanya Williams

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

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13

As a mom of an 11-year-old boy and a baby on the way, I keep a busy schedule between work, school, sporting activities, appointments, family time and the list goes on. Through a normal day I probably process many emotions

and sometimes end up with worry, fear, anxiety, guilt, or stress. It's usually not full of peace. This is probably true for many of us in life as we try to keep up with all the things going on in our lives and around the world. It's not too hard to lose the peace we long for in today's bustling and uncertain world.

The great news is that peace in Christ is always available. In Colossians, Paul reminds us of this, and he tells us it is a choice that we must choose. We have to "let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your heart." It doesn't matter what is going on in our personal lives or in the world, we have to choose peace from Christ. We can choose to let worry, fear, and anxiety take over, or we can choose peace. It is something we, or at least I, must work at and purposely accept and it doesn't mean that there will be no trouble or fear. I have to learn to surrender that fear or anxiety to God and know that He is in control.

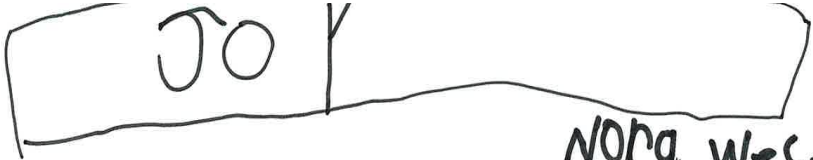
Christ's peace is one that is always available. It is not dependent on circumstances or what we have or have not done. It's readily available and he is always there to provide it, when we accept it. This world is too much for us and we cannot do it alone, but thankfully He is there watching over us and waiting for us to call on Him.

When times of worry, fear, stress or anxiety hit in your world, take a few deep breaths, maybe go for a walk, do some yoga, or even find something to make you smile, and most importantly say a prayer asking Christ for his peace. Let His peace fill you and always remember that you belong to God and He can hold it all together for you. Despite the hustle and bustle this Christmas season, aim to keep some peace in your daily life and fully enjoy all the season's celebrations.

-Stefanie Beames

Joy

WEEK 3



Nora West
age 5



Nora West, 5 years old

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

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14

Bursting with Joy

One of my favorite Christmas movies is Elf. There's a scene that never fails to make me smile—Buddy the Elf spots a sign that reads "World's Best Coffee" and, in true Buddy fashion, he bursts through the door, thrilled to congratulate those he believes made the finest cup of coffee on Earth. He's overflowing with joy, eager to

celebrate and share the discovery with others.

It's a funny moment, but also a powerful picture. Buddy believed the sign without hesitation. His joy was immediate, contagious, and uncontainable. It makes me wonder: do we approach the gospel with that same kind of excitement? Are we bursting through doors, hearts full of joy, ready to invite others into the good news of Jesus?

Joy, by definition, is a deep emotion of great delight or happiness caused by something exceptionally good or satisfying. But biblical joy goes even deeper—it's not fleeting like the thrill of a new gift or a seasonal treat. True joy is rooted in the presence of God, sustained by the Holy Spirit, and anchored in a life of righteousness.

Key Takeaways for a Life of Joy:

- Joy is a deep, internal state that outlasts temporary happiness
- Joy is discovered through pursuing God and living righteously
- Joy remains steady even in trials and hardship
- Joy is more than a feeling—it's a way of being

We see glimpses of this joy all around us: in the eyes of grandparents cradling a newborn grandchild, in the quiet kindness of a coworker who radiates peace and positivity. These moments reflect the joy of Christ—and they draw others toward Him.

This Advent season, let's be like Buddy. Let's believe the good news with childlike wonder. Let's burst through doors, hearts full of joy, ready to share the message of Jesus with everyone we meet.

-Suzanne Ratcliff

Joy

MONDAY, DECEMBER 15

Our son, Jon Sean, passed away last December 17th during his sleep. Medical examination revealed no specific cause for his passing- just "complications associated with cerebral palsy," a malady that had affected him his whole life. It had caused profound effects on his intellectual and physical growth. We had received no medical answers concerning the cause of that condition since we began searching during his first year, and the only suggestions were to encourage his learning at home and in special education classes- always with patience and not expecting great gains.

Sean really exceeded expectations. He could read at an elementary level. He could perform simple tasks with close supervision. And he had learned to sing-pretty well, I thought, given his disabilities.

