

THROUGH HER EYES



NOVEMBER 23 - DECEMBER 26

GLENKIRK CHURCH CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONALS 2020

CONTENT

3	Introduction
4	Devotional Practices
5	Readings for Advent
6-19	Week One: HOPE
20-35	Week Two: PEACE
36-49	Week Three: JOY
50-65	Week Four: LOVE
66-81	Week Five: WAITING

²*The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.*

⁶*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

⁷*Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.*

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7 NIV

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR BEGINS WITH ADVENT AS WE PREPARE FOR GOD'S LIGHT TO SHINE IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS.

That first Christmas things were dark. The Jewish people, though living in their own land, were not free but lived under Roman occupation. God had been silent for over 500 years. They longed and prayed for things to be different.

So, also, this year we long for things to be different. But the promise is that God's light has come. This Christmas, maybe more than any other for a long time, let us seek God's light.

On that first Christmas, not many knew what God was doing, but he was working. It would take thirty years before Jesus began his public ministry. It would take another three years for people to begin to understand what God was doing. But eventually, one person at a time, God's kingdom began to take hold, and the light began to grow.

This devotional is filled with stories about how God has shown up during this last year. As you read these stories, ask God: "God, where do you want to show up in my life? How can I be a light to my neighbors, my friends, my family?"

For the darkness cannot overcome the light—let us be people of the light. Let us pray that in our being people of the light, renewal might come this new year into our lives, the lives of our families, our community, our nation and the world.

We have included the "daily office" readings and our Lenten devotional practice in this booklet. As you take time each day to read a story of God's showing up, also take time to sit with God—and to read his Word.

IN THE MORNING

TAKE 15-20 MINUTES

- Begin by just sitting with God and enjoying His presence.
- Read the Scripture readings for the day and the devotional for the day.
- Then take some time to reflect on the greatness of God and thank Him for the ways He has shown up in your life.
- Walk through the day with God, giving Him the things on your calendar and asking for His guidance.
- Conclude by just waiting on God. Is there a word He has for you that day? Where might you need Him to be a “Wonderful Counselor,” “Mighty God,” “Everlasting Father,” or “Prince of Peace” in your life this day?

IN THE EVENING

TAKE 5-10 MINUTES

- Reflect back through the day. Where did you see God show up? Thank Him for His presence.
- Note any feelings, thoughts, words, actions, or choices you made that were contrary to God’s will. Confess these to
- Jesus and accept His forgiveness.
- Release yourself to God for the night, asking that you would be conscious of His love as you sleep.

