



DAY NUMBER ONE

Scripture Readings:

Isaiah 9:6-11; Isaiah 11; Jeremiah 33:14-16; Matthew 24:30-31; John 14:1-3; Revelation 1:7-8

Devotional: “Advent”

The word “advent” is rooted in a Latin word simply meaning, “coming”. Advent is a season of expectant waiting and preparation for the coming of Christ. This side of the life, death and resurrection of Christ, we are able to celebrate this season of advent in two distinct ways. We look back and identify with those that awaited and longed for the arrival of the Messiah foretold to them. We do this from a perspective infused with knowing that God, in His faithfulness, provided that Messiah in Jesus, just as the Scriptures prophesied. We also look ahead, in expectation and longing for the second coming of Christ.

Advent is not a biblical mandate, but a tradition implored among the Christian tradition to set our minds and hearts on the coming of Christ. It is our prayer that in the weeks leading up to the day on which we celebrate the birth of Christ, that you and your family would take time to meditate on God’s Word together and to adore the Son and His advent, which brought us rescue and redemption. Through the coming weeks, we will look closer into the implications of advent, that Christ provided, in Himself, hope, peace, joy and love. We experience a glimpse of these things in the earthly realm, as they ultimately find their source in Christ. He is the Hope of the World, the Prince of Peace, the Fullness of Joy and the Lover of our Souls.

DAY NUMBER TWO

Scripture Readings:

Hebrews 6:11-12; Hebrews 10:22-23; Hebrews 11:1; Luke 1:5-17

Devotional: “What is Hope?”

There is a distinct difference between the definition of hope used from an ordinary human standpoint, and the definition of hope we find in the pages of Scripture. It is pretty common to hope, right? We *hope* we get a job. We *hope* our kids are well behaved. We *hope* we make enough money to pay our bills. But our human hope implies a degree of uncertainty, things are not sure, they are possibilities but not certainties. In Scripture, however, hope is void of uncertainty. In fact, certainty is at its core, because it rests in the

stability of God, His character and His will, which are unwavering. Biblical hope, then, can be defined as, “the confident expectation and desire for something good in the future.”

We also see in Scripture the close connection between hope and faith. In Hebrews 6:11-12, the writer of Hebrews uses the term, “full assurance of hope”. This phrase is also used in Hebrews 10:22 and translated, “full assurance of faith”. Faith defined for us in Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is both the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. So hope is an element of faith looking specifically toward the future, while faith encompasses a belief and trust in God for our past, our present, and our future. This distinction is critical to understanding the confidence that lies in a biblically defined hope. Hope is essential to our faith.

DAY NUMBER THREE

Scripture Readings:

1 Peter 1:3-5; Romans 5:1-11; Romans 12:12; Luke 1:18-25

Devotional: “Why Hope?”

It doesn't take long to look around the world, into the present darkness and evil that surrounds us, and conclude that we have little reason to hope. We all experience pain and suffering. Peace and safety are hard to come by. Injustice, sorrow, sickness, poverty and violence are all alive and well. *But* The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). When Jesus stepped onto the scene, hope was made possible. The advent of Christ ushers in hope.

When we trust the work of Christ on the Cross for salvation, we are saved by faith (Ephesians 2:8). Given that hope is faith in the future tense, we, as believers, have hope, we possess it and it is ours for the taking. It is at the root of our saving knowledge, understanding and belief in Christ. And if we believe that Christ bore the weight of our sin on the cross and defeated death in His resurrection, Peter says that we are born into a *living* hope, a hope in Jesus' victory on our behalf, no matter the trials and tribulations of this world.

Having been justified, we rejoice in the hope of God's glory, even in the midst of suffering. In fact, as believers, suffering produces hope, because we know that despite our present troubles, God's love has been poured out on our behalf in Christ. As His followers, life will be difficult, but our hope is not at the mercy of our circumstances and our perspective is not limited to what is seen, but is wrapped up in the truth of the Gospel for all eternity. We have hope and can hope because it has been given to us in Christ.