His life was like ours- centered around family and church, but even in public, he always wanted to greet everyone and tell them about the good things in his life that made him happy. And he was loved by most- so much so that many folks knew me only as "Sean's Dad." At FBC here in Lufkin, for the first time in his life, we found a special class that was dedicated to serving "special" people. He could sing, read the Scripture for the class and was always happy to join me at my pew for the worship service.

His favorite part of worship was the music- especially the hymns of praise- because they are so full of joy. His favorite hymn was "Victory in Jesus," and when it came to the chorus, when the lyrics proclaim, "Victory in Jesus, my Savior forever," he sang with all the joy that he felt, holding his hand high as he could stretch. At Christmas, it was "Hark , the Herald Angels Sing," and "Joy to the World" that he loved the most. He had the lyrics memorized. They were a part of his personality.

In spite of all the curveballs that life had thrown at him, Sean was joyfully triumphant, and I know that he would share that triumph and joy with everyone in this Christmas season of Joy.

Luke 6: 22-23 (TLB)

*What happiness is it
when others hate you and
exclude you and insult
you and smear your name
because you are mine!*

*When that happens,
rejoice! Yes, leap for joy!
For you will have a great
reward awaiting you in
heaven. And you will be
in good company-- the
ancient prophets were
treated that way too!*

-Jim Colley

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

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16

There are days when I feel like I'm running uphill- tired, distracted, and unsure if I'm even on the right track. Feeling lost or invisible in the flow of the race of life. I tend to get lost in my own head and thoughts just for God to remind me I'm not alone in this. I give pause to look around at the people of faith I've surrounded myself with, those who kept believing and showing up even when it was hard. Their lives whisper to me "Keep going. God is faithful." When I'm honest, I know there are things that slow me down—worry, comparison, fear, sometimes even comfort.

God calls for me to lay those things down so I can run freely with my eyes on him. Jesus didn't endure the cross because it was easy. He endured it because of the joy set before him. The joy of redeeming us and making us his own. When I feel weary, when faith feels heavy, I remember: He knows what it's like to struggle. He knows what it means to endure. He didn't think twice, and he did it with joy for us. So, I want to look up. To shift my gaze from my own pace, pain, or pressure, and fix my eyes on Jesus. He's the One who gives me strength to keep running, even when I stumble. The race feels long, and we can't see how it will end, but he's already run ahead of us and is calling us forward.

-Lacey Cummings

Joy

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17

Notice the angels said, "...good tidings of great JOY" not "...good tidings of great HAPPINESS." There is a big difference between joy and happiness. Happiness is a reaction to something great. Joy is the product of someone great.

The angel's message to the shepherds was simple but life-changing: Fear not. God's answer to fear was not a command to be brave but the announcement of good news—the birth of Jesus Christ.

This message brings great joy because it meets our greatest need. We were separated from God by sin, but through Christ, we are offered forgiveness and new life. The angel revealed three truths about who Jesus is:

- A Saviour – the One who rescues us from sin and restores our relationship with God.
- Christ – the promised Messiah, the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption.
- The Lord – God Himself, who came in human form to live among us.

The shepherds were the first to hear this good news. They were common people chosen by God to receive and share the message. This reminds us that the gospel is for everyone, regardless of background, status, or past mistakes.

Chris Tomlin's song "My Soul Magnifies the Lord" echoes this truth:

*"Good news of great joy for every woman, every man—
This will be a sign to you: a baby born in Bethlehem.
Come and worship, do not be afraid."*

Just as the shepherds were told not to fear, we can live in that same confidence today. No matter what uncertainty or darkness surrounds us, Jesus' birth is still the foundation of our peace and the source of lasting joy.

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.*

-Gabe Keese

Psalm 119:110-112 (ESV)

The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts. Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart. I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end.

Joy

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18

Joy is in your salvation and in the fact that Jesus gave his life for us so that we could be saved. "No one can take your joy from you" John 16:22.

Joy and Love are two of my favorite words. They are wonderful functions of

the heart. Joy is given and received. The joy received from the Lord should be shared with others.

Joy is with us in good times and in difficult times. At some point in our lives, we may have had some difficult times. The joy of knowing that the Lord is with you, in good times and bad times, and that in bad times, you can ask for strength to make it through, you have the joy of knowing that He will grant you that strength.