READINGS FOR ADVENT

Monday, November 23 Ps. 7; Esth. 2:1-18; 2 Tim. 2:8-13

Tuesday, November 24 Ps. 7; Esth. 8:3-17; Rev. 19:1-9

Wednesday, November 25 Ps. 7; Ez. 33:7-20; John 5:19-40

Thursday, November 26 Ps. 80:1-7, 17-19; Zech. 13:1-9; Rev. 14:6-13

Friday, November 27 Ps. 80:1-7, 17-19; Zech. 14:1-9; 1 Thess. 4:1-18

Saturday, November 28 Ps. 80:1-7, 17-19; Micah 2:1-13; Matt. 24:15-31

Monday, November 30 Ps. 79; Micah 4:1-5; Rev. 15:1-8

Tuesday, December 1 Ps. 79; Micah 4:6-13; Rev. 18:1-10

Wednesday, December 2 Ps. 79; Micah 5:1-5a; Luke 21:34-38

Thursday, December 3 Ps. 85:1-2, 8-13; Hosea 6:1-6; 1 Thess. 1:2-10

Friday, December 4 Ps. 85:1-2, 8-13; Jer. 1:4-10; Acts 11:19-26

Saturday, December 5 Ps. 85:1-2, 8-13; Ez. 36:24-28; Mark 11:27-33

Monday, December 7 Ps. 27; Isa. 26:7-15; Acts 2:37-42

Tuesday, December 8 Ps. 27; Isa. 4:2-6; Acts 11:1-18

Wednesday, December 9 Ps. 27; Mal. 2:10-3:1; Luke 1:5-17

Thursday, December 10 Ps. 126; Hab. 2:1-5; Phil. 3:7-11

Friday, December 11 Ps. 126; Hab. 3:2-6; Phil. 3:12-16

Saturday, December 12 Ps. 126; Hab. 3:13-19; Matt. 21:28-32

Monday, December 14 Ps. 125; 1 Kings 18:1-18; Eph. 6:10-17

Tuesday, December 15 Ps. 125; 2 Kings 2:9-22; Acts 3:17-4:4

Wednesday, December 16 Ps. 125; Mal. 3:16-4:6; Mark 9:9-13

Thursday, December 17 Ps. 89:1-4, 19-26; 2 Sam. 6:1-11; Heb. 1:1-4

Friday, December 18 Ps. 89:1-4, 19-26; 2 Sam. 6:12-19; Heb. 1:5-14

Saturday, December 19 Ps. 89:1-4, 19-26; Judg. 13:2-24; John 7:40-52

Monday, December 21 Luke 1:46b-55; 1 Sam. 1:1-18; Heb. 9:1-14

Tuesday, December 22 Luke 1:46b-55; 1 Sam. 1:19-28; Heb. 8:1-13

Wednesday, December 23 Luke 1:46b-55; 1 Sam. 2:1-10; Mark 11:1-11

Thursday & Friday, December 24 & 25 Isa. 9:2-7; Ps. 96; Tit. 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20

Saturday, December 26 Ps. 148; Jer. 26:1-9, 12-15; Acts 6:8-15; 7:51-60

EVE

GENESIS 3

A woman who had everything and then lost it shows us that the promise of Christ brings hope to any situation.

MONDAY

November 23

Juli McGowan Boit, *Living Room International, Kenya*

My family lives next to a children's home in a rural village in Kenya. Each night we can hear the children pray in unison the words of Psalm 23: *"Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all of the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever"* (v. 6).

On a very hard day, I was discouraged and afraid, overwhelmed by the weariness of the world. I was listening to the words of a worship song, remembering the truth of how faithful and good God has been to my family—every day of our lives. The hard times in my life have not ever changed this truth.

When the song finished, my little boy (who barely speaks) said, "Again!" It surprised me as I had never heard him say that word before. I turned to look at Ryan with tears in my eyes and asked him, "Again?"

My sweet boy who has survived so very much in his three years of life said, "Yes!" We listened again to the words declaring the goodness of our God.

In a year marked with aching and waiting, of wading through loss, disappointment and uncertainty, I'm grateful that God's goodness is unchanging. I'm thankful there is space to wrestle through the hard times while also holding onto the **hope** of a loving God who is willing to go anywhere for the sake of love.

Even though I walk through the valley of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. ... Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all of the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Psalm 23:4, 6 NIV

TUESDAY

November 24

Parker Sutton

The new year 2020 was promising to be a good one. My wife and I were retired, active and in good health for people of our age. We hitched up our travel trailer and spent a few days at the beach ... something we always looked forward to doing. While there we enjoyed planning and dreaming about future travel.

Then COVID hit in March. We had to cancel those future travel plans. Dutifully, we hunkered down in isolation and began working on a few home projects. This time also afforded us the opportunity to dig deeper into and linger with Scripture. A daily prayer chain also helped us expand and deepen our prayer life. I believe the Lord was preparing us for what was to come.

During the latter days of April, I began experiencing back pains. I wrote that off as being caused by the physical activities I'd been pursuing. In June I finally saw my doctor, had some X-rays, and discovered I had several broken ribs! I was referred to an oncologist, who ordered CT scans and biopsies. The results showed that I had multiple myeloma of my bone marrow. Talk about a world turned upside down! The bad news was that this cancer was not curable. But the good news was that it is treatable!

Dismayed, we turned to God in prayer, wondering what He had in store for us and seeking some clarity for the future. We also turned to family and friends for their prayer support. I never before have felt such peace and being uplifted at knowing that God is with me and that my Christian brothers and sisters are praying for us. Wow! Feeling God's presence and the support of those prayer warriors has helped me accept my condition and has helped assure me that God is in control. My wife, bless her, has been my rock during all of this. I thank God every day for her.

