

THE BRIDGE

COMMUNITY CHURCH



2021

We hope this guide helps your heart to "prepare Him room"
as we remember Jesus' birth and eagerly await His return.
These devotions can be used individually or with family and
friends. Many thanks to those who contributed!



Scan this to access the Christmas Spotify Playlist!



WEEK 1: HOPE

By Natalie Richardson

"And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us...for we long for our bodies to be released from sin & suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us...the new bodies he has promised us. We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently." Romans 8:23-25 (NLT)

Do those verses speak to your soul as they do to mine? If so, then perhaps you too are in a weary season where your story looks like ashes around you. Our hope began all the way back at the beginning in the garden. But throughout the ages, as God has fulfilled promise after promise, His trustworthy character has been made more and more evident to us. His credibility has never really been in question, but I am so grateful that we have a God who acknowledges the nature of our hearts to wander, to question, to lament, to grieve, to wonder, and to stray. All over the book of Psalms it calls us back to belief...back because He is acknowledging that perhaps we have moved. It tells us to remind our souls of God's faithfulness...remind because perhaps we have forgotten. Tim Mackie, from The Gospel Project, has said that the entire book of Psalms was written because of this tendency. It was written to "legitimize the human struggle & the tension of holding on to hope when it looks like I have no reason to". Thank you God! I don't know about you but that brings relief that my wandering & wondering & questioning are not unique to me. I don't have to pretend they aren't there. So, in the Christmas story where is this evident? Where is God showing His faithfulness? In a stable, on a hill, in the night God made Himself human to usher in one of the greatest parts of His plan! Let Christmas remind you, friend, that He is a God who will do what He says He will do. If you are in a weary season, if your story does not look like God is for you, if your life is currently in ashes...rest assured, friend, that doesn't mean He is not faithful. It means He is not done. God is a God we can put our hope in. The Jews waited for over 4000 years from the garden to the stable. We are in the next phase of God's plan. We can see His birth & His resurrection in our rear view mirror, to help us hold onto hope for His coming again. That is my encouragement to you. Let Christmas remind you that He is faithful. You can trust him. You can hold onto hope.

Lets pray Romans 15:13 (AMP) together: *"May the God of Hope fill us with all joy & peace in believing that by the power of the Holy Spirit we will abound in hope & overflow with confidence in His promises."* Amen.

Questions:

1. Where have you seen God's faithfulness in your story?
2. Where do you currently feel a struggle to hold on to hope? Is there a relationship in shambles, a child in rebellion, a sin you are feeling powerless to?
3. Remind your soul of what Jesus' birth means (spoiler alert...it paves the way for Easter!). Tell your soul the truth of the Gospel. And then pray Romans 15:13 again.





WEEK 2: PEACE

By Caleb Babineaux

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" Hebrews 12:1.

As a runner, there are all types of days I have; from easy runs to races, they all have their own challenges that push me. Through it all though, once finished there is a sense of completeness, or shalom (the Hebrew word for peace). There are ups and downs in life that God doesn't guarantee will be easy but says through Him we will find peace. Just like any day of running there can be a good race but also a bad race that we can never truly prepare ourselves for. Likewise in life when we come across a bad race all we can do is run to God. He is the only one who can give true peace and comfort that we search for in the world. The great thing is, when running in life is a challenge, God is there and desires for us to come to Him for when times get difficult. And although God may not give us immediate resolution when we seek it, He does give us comfort even if it's not in the way we expected. In the midst of the Christmas season, we are reminded of the Prince of Peace being born into our broken world to mend our brokenness. When we place our faith in Him, we can be settled with peace that comes from knowing Him even in the chaotic world in which we live.

"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." Philippians 4:6-7

Questions:

1. In your race of faith, how have you seen God lift you out of a difficult season and given you peace?
2. How can you remember that peace is from God when the things of this world are going your way?

Pray: God, I thank you for this season of love and joy you've given me. I thank you for being here even amidst the times that can be chaotic. I pray that you open my eyes to see the peace and light in this dark and crazy world. In all that the world gives us, please be with us and give us comfort. In your Son's name we pray, Amen.