DAY NUMBER FOUR

Scripture Readings:

Lamentations 3:21-24; Romans 8; Hebrews 10:23; Jeremiah 33:14-16

Devotional: “The Source of Hope”

What does it look like to hope, in an earthly sense? When you find yourself hoping for a specific outcome, for a change in circumstances or a favorable result, what emotions are present? Are you fearful? Insecure? Anxious? Earthly hope is often ridden with anxiety. We are either biting our lip hoping our team makes that final free throw, or we're up in the middle of the night hoping to hear from an estranged friend. We worry things won't turn out the way we want or even the way we've planned. But this is unlike the hope that we have in God.

Most often our hope wavers because it is rooted in an act of will and therefore lacks a stable foundation. In the examples previously mentioned, our hope is in a player or a friend. We can't be sure that they will act in a certain way, or if they do, that they will succeed. But Biblical hope lacks no such certainty. It is confident and fully assured because it is rooted in the faithfulness of God, that is its source. This is most evidenced in God's provision for us in Christ. We look toward the fulfillment of all His promises in Scripture, and particularly to the return of Christ, knowing that His character is defined by unwavering faithfulness. He is unchanging, He is for us (Romans 8:31), and He is working things out for our good (Romans 8:28).

Where is your hope rooted? What characteristics of God can you rest your hope in today?

DAY NUMBER FIVE

Scripture Readings:

Psalm 42:1-11; Psalm 43:1-5; 1 Peter 3:13-17; Colossians 1:27; Luke 1:26-45

Devotional: *"How Do We Live Out Hope?"*

If we know that hope comes from God and that it is possessed by the believer upon salvation, why is it so difficult to live out? Why are so many of us, as Christians, hopeless?

As we take a closer look at hope, Scripture not only gives us the source of hope and the reason for hope's inhabitation, but also the way in which we can abound in hope. Hope is made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13). When we put our faith and trust in Christ for salvation, He graciously gives us His Spirit. His Spirit is Christ in us, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). God has given us hope, but we must abide in Him and His Spirit in us, in order to experience and live out hope.

The beauty of the hope ushered in through Christ and made alive in us through His Spirit, is that it gives us the ability to have abiding hope, that transcends earthly circumstances and uncertainty. We begin to hope not *for* a certain result or outcome, but *in* the love of God displayed in Christ on the Cross. This makes our circumstances a wash, which can prove a powerful testimony for those that don't know Christ. In fact, Peter foresees our hope as something that sets us apart, something that we should be ready to give a reason for in order to point others toward Christ (1 Peter 3:15).

So is it ok to hope circumstantially; for a new job? for a relationship to flourish? for a kid to do well in sports or in school? for a business deal to succeed? Yes. However, our hope is rooted in Christ, no matter and sometimes despite the eventual outcome. Is the focus of your hope *for* something or *in* the person of Jesus? Who can you share that with today?

DAY NUMBER SIX

Scripture Readings:

Romans 4:16-25; Hebrews 6:9-12; Luke 1:46-56; Luke 1:57-80

Devotional: *"Doubt: A Hindrance to Hope"*

If faith as a whole, which encompasses hope, is "the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1)," it is appropriate that it would be countered in our lives and hearts by doubt, which is defined as a feeling of uncertainty or lack of conviction.

Paul attributes faith to Abraham and describes the connection between that faith and hope saying, "In hope he believed against hope." (Romans 4:18) He believed *against hope* from a human perspective and believed *in hope* resting on the character of God. In fact, Abraham's circumstances seemed humanly impossible. The promise of an heir was hopeless in the face of old age and barrenness. But when hope rests on God, who can and does, in fact, do the impossible (Matthew 19:26), the realm of possibility has no bounds. Our hope abounds in His ability, His goodness and His faithfulness toward us, His children. We have "full assurance of hope."

Too often we are afraid to hope for things because we doubt they are possible or we doubt the will on which they rest. Maybe we've been let down, we have past wounds and grave disappointments that cloud our ability to hope. Our past experience or present circumstances create looming doubt and disbelief in future good. It is in these moments that we must shift our focus from the temporary to the eternal and to the truth of the Gospel. We must draw on truth from God's Word, truth that affirms His unchanging character and His great love for us displayed in Christ. The power of the Gospel shatters doubt.