Now, after months of chemo, good and bad days, constant prayer, and caring ministrations from competent medical personnel, my response to the chemo has been very positive. I'm beginning to see I may still have a future here in this world.

As we approach the celebration of our Savior's birth during this Advent season, I am ever more **hopeful** and have the certainty that our Lord is with me. I have an assurance of God's unfailing love and His eternal provision for me through Jesus' great sacrifice. It is my hope that through this journey I can share that love with others as I seek to know Him better and to serve Him.

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 NIV

WEDNESDAY

November 25

Marsha Werner

A few years ago as I was facing surgery, I was reminded of an oft-quoted Scripture: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God”* (Philippians 4:6). I knew this. I prayed this. I shared it with others.

As I read this Scripture again, I was struck that another oft-quoted Scripture follows: verse 7!! (Duh!) It held immediate promise: *“And the peace of God, which transcends all human understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* I had always used the two verses separately. Now I saw the command, the “how to,” and the promised result flowing into each other. It was so helpful the night before my surgery. It is so helpful now.

Our son is in the midst of evaluations for a potentially serious diagnosis. He is in God’s waiting room, not knowing the final outcome. We’re all in it with him—his wife, his two children, his siblings, and his parents. Most importantly, God’s there too! Anxiety and fear and the “what if’s” are readily available in abundance. But we know the God whose name is **Hope**! We have personal

history as we recall numerous incidences of God’s faithfulness, presence, and mercy in our past. Therefore, we not only praise this God but also thank Him for who He is.

When my focus waivers and I fall into the temptation to fear and doubt, one of my favorite things to do is to pray back God’s attributes in alphabetical order. It can even become a game! For example, A=Always, Almighty, Already (there). P=Promise Keeper, Provider, Prayer Warrior for us. S=Sovereign, Savior, Sufficient. Keeping a “reminder list” for those times when I hardly know what to pray is reassuring. Having a group of friends to call into immediate prayer action is essential too.

We don’t know what lies ahead, but we know the God who does. God gives us His peace in abundance. He blesses us in ways we cannot fathom or even ask for. We can take the next step and do the next thing because we know He knows.

*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 NIV

THURSDAY

November 26

Paige Gutzke

During this pandemic, I am sure you have felt at one point alone and anxious. As someone who regularly struggles with feeling alone and anxious, I often turn to prayer. When the pandemic hit and my school closed, extracurriculars stopped, and church switched to an online format, I was struggling even more with feeling alone and feeling anxious. Suddenly life just stopped.

When I started to feel alone, God showed me **hope** and strengthened all of my relationships with friends, with family, and most importantly with Him. Romans 8:38-39 reminds me that God is always on my side and nothing will ever separate me from Himself.

When I started getting very anxious about what was going to happen in the future and how long this pandemic was going to last, I turned to one of my favorite Bible verses, Philippians 4:4-7, where again God gave me **hope** through His Word. I did as the passage said and I prayed, giving Him all of my anxieties. This helped to calm me down and gave me a healthy outlet to release my anxieties.

When I am feeling alone and anxious at the same time, I look to Psalm 25:16-18. God gives me **hope** through this Scripture by showing me that when I feel “lonely and afflicted” (v. 16), I should turn to Him and He will relieve these feelings. I often just use these verses as a prayer and keep them in the back of my mind.

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything ... 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 4:4-7)

*Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted. The
troubles of my heart have multiplied;
free me from my anguish, look upon
my affliction and my distress and take
away all my sins.*

Psalm 25:16-18 NIV

FRIDAY

November 27

Darren Richer

The year 2020 has been a roller coaster ride for most of us. God has revealed Himself to us in many ways. There have been many incredible blessings during this time: slowing down, more time with family, seeking God more because of uncertainty, time to reinvent ourselves, and time to connect with many people who in the chaotic pace of life we just don't see. There have also been incredible hardships: economically, relationally, politically, and health-wise.