WEEK 3: JOY

By Amy Beasley

I taught my kids some basic Latin in our homeschool. I love etymology, and I love what I learn about my own language through the study of ancient languages. *Adventus* is translated *come, arrive at, reach, be brought to*. A verb, yet clearly where we derive our English noun for this time in the church's calendar we call Advent. We remember Israel's waiting for the coming promise of hope and redemption. We stand ready for our own hearts to be brought to the manger side—to see that hope in flesh! And while we wait, we wait with **joy**.

Happiness is a temporary feeling dependent upon good circumstances, while joy is a deep, sustainable contentment that is dependent upon trust in a sovereign God--regardless of circumstances. I love how Tim Mackie from The Bible Project puts it, "Joy is an attitude **God's people** [emphasis mine] adopt, not because of their circumstances, but because of their hope in God's love and promises." Joy is a choice, yes, but know this: That choice is only possible if we understand and believe the gospel story. Only if we know the Joy-Giver.

One of my favorite Advent scriptures is Isaiah 9:2-3 (CSB): "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness. You have enlarged the nation and increased its **joy**. The people have **rejoiced** before you as they **rejoice** at harvest time..." There it is. Joy *in* darkness. But why? Because the Light was coming. And the Light is coming. And the prophet knew it.

It's beautiful to me how synonymous the ideas of waiting (suffering, darkness, etc.) and joy are within the metanarrative of scripture. All throughout the Old Testament, tiny flickers of light begin to peak though as early as Genesis 3:15, and continue on through countless others, like this one in Isaiah, showing the waiting/suffering Hebrew people (and now us) that the story isn't over. Then finally in the New Testament (Luke 2), the promise is finally announced "with great **joy** for all people"!

Can *you* find joy in the midst of crisis, heartbreak, and tragedy? For me, it was only through those things that I discovered true joy. Often that's what it takes. Again, Tim Mackie. "If you believe that Jesus's love has overcome even death itself, joy becomes reasonable, even in the darkest of circumstances."





WEEK 4: LOVE

By Byron Moore

When I was young my father traveled a lot in his business. It wasn't unusual for us to get up on a given morning, see an empty place at the breakfast table, and ask Mom, "Where's Dad?" "Chicago," she might say. Or London. Or even Tokyo! Dad took frequent flying to another level. Honestly, I didn't care much for his traveling. But what I always looked forward to was his homecoming. "He's here!" was the only signal needed for us to hear to rush out the door to greet him. Kneeling down, he would greet us with hugs, kisses, questions and stories about where he'd been. I can still feel his whiskers rubbing against my smooth face as he gave me a tight hug. While he occasionally brought gifts with him from his travels, today I can't remember one of them. What I remember is him. I didn't realize it then, but every time I heard "He's here!", what my little heart was hearing was "He loves me! He came for me! He's here!" In those moments, I was happy down to the core of my little heart. Isn't that what Jesus has done for us? Can't we also hear the angels crying out to our own hearts, "He's here! He loves you! He came for you!"

"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

1 John 4:9-10 (ESV)

Questions:

1. Do you like the "going away" or the "coming home" part of traveling best?
2. What makes you feel loved the most?
3. How would it feel if you found out God loves you 100x that much?





EPIPHANY

By Terrie Queen Autrey

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will name him Emmanuel, which means God with us." Matthew 1:23

As the matriarch of generations, Leta Autrey is a strong and determined woman with a lively curiosity and a love for people. At 93, she is still adjusting to the loss of her lifelong love, Sam, who died just before COVID struck. She was living alone for the first time in nearly 70 years when she suddenly faced the isolation of the pandemic. Despite these circumstances, Leta's faith has sustained her. "I think about God WITH us," she said, "and that helps me so much. When I struggle, I think of Him, right here beside me." She patted the armrest of her chair. "But God is also FOR us," she said. "He loves us and He is on our side. Psalm 118:6 says, "The Lord is for me; I will not fear." Holding her finger up like the outstanding 5th grade teacher she once was, she repeated the two promises: "God is with us, and God is for us." When we are hurting, sick, or lonely, it is easy to think, "Where is God?" Does the tender and constant love of God described in these verses help you walk through hard or uncertain times? The notion of "fully God and fully man" can be difficult to grasp. Do you see the baby in the manger as "God with us"?

Pray: *Father, we are all wounded, and we often feel alone. Help us remember the peace and promises that the birth of Jesus brought to our world: God with us. God for us. God ready to save us. Allow these truths to open space in our hearts for the holy grace and piercing joy of Christmas. Amen.*