DAY NUMBER SEVEN

Scripture Readings:

Genesis 1:31; Psalm 4:8; Psalm 34:14; Matthew 8:23-27; Matthew 1:18-22

Devotional: "What is Peace?"

"True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice." MLK

Martin Luther King Jr. knew that true peace was not just the day when violence on the basis of race would end, but when all people would come together for the mutual benefit of others. Peace is not simply getting children to stop bickering with each other, it is seeing them *enjoy* one another.

From the very beginning of time, peace was understood to be not simply the absence of that which is bad, but also the presence of that which is good.

In the Bible, the Hebrew word used for peace is "shalom". Shalom means wholeness, complete flourishing of a person's life. Biblically, shalom is often used to reference a person's life being whole with God. Perhaps the best way to think of peace is to think back to those first days on earth, before sin. Think back to what God said after He created the heavens and the earth and all that is within it. "And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good (Genesis 1:31)." God created everything to operate in perfect harmony with one another and with God. This is shalom; this is peace.

Do you have this peace? Is your soul flourishing with your Creator? Can you look at your life and say, "It is very good"? Good news, it is yours to be had!

DAY NUMBER EIGHT

Scripture Readings:

Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 14:33; Philippians 1:2; Psalm 46:10; Luke 2:1-5

Devotional: "Why Peace?"

Can you imagine a world where everything is good? Where shalom is the norm? Where every person, every endeavor, every thought is good? This was the world God created. This was a place of peace, of flourishing, for all people and all things, to the glory of God and the good of others.

It didn't take long for peace to move to hostility. It didn't take long for mutual benefit to move to selfish ambition. Today, we live in a world where peace is often times hard to come by. But a world of hostility, hatred and selfish ambition is not the life God intends for us. God desires a kingdom of peace, of righteousness, of joy for all in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). God has created us to live in peace and to reflect the God of peace (1 Corinthians 14:33) that we serve with our lives.

When we live in peace, God is glorified because He is the God of peace. We reflect Him through peace, but we also receive lives of good, of flourishing. This is why peace matters!

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." For His glory and our good!

DAY NUMBER NINE

Scripture Readings:

Isaiah 9:6; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Isaiah 26:3; Luke 2:6-7

Devotional: *"The Source of Peace"*

As previously mentioned, peace was broken in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve brought sin into God's good and peaceful world. The peaceful relationship between God and man, and man and one another, is now hostile and damaged.

Often times, when hostility exists between two parties, a mediator is needed to stand in between the two parties and bring reconciliation. The mediator's sole job is to restore peace between the two, to bring flourishing back into their lives. Therefore, what is needed to restore peace between us and God is also a Mediator. In order to have peace with God, someone needs to reconcile us back to God, bringing peace into our lives. A long time ago, Isaiah would tell us that this Mediator would one day come, and that He is the Prince of Peace (9:6).

Who is this Mediator that Isaiah wrote about? Who is this Prince of Peace? Who is this person who would offer to reconcile us back to God and bring true peace into our lives?

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you." (John 14:27)

Jesus said, "My peace I give to you." (John 14:27)

Jesus said, "in me you may have peace." (John 16:33)

Jesus is that Mediator. Jesus is the one who would stand between God and mankind in order to restore peace, to reconcile our relationship with God. When Jesus was born, peace came into our world!

DAY NUMBER TEN

Scripture Readings:

Luke 7:36-50; Luke 8:43-48; Luke 19:1-10; Luke 2:8-12

Devotional: “How Do We Experience Peace?”

She knew she wasn't supposed to be there. It was the house of a Pharisee, a religious leader in the community, and there she was, a sinner, a “woman of the city.” Everyone knew of the turmoil in her life. Most of all, she knew. Her soul was in chaos because of the sin in her life. Hostility with others and with God followed her at all times.