At the beginning of this pandemic, I was a little bit in shock and realized that I wanted to use this time to grow. My job as a tennis coach, along with duties as a father, husband, church volunteer and leader, has been wonderful but without healthy margins. The pandemic gave me time to slow down and take an inventory of my life. For me it was a "half-time"—almost what I was praying for—but a little guilt-ridden since there are so many financial and virus problems. Ephesians 1:18 speaks about seeing what is in our hearts, which will enlighten us to have hope since we are God's people. This time has been extremely enlightening for me.

During the past few years, I have been on a quest both spiritually and career-wise to see how they will intersect.

At our most recent ECO conference, I found my answer. At one of the breakout sessions I attended, there was a training curriculum called Life Younique, which helps people discover their unique gifting. As Christians we all are called to love our neighbors as ourselves, sharing the Gospel to the ends of the earth. This is our general calling. Our specific purpose for how God created us uniquely is what intrigues me so much.

When we identify our unique calling, it's like unleashing everything God has created us to be. One of the most dynamic tools that has helped me identify this is focusing on two motivating words that get me jumping out of bed in the morning. My two words are "inspiring vision," which means that for me to be the most effective in God's kingdom, I need to be used where I can do this on a regular basis. This doesn't mean that I don't serve in other capacities, but it helps to give me a more laser-like focus so that I can be used best for the kingdom.

Since I dove into this study headfirst, it's been my passion to show, tell, and teach this to others. Many of us in life are well-intentioned, but we never really experience God's power inside us. I encourage each of you to slow down and search for what makes you "younique." May you feel the peace of God working inside you.

*I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the **hope** to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints.*

Ephesians 1:18 NIV

SATURDAY

November 28

Rev. David Woo

In verses 14 and 15 of Genesis 3, God cursed the serpent for causing Adam and Eve to disobey God. God said that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent while the serpent will strike his heel. The seed of the woman, Jesus, will crush the head of Satan. Satan will bruise the heel of Jesus; He will be crucified but rise again from the dead.

Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden and now had to endure a lifetime of painful labor. They could never regain the perfect fellowship they once had with God. They did not know about the coming Messiah, who would die for their sins and reconcile them to God. However, if they were to have faith in God and trust Him, the death of Jesus on the Cross would be applied retroactively to their sins. There was **hope** for them; however, they most likely did not know the end of the story which would have restored their **hope**. **Hope** was lost but there was still **hope**.

Sometimes one might go through a situation where all visible **hope** is lost. As an example, Sister Yuen Meng was imprisoned in China in 1967. After a year in prison, she was offered release if she would deny Jesus. Authorities brought her children to the prison and told her to make the choice. She said, “Jesus cannot be replaced. Even my own children cannot replace Jesus.”

The warden shouted to her children, “Listen, you kids! Your mother has rejected you! She doesn’t love you!”

Sister Yuen Meng was further sentenced to 23 years in prison. When she was released in 1981, her son was 34 years old. She had not seen any of her family in those intervening years. Her son had been taken away by the state and raised in atheistic schools where he was told that his mother had disowned him. Many Christians shared the gospel with him. He responded, “Your Jesus took my mother away from me. Why should I believe in Him?” Sister Yuen Meng traveled to Tibet to find her son. He rejected her, screamed that he had no mother, and pushed her from his home. She has never seen her son again.

We do not know the end of the story. Our **hope** is that one day the son might come to faith in Jesus and understand his mother’s refusal to deny Christ. When there appears to be no **hope**, we can still **hope**.

*The LORD God said to the serpent, ...
Cursed are you above all the livestock and
all the wild animals! You will crawl on your
belly and you will eat dust all the days of
your life. And I will put enmity between
you and the woman, and between your
offspring and hers; he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.*

Source:

Paul Hattaway,
The Heavenly Man
(Grand Rapids:
Monarch Books,
2002), p. 213-214.

Genesis 3:14-15 NIV

HANNAH

I SAMUEL

A woman who has lived a life of disappointment and loss shows us that God's promises can bring peace in life's difficulties.

MONDAY

November 30

Mike Chen

As I watched the daily news, I felt gloomy for the future. I was concerned about the Far East, which is where I came from.