In the scripture I was given, Psalms 119:110-112, joy comes to the heart by obeying all the laws, in spite of those temptations to the evil around us. There is joy in obeying the laws of God and the land. These are some of my greatest joys:

1. *Walking through the forests of East Texas and seeing all the nature that God created. It gives me peace and joy within.*
2. *Relishing in the accomplishment of my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. However, the greatest of these is having one of the greats run up to you and giving you a big hug.*
3. *Doing something for the residents of a nursing home, whether with a visit, or remembering them in some way on holidays. Many of them are lonely.*
4. *Waking up to a beautiful day.*
5. *We are instructed to make a joyful noise unto the Lord. Singing "Joy to the World" at Christmas is a great joy.*
6. *Saying "Good Morning" to a stranger you meet when you are out and about. You may make their day.*
7. *Attending a church where you feel at home with your fellow church members.*
8. *Friends*
9. *The greatest joy is knowing and trusting in the Lord.*

In conclusion, to me, joy is like sunshine in the heart. We should spread that sunshine to others. Having a good attitude and forgiving nature goes a long way in helping us spread joy.

-Harry Stafford

Joy

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19

When I sat down to write about joy, I wanted to provide something that was deep and insightful, but one central idea continued to come to my mind: laughter. I have been blessed to have two children of my own and spend time with so many other children through Sunday School and through my job. There are few moments as special as a child's laughter. The way that children can stop everything and lose themselves completely in the moment reframes what is important in our hectic lives.

As an adult, we sometimes think that those moments are a derailment of our agenda, but maybe those moments are the point. Those moments of laughter are pure joy. We become so busy during the Christmas season with parties, events, performances and traditions, that we don't let laughter have a seat at the table with us. We think of laughter as being irreverent even. Then you think about the way that Jesus wanted children to have the opportunity to come to him; maybe that's because he could really laugh with them. He could find true joy with them.

I pray that this season your families are able to find joy and laughter, and even in the busiest of moments that we take joy with us this Christmas.

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!

-Casey Adams

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

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20

"The opposite of joy is not sadness.
It's hopelessness." – Timothy Keller

Isaiah is writing in this passage to the people in Zebulun and Naphtali, the most northern tribes, who were the first to suffer from the Assyrian conquest. This part of the Promised Land suffered repeatedly during biblical times. The Assyrians invaded and resettled this area before any other in the country, and they gloated about the yokes that they put on the people.

In my humble opinion, hopelessness in their situation was a very reasonable response!

Yet Isaiah tells them that a light is coming. That it will burst forth and push away all the darkness that they are living in and through. He is painting them a word picture of a bright and beautiful future that they can ground themselves in. It is this hope of a coming light that their joy is founded on. Not their present circumstances.

As a modern Christian trying to walk faithfully in God's will, I recognize a lot here. My current world certainly has dark corners right now. There is still devastating war and intractable hunger. There are cold hearts lacking faith and compassion all around. Sin tempts and conquers still. My own walk falters and seems to stand still, unable to move forward under its own power.

And yet...,

I look and there is a light shining in the darkness, my darkness. Christ has come, is coming, and will come again!

Therefore, whatever my circumstances today or tomorrow, I do have and will have joy!

Come soon, Lord Jesus!

-Catherine Roberts

Love

WEEK 4



Preston Gonzales, 3 years old

Proverbs 10:12 (NIV)

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

Love

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21

What is Love? Such a simple word but it has so many meanings. Every person would describe Love in many different ways. Love is mentioned between 310-684 times in the Bible, depending on the translation. Hate on the other hand on average is mentioned only 125 times. The Bible says mankind is made in the image of God and God is Love. It is one of the central themes and driving forces of God's word.

1 Corinthians 13:4 states that Love is patient, Love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. If we all lived by that verse, what a better world this would be. It can be one of the greatest feelings you can feel. Jesus showed Love by teaching compassion through his actions and words, performing acts of service, healing the sick and by dying for humanity.

I feel so lucky to have so many friends that love me. I know they do because they show me Love every day. Do we Love the way Jesus loved? That is a question we should all ask ourselves. I know I will never be able to reach that level but it will be what I strive for everyday.

Alan Jackson wrote a song after the 911 attacks called *Where Were You When the World Stopped Turning*. In those lyrics he wrote:

*Faith, Hope, and Love, are some of the good things He gave us,
and the greatest is Love.*

We should all use Love in our feelings and emotions daily with our family, friends and strangers. Let's all try to live our lives in Love.