But something drew her to this house. Rather, someone drew her in. This woman knew deep in her soul that if peace were to ever be found in her life, Jesus, the Prince of Peace, could give it to her. In an incredible act of faith, this woman threw herself at the feet of Jesus, weeping from her sin, broken from the peace missing in her life. She knew God had created her for more, for good and for peace, yet it had been gone for so long. Her life consisted of sin, not peace. Maybe, just maybe, Jesus would give her a taste of peace in her tormented life.

But, in only eight words, Jesus changed everything. “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” (Luke 7:36-50)

We are all longing for peace in our lives. We all want the brokenness and chaos of sin to be removed and for shalom to enter in. So how do we find true peace? How can we go and live our lives in peace? JESUS! JESUS! JESUS! If we lay our lives at His feet, trust Him with our whole selves, the Prince of Peace will cover us with peace for all our eternity! Jesus is the giver of peace to our lives!

DAY NUMBER ELEVEN

Scripture Readings:

Ephesians 2:13-16; Colossians 3:12-17; Romans 5:1; Psalm 29:11; Luke 2:13-14

Devotional: “How Do We Live in Peace With Others?”

For thirty years, the Berlin Wall stood separating families, friends and fellow countrymen from one another. Concrete and barbed wire divided one side of the city from the other. With this wall, peace was impossible. Regardless of the hostility present, they could never socially flourish with this wall dividing them. On November 9, 1989, the wall “fell down” and Berliners were allowed to pass through the formerly locked gates. Millions began to celebrate and chant “Open the gate!” Finally, relationships could be restored and peace could be had.

While the Berlin Wall was a literal wall dividing one from another, all too often we build dividing walls of hostility in our hearts that separate us from others. The hostility we build up may not be literal, but it is just as powerful to keep us from peace with one another.

But Jesus has changed everything. Through His death on the cross, He has removed guilt and sin, offering peace to all who trust their lives in His hands. For all who are now His, we are united into one family, and Jesus has removed every wall of hostility that would keep us from peace with others. When we remember the work Jesus has done to bring peace into our lives, it compels us to move forward in bringing peace to others!

DAY NUMBER TWELVE

Scripture Readings:

Philippians 2:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; John 13:34-35; Matthew 5:9; Luke 2:15-18

Devotional: *“How Do We Take Peace to the World?”*

In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he urges them to have the attitude of a Christ, a posture of humility (Philippians 2:1-11). Humility is considering others as more significant than yourself. It’s not thinking less of yourself, it’s thinking of yourself less so that we can think of others more.

Jesus came to bring us peace, to reconcile our broken relationship with God. And He leaves us here as His representatives, His agents of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). We have an obligation to consider others as more significant than ourselves and to bring to them the hope that they too can be reconciled back to God, they too can have peace with their Creator.

So how can we do that? Love others as Jesus has loved them. Bring peace as Jesus has brought peace. Seek their well-being. Seek peace for their lives. When we genuinely look out for the betterment of others, peace will naturally follow.

DAY NUMBER THIRTEEN

Scripture Readings:

Matthew 10:38-42; Luke 10:41-42

Devotional: *“Busyness – A Hindrance to Peace”*

Many years ago, two sisters had an opportunity that so many of us would dream to have. They had Jesus in their home as their guest. How many of us would love to have Jesus spend time with us in our home? Seriously. Jesus!

But here they were, Mary and Martha, hosting Jesus Christ in their home. Martha, as I imagine so many of us would, wanted to have everything perfect for Jesus. She swept, she straightened, she got drinks, she refilled drinks, she cleaned, she prepared her home perfectly for Jesus. Mary on the other hand did none of that. Mary simply sat at Jesus’ feet, watching, listening, soaking it all in.

Martha, in a frenzied mess, takes ten seconds to call out her lazy sister and ask Jesus if He would intervene. Jesus’ response tells so much. “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:41-42)

In the midst of her busyness, Martha was worked up a restless frenzy, and missed Jesus. Her busyness, while she thought was good hosting, was only a hindrance to experiencing the Prince of Peace. Busyness often times masquerades as productive, even spiritual. But all too often, busyness keeps us from what matters most, sitting at the feet of the Savior and enjoying His peace!