The following news often caught my attention: Hong Kong lost its autonomy; Uyghur Muslim people were segregated in re-education camp; China posting threats to Taiwan for unification; a territorial dispute of South China Sea and free navigation; the outbreak of COVID-19 and the global health crisis.

Many times, on my own self-reliance, I pray for **peaceful** resolutions to these tangible issues. However, the answers to these prayers seem unfavorable or they are not answered.

We should pray to the Lord for His guidance and protection, not lean on self-thinking. In His timing and unique way, God will intervene in the midst of our vulnerability. He will deliver us from the snare of the wicked. Our human way is feeble. God's way is splendor, mighty and glorious.

The COVID-19 virus spread widely. The virus is contagious and lethal. If infected, patients become vulnerable to a compromised immune system. CDC guidelines to slow down the spread of this pandemic have halted our routine activities and group gatherings. The old life rhythm has changed. Social distancing and wearing masks have become normal.

We are eager to have the arrival of a vaccine and therapeutic medicine for the cure. Any medical breakthrough should ease our anxiety and perplexity. But it is vital that we seek God's mercy to give us wisdom and knowledge in our endeavor to get solutions.

During this pandemic, my routines have been ignored or rescheduled. I have more time to read the Bible and pray. With God, I find **peace**. I realize that God is holy and sovereign; His love endures forever. In Him is life and light; we will not walk in the darkness.

Although evil and threats are always present, do not lose heart; rely on the Lord. *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."* (Psalm 46:1)

This is what the LORD says: "In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!'"

Isaiah 49:8-9 NIV

TUESDAY

December 1

Debbie Alley

During this year of pandemic and isolation, God has tried to impress on me the importance of slowing down to be able to experience a time apart from the world. Never before can I remember having so much free time. There is space without multiple daily commitments to spend extra time alone with God, time alone with my immediate family, and time alone with myself. Time to read. Time to pray. Time to be still. No distractions. No excuses.

But isolation is not a natural place for us to be. We are part of the Body of Christ and made for fellowship. We are made to support each other and build each other up. We are not created to be alone. Isolation is used as a “punishment” for a prisoner in jail.

And yet, God tells me in Deuteronomy 31:6, “*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them (or the coronavirus), for the LORD your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you.*” I am not alone. I will never be alone. I am not forgotten!

I have experienced my own anxiety through this unprecedented season. First of all, my career as a

*You will keep in perfect **peace**
him whose mind is focused on
You because he trusts in You.*

Isaiah 26:3 NIV

dental hygienist is considered the #1 “at-risk” job for contracting coronavirus. Second, I am in an age category that is considered high-risk. Finally, I am also immunocompromised—Strike 3!

But God’s Word reminds me in Philippians 4:6-7, “*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.*” Lord, keep me safe! Keep us all safe! “*And **the peace of God**, which surpasses ALL understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*”

God has impressed on me that this time is a *gift* from Him: a gift of **rest** and **peace** in the midst of anxiety, the unknown, and isolation. And yet my natural instinct is to fight it. I look for things to do, to be busy again, to be productive. I cook, bake, clean out a closet, organize the garage, work in the garden, or go for a walk.

Even though I often struggle against the good that God wants to do in my life, the **inner peace** that He gives brings me through it all. This cannot be explained; it is above my understanding!

WEDNESDAY

December 2

Jackie Bussey

To be honest, 2020 will not go down as one of my “TaDa!” years. Although it is not one that I would care to repeat, my unforgettable year began in 2019.

On August 7, 2019, my precious mama, who suffered with dementia for 15 years, took her last breath while my father, her devoted husband, and I looked on. It was “good news,” though, because the torment of watching her decline was over. My mother went home. Her time here in an earthly state had fulfilled its purpose. For my dad, it was hard, it was sad, and it was lonely. He had lost a part of himself ... forever, and my comfort could not replace that.

Being an only child has its pros and cons—no doubt. The responsibility of taking care of aging parents and honoring them (by myself) was a challenge. My parents were overly loving, overly dependent, and overly sensitive. I learned early on how to dance with them—keeping the peace and taking care not to hurt or embarrass them. This is a big job when you’re small, but it served me well for what was to come.