-Pat Nicholson

Love

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22

As Christians, we're called to love. But what does that really mean?

I've spent the past three years, at SFA, studying to be a teacher. Therefore, I've spent a lot of time learning how to set expectations for my future students. In classrooms, children often gather at the rug to talk about what something looks like and sounds like; whether it's kindness, respect, or following directions. They describe it together, so everyone understands what's expected.

So, what if we did the same with love? What if we met Jesus at the metaphorical "rug" and asked Him, "Lord, what does love look like?"

In Jesus' context, love looked like giving His life. While we may not be called to crucifixion, there are other forms of sacrifice that we can bear. Maybe that looks like offering your full attention to someone instead of thinking about everything else you must do. Maybe it means sacrificing your time to serve in one of our church ministries. There is always something we can do to display the love of Christ, regardless of age, gender, or income.

When we sit at the rug with Jesus, He reminds us that love isn't just a feeling; it's an action. It looks like forgiveness when it's hard. It sounds like encouragement instead of criticism. It shows up in service, humility, and grace.

This Advent season, as we prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ, may we pause long enough to ask Him to teach us again what love looks like, sounds like, and feels like in our everyday lives. Because just like those children in the classroom, there is always something more to learn.

1 John 4: 9-10 (NLT)

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through Him. This is real love -- not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

-Briley Stevens

1 Corinthians 13:13 (NLT)

*And now these three remain:
faith, hope and love. But the
greatest of these is love.*

Love

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23

1 Corinthians 13:13 tells us how important love is. This makes me wonder what really is love? Is love opening presents on Christmas Eve? Is it drinking hot chocolate and watching Christmas movies with my

family? I think all of that is love, but love is also way more. Love is hope and faith, but without love, scripture says that having faith is nothing. Obviously, the greatest example of love is God sending his only son to come and be sacrificed on a cross to take away our sins. Because of this, I think love is selflessness and sacrifice. Love can be small things, like paying for your friend's meal, sitting with someone who normally sits alone at lunch, or noticing when someone is sad and needs help. Faith and hope don't make up for the sacrifices, the care, or the attentiveness to other people that comes with love. This is why love is so important and great.

During Advent, I hope to practice the qualities of love described in 1 Corinthians 13 – love is patient, kind, does not boast, is not proud, is not self-seeking or easily angered, and keeps no record of wrongs. This helps me remember how to live, not only in the season of Advent, but all year. I am thankful that God's love never fails.

-Lydia Koch



CAROLS
CANDLES
& COMMUNION

Christmas Eve

12/24
5:30PM

Psalm 89:1 (NIV)

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

Love

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Love truly did come down at Christmas
through the birth of our Savior! We
should respond to this great love by
worship and singing! In Psalm 89:1,
we are reminded to sing of the Lord's
great love forever! Even heaven and
nature sing and rejoice!

O come, all ye faithful! Come adore
Him! As God gave His only Son, He demonstrated true love by
rescuing humanity from sin and death. Through the gift of Jesus
and His sacrifice on the cross, we have forgiveness of sins and the
promise of eternal salvation! This is love! Christmas reminds us
that God is present with us and wants to transform and redeem
our lives. Knowing that all people are worthy of God's love, may
we in turn show love and forgiveness to others and go tell the
good news - on the mountain, over the hills, and everywhere!

I wish you a wonderful Christmas as you remember Jesus, your
Redeemer and Deliverer, and the great love He has for you!

Come and Worship! Worship Christ the newborn King!

-Delise McIlveene

Love

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25

The Word became
flesh and made His
dwelling among us.
We have seen His
glory, the glory of
the one and only
Son, who came
from the Father,
full of grace and
truth.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Today we celebrate the greatest gift of all, a God that is not far off, that is not distant or detached but is here among his people. Emmanuel, God is with us! On this Christmas Day, may you pause amid the laughter, wrapping paper, presents, and songs to remember the heart of it all. The Word that became flesh. The Creator who stepped into his creation. A Deity who came to dwell among us. Aren't we grateful that we worship a God that came close to us on that wonderful Christmas morning thousands of years ago!

-Walker

Notes:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

Notes:

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Notes:

[illegible]

Notes:

[illegible]



Copyright © 2025 First Baptist Church Lufkin