DAY NUMBER FOURTEEN

Scripture Readings:

Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 2:10-11

Devotional: “*What is Joy?*”

Joy is often defined as, “a feeling of great pleasure and happiness.” Too often we confuse joy with happiness and think that someone must be joyful if they are always walking around happy, but that isn’t really how the Bible defines it.

When we believe God is in control of everything, including all the details of our lives, we can be confident that He is always at work to draw us closer to Him in all situations. Not only will that drive us to praise Him, but that will bring us true joy.

Joy isn’t so much a feeling as it is an action of us choosing to trust God in our circumstances.

DAY NUMBER FIFTEEN

Scripture Readings:

Philippians 4:4; Psalm 47:1; Psalm 92:4; James 1:2

Devotional: “*Why Joy?*”

So then, if we know what joy really is, why is it important?

For followers of Christ, when we are filled with joy and we begin to express it, we proclaim to the world that we can rejoice in any situation (Philippians 4:4) and we declare God’s glory with cries of joy (Psalm 47:1). It may not always look pretty, but we can depend on God to deliver us and we can be joyful in the process because of so much that has been done for us through the finished work of Jesus Christ. If we don’t choose joy, we are proclaiming what Jesus did wasn’t enough. That’s why it’s important for us to choose joy every day. There is nothing we will encounter that Jesus can’t relate with us on and that He will not bring us through.

DAY NUMBER SIXTEEN

Scripture Readings:

Luke 10:21; Hebrews 12:1-2; James 1:2-4; Galatians 5:22-23

Devotional: “*The Source of Joy*”

When Jesus was born into this world, He not only provided a way to God the Father, He also modeled joy for us from day one, doing everything in accordance with His Father’s will (Luke 10:21).

- He was joyful in His relationship to His Father.
- He was joyful in serving others as He healed and provided for them.
- He was joyful in passing joy to God’s children.

- He was joyful as He endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2).

This is where joy comes from. This is who joy comes from. Jesus provided the perfect model for us to understand how to find and express real joy, in our relationship with Him and in our relationships with others. Nothing else can even come close to defining joy for us like Jesus can.

If we understand that Jesus forgave all of our past, present, and future sin by dying on the cross for us, paying the penalty of His Father's wrath, and then rising from the dead, how could we *not* find joy through Him? As the Church, we should find joy in all circumstances because of the One who has provided joy for us.

DAY NUMBER SEVENTEEN

Scripture Readings:

Luke 4:18; Psalm 16:11; Romans 15:13; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Psalm 126:3; Luke 2:8-19

Devotional: *"How Do We Live Out Joy Personally?"*

When Jesus was born into this world, it had huge implications. Not only did He come to set the captives free (Luke 4:18), He also came to give His followers a brand new identity (2 Corinthians 5:17). Have you decided to put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ? If so, your entire identity has changed!

The love of Christ now compels us to live for Him and seek to glorify God in everything we do instead of trying to glorify ourselves. It's a lifelong process, continuing to learn how to live for Jesus instead of living for ourselves.

Personally, we live out joy in our lives by spending time with God through prayer, reading the Bible, and trusting that the Holy Spirit will lead us to repentance, out of our old ways and into the newness of life in Christ. God will direct us on what it means to have a new identity and to be joyful in the process.

The Gospel drives our identity. As we progress and continue to see more and more just how sinful we are, we see how holy God really is. What Jesus did on the cross becomes that much more important for us and the cross gets bigger for us each day. The more we realize there is nothing we can do for our salvation and that everything has been done for us through Jesus, the more we can live out joy in our new identity as a follower of Christ.

DAY NUMBER EIGHTEEN

Scripture Readings:

1 Corinthians 13:7; Proverbs 22:6; Exodus 20:12; Philemon 1:7; Romans 13:10; Matthew 2:1-12

Devotional: *"How Do We Live Out Joy With Others?"*

As we follow Jesus and learn to express joy personally, God also provides for us relationships in which to live out joy.

All of us have relationships around us. We have family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and even strangers. Regardless of their relationship status to us, there are specific people God has put directly into our lives for a reason, and we are called to express joy to them because of what Jesus has done for us.