On January 18, 2020, my healthy, robust, full-of-life father joined his wife in heaven. What a jolt! Five and one-half months later! We had so many plans; we got our grieving under control for my mom. Now my sweet Dad—gone. It was “good news” though; he too went home to Jesus. First Corinthians 15:26 says that the last enemy we overcome is death. Thank you, Jesus. But what about me? My mind went into overdrive. Planning the next steps in my life and figuring out what to do was overwhelming—I was alone. But what I learned was that Jesus is with me!

On January 23 the coronavirus hit. Again, I thanked Jesus. Deuteronomy 31:6 says, “*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you.*” I firmly believe that! This Scripture got me through all of my trials and pain. The Lord is generous; He gave me time to heal. My parents are gone, but I have His encouragement and strength to continue.

Would I repeat 2020? My love for God is abundant; my faith is stronger, my purpose is clearer, and I have lots of hope for the future! Now that’s GOOD NEWS!

*[Jesus said,] “Peace I leave with you; my **peace** I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

John 14:27 NIV

THURSDAY

December 3

Robin and Hugh Adkins

This past year has challenged us to strengthen our relationships with more love than we thought we had, to embrace patience when we feared we had no more, and to form bonds that will be stronger because of a God who is always caring for us. Isaiah 41:10 says: “*Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*” And God did just that! He saw us through this past year.

Our oldest son, his wife, and our five-year-old grandson moved in with us last year (on our request) so that they could get their finances in order and save as much as they could to purchase a home. We went from being “empty nesters” to a household of five in our three-bedroom home overnight.

We knew this would probably be much harder for them than it would be for us. We only had to pack up and condense a few things so that they would have room to move their belongings into our home. They had to figure out what to bring into this much smaller place than what they had, and they put the majority of their belongings in storage.

The logistics fell into place quite quickly; then we started working out how we would live together. This certainly

presented a greater challenge. My husband and I usually eat dinner at the dining table, and at a pretty routine time. However, my son and his family never sit at a table for dinner, and they eat whenever they get to it. Our home is pretty neat and uncluttered; their tidiness did not match ours. They both work different schedules, and we are semi-retired. We attend and participate in church; they do not. And our grandson had four “parents” telling him what to do. The disparity was large.

It took the five of us a couple of months to adjust, and Philippians 4:13 pulled us through: “*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*” We got into a routine, and we started sharing in the household duties. We all worked very hard to find ways to make this work, and we found that we could do this.

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Isaiah 41:1 NIV

Now this did not happen without some teeth gritting and even some unkind words or feelings being hurt. But Colossians 3:14 says: “*And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*” And our love and our bond grew stronger. Our relationship with this little family has grown. We are all more patient, kinder, and have a greater respect and love for each other because of this time we shared.

It was worth every sacrifice and every tear; the time was filled with love and joy. Our son and his wife gained strength in the gift they were given, and in fourteen months they found their way to a new home. They have gained grateful hearts, experienced unwavering love, and learned through us that with God as our strength, we can accomplish so very much.

FRIDAY

December 4

Shadi Fatehi, *Pars Theological Center*

*“For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace.**”*
(Isaiah 9:6 ESV)

After the passing of his wife, C. S. Lewis describes his grief in the following words:

There is spread over everything a vague sense of wrongness, of something amiss. Like in those dreams where nothing terrible occurs—nothing that would sound even remarkable if you told it at breakfast-time—but the atmosphere, the taste of the whole thing, is deadly ... I hear a clock strike and some quality it always had before has gone out of sound. What’s wrong with the world? Then I remember.

Source:

C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*
(United Kingdom: Faber and Faber, 1961).

The feeling that Lewis evokes is all too familiar, even for those of us who have not yet experienced the loss of a loved one. This is because the acute loss of which he writes is what many of us carry with us throughout most of our lives. It is as though from the day we are born until the day we die we are grieving the loss of something we never had.

We might never articulate it in this way, but perhaps one of the things we grieve most in life is the **peace** that we never had.

The absence of **peace** in our lives is apparent everywhere we look. We see it in today’s environmental crisis, identified by Wendell Berry as the “war against nature.” We also see it in the on-going tensions in internal and foreign politics. Moreover, the absence of **peace** is manifested in our fractured relationships and in the lack of synthesis in each of our own interior lives.

Many of us spend most of our lives searching for the **peace** that we never had. Some of us think we will find **peace** by working hard to control ourselves and everything around us; we think that if we could just get things in the right order, if we could just rearrange ourselves and the things around us in the proper way, then we will find **peace**.

Others of us run away from the commitments and people who most threaten our **peace**, thinking that as long as we remain on our own, we can savor some semblance of **peace**. And, still, there are others of us who attempt to find **peace** in a life filled with aesthetic pursuits, whether that be in the stillness of the outdoors or in our regular escape to vacation homes.

Despite our best efforts, the chaos and disorder of our lives always remains. We never seem to find the **peace** we are looking for.

One of the beautiful mysteries of the gospel is that the baby born to us in a manger has come to bring us **peace**. This baby is the *Prince of Peace* who, according to the writer of Hebrews, is the one “*who makes all things whole*” (Hebrews 13:20).

Today, Christ is encountering many Muslims in Iran through dreams and visions. And one of the qualities that Iranians find most captivating about Him is His **peace**—in fact, so much so that they are choosing to give up everything to follow Jesus. May this Advent be an opportunity for us—as individuals and as a church—to discover afresh the **peace** that has so captivated the hearts of our persecuted brothers and sisters in Iran. In the end, it is only in Jesus that we find the **peace** we never had.

*May God, who puts all things together,
who makes all things whole, who made a
lasting mark through the sacrifice of Jesus,
the sacrifice of blood that sealed the eternal
covenant, who led Jesus, our Great Shepherd,
up and alive from the dead, now put you [us]
together, provide you [us] with everything
you [we] need to please Him, make us into
what gives Him most pleasure, by means of
the sacrifice of Jesus, the Messiah. All glory
to Jesus forever and always. Oh, yes, yes, yes.*

Hebrews 13:20-21 The Message

SATURDAY

December 5

Betty Naylor

Wow! What a year this has been for all of us—pandemic, quarantines, fires, lives lost, jobs lost. It's been a time of change and perhaps a time to determine what our priorities are. Living in a retirement community, I have felt the grief of losing many friends this year. And when I lose some of the expected freedoms that I take for granted, it causes me to rethink how I use my time, talents, and resources for the kingdom

This year has brought unexpected circumstances in my family also. One of my daughters had surgery for breast cancer in February, followed by months of chemotherapy and radiation. It was a scary time and it still is. Because of the coronavirus I was unable to offer any help to her and her family. Then my son, who is a missionary in Russia, got the coronavirus and had all of the symptoms. Thankfully, he recovered and his wife and two children didn't get it.

If I have learned anything in all of these events of this past year, it is that life is full of unplanned events and life is unpredictable. As a Christian I am to be prepared by living each day in relationship with God. I have also learned that God is in control and that He knows me and the plans He has for me—that's His job. My job is to listen to Him, love Him, and be obedient to His direction. He has brought **peace** in the midst of trauma and the unknowns.

As we end this year, I look forward to a year filled with less drama but with the assurance that He keeps His promises.

PANDEMIC

Anonymous (Written March 11, 2020)

What if you thought of the pandemic as the Jews consider the Sabbath—the most sacred of times? Cease from travel. Cease from buying and selling. Give up, just for now, on trying to make the world different than it is.

Sing. Pray. Touch only those to whom you commit your life. Center down. And when your body has become still, reach out with your heart. Know that we are connected in ways that are terrifying and beautiful. (You could hardly deny it now.) Know that our lives are in one another's hands. (Surely, that has become clear.)

Do not reach out with your hands. Reach out with your heart. Reach out with your words. Reach out with all the tendrils of compassion that move, invisibly, where we cannot touch. Promise this world your love—for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, so long as we all shall live.

[God said,] "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

Hebrews