Some examples of this would be for us to be joyful in relationships through loving others well (1 Corinthians 13:7), to be joyful as we train up the children God has put in our lives (Proverbs 22:6), or to honor our parents with joy (Exodus 20:12).

As we follow Jesus and love others, we have an incredible opportunity to refresh the saints (Philemon 1:7) and to make an impact on those who do not yet know Him by the way we love them and do no wrong to them (Romans 13:10). What a joy and privilege that God has given us people to minister to. He sees us fit to bring the good news of the Gospel to so many people and has equipped us with the Holy Spirit to do so!

DAY NUMBER NINETEEN

Scripture Readings:

John 16:24; John 3:16; 1 John 4:19; Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 2:10-11

Devotional: *“How Do We Live Out Joy in the World?”*

Jesus calls us to make disciples of all nations, to baptize them, and to teach them to observe all that He has commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). This doesn't necessarily mean He is calling you to physically travel around the world doing so (although that may happen), but it does drive the emphasis that Jesus is for everyone and the mission is for everyone we encounter.

God's love is for the entire world and everyone has the opportunity to believe in Jesus and not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16).

As we go through life and are presented with many opportunities to share the Gospel and love one another, we have the Holy Spirit to guide us and teach us every step of the way. We know at the end of the day, whatever we ask in the name of The Lord, we will receive and our joy will be full (John 16:24).

That means we can joyfully follow Jesus and serve others because that is what He calls us to do. Only God can do the work of changing hearts and bringing people to Himself. All He calls us to do is to be faithful to spread the message of the Gospel and to love others. Simply put, we love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). That's why we do anything, because Jesus has done everything.

DAY NUMBER TWENTY

Scripture Readings:

1 John 4:8-10; 1 Peter 1:8-9

Devotional: *“Cynicism – A Hindrance to Joy”*

Though joy is an amazing thing that expresses our trust in The Lord, sometimes our joy is hindered by cynicism. If we are not spending time with God daily through prayer, reading the Bible, or ministering to others, we get caught up in our own world and looking out for only ourselves. When bad things happen to us, we will quickly find a way to complain about it and over time we become cynical.

Think about it, when you are around someone who is joyful, they can impact you and literally change your day. Equally so, when you are around someone who is negative, they can have the same impact and crush your attitude for the rest of the day. It's crazy to think of just how big of an impact we have on others.

As followers of Jesus, we have every reason in the world to be joyful. If we are being cynical at any time, we are not trusting Him and have forgotten about our first love. Be encouraged to continue going deeper in your relationship with Christ or perhaps, to return to your first love, where you will be satisfied with joy.

DAY NUMBER TWENTY-ONE

Scripture Readings:

1 Corinthians 13:1-13; 1 John 4:7-21

Devotional: “*What is Love? Why Love?*”

The definition of love has as many variations as the number of people asked to define it. One might conclude it is a feeling, based on human instinct and articulation. Another might say it is a choice, something that transcends emotion and rests on human will and resolve. Yet another might vaguely conclude it is a force of nature, mysterious in its inability to be controlled or even fully understood by our finite humanity. But what does Scripture say? What does God say love is and how can we know it when we see it in a world tainted by sin and darkness?

Scripture distinguishes human love and the love of God, the latter being perfect and the former, while a glimpse in part of God’s love, impossibly perfect due to the nature of sin’s existence. It is important to recognize our inability to experience the fullness of love apart from Christ, who removes sin and allows us to see love clearly and fully. That is why the advent of Christ not only gives us the grandest display of love, but it also allows the possibility for us to know and experience love.

One of the most popular passages of Scripture on the subject of love gives us a clear definition of love by its characteristics, what it is and what it is not (1 Corinthians 13). Most commonly we are encouraged to love in this way, however, we must also foresee these characteristics of love as having motivated God’s love toward us in Christ. Most importantly, that we are not self-glorified as the subject of His love because we are so great, but that His love despite us, overcomes the great darkness of sin and death that we possess apart from Him.

Why do we love? When we have a complete understanding of love, perfect love displayed for us in God’s gracious giving of His Son, the outpouring of love upon others is not only justified, but instinctive. We love because He first loved us.

DAY NUMBER TWENTY-TWO

Scripture Readings:

Romans 8:31-39; John 3:16; Romans 5:8; Jeremiah 31:3; 1 John 4:19; 1 John 4:7

Devotional: “*The Source of Love*”

John emphatically states, “God is love.” The source of love is God himself. Not that God is just a picture of love, love being independently defined, existent and simply displayed by God. But that God himself is the definition of love, preexisting love and love being a byproduct of His character and person. Without God, we have no basis for love and no ability to love.

The source of love in us then becomes God’s Spirit, which indwells upon our salvation. This is made possible only through the coming of Jesus, that God’s love compelled Him to send His Son for our rescue.

Christ's life, death and resurrection, beginning with and made possible by His advent, are evidence of the power of God's love to overcome sin and death, which are unable to drive out love. God's love then conquerors over earthly forces, over all human emotion and over the disguises of pride and that which is self-seeking.

Consider the nature of God's love, exemplified in Christ, as the source of the love that we first experience and then live out. God's love is self-giving and sacrificial. He gave Himself on our behalf (John 3:16). God's love is unconditional; it is given to us when we do not deserve it (Romans 5:8). God's love is eternal (Jeremiah 31:3). God's love is powerful. God's love heals and comforts but also serves as our defender, His love defeats the enemy on our behalf. God's love is life changing (1 John 4:19). Nothing can separate us from God's love.

DAY NUMBER TWENTY-THREE

Scripture Readings:

Hebrews 10:23-25; John 13:34-35; Matthew 22:34-40; John 15:9-17; Ephesians 4:1-6;

2 Corinthians 5:14; Luke 15:11-31

Devotional: *"How Do We Live This Out?"*

Our capacity to love is fully and completely dependent on the grace of God, which fortunately for us, is constant and far bigger than human capability or understanding. We must be careful not to define love solely on our ability to choose it or decide upon it, while this is an important aspect for us, as believers, to live a life of love. However, this would, in fact, leave love at the mercy of our ability, which is not love in the fullest degree of its existence. So we must first depend on God's grace, we must love God through our faith and trust in Him. And then we must abide in His love daily, as to not forget it or be deceived by those that oppose it.

Jesus tells us that after an experience of His love, we are to love others. As believers, this love unifies us, His church, as we build one another up to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:23-25). To those far from God, our love for one another marks us and sets us apart (John 13:34-35). God displays His love for the world through us, us loving others as He loved us. It is no surprise that this is what Christ calls us to, given the stark difference between His love, void of self-motivation and desires, and the love the world knows, which can often be merely a fleeting emotion perpetuated by a desire to be loved in return.

"The love of God is not God's making much of us, but God's saving us from self-centeredness so that we can enjoy making much of Him forever. And our love to others is not our making much of them, but helping them to find satisfaction in making much of God. True love aims at satisfying people in the glory of God. Any love that terminates on man is eventually destructive. It does not lead people to the only lasting joy, namely, God. Love must be God-centered, or it is not true love; it leaves people without their final hope of joy." John Piper

How can we give the love of Christ away? How can we display it to others?

DAY NUMBER TWENTY-FOUR

Scripture Readings:

John 3:16

Devotional: *“Wrapping Up Advent”*

It is our hope that this season of Advent has been marked by the richness of Christ and the love, joy, peace and hope that were ushered in with His coming. Though we have walked through each of these, their definition, cause and origin, He is the constant thread in each. He is their perfect display and the hope of their existence in our lives and our world. Our focus must be on Him, not only through this calendar season, but in every season.

Read through some of the passages that stood out to you over the past weeks. Meditate on some of the truths of which His Spirit provided understanding. Share the story of Christ with someone that does not know Him or remind someone that does of The Good News of His coming. Reflect on the character of God, that He would choose to bring rescue to us through Christ. Pray for your heart to dwell securely in His hope, His peace, His joy and His love. Pray that over your family, your friends and your world, both near and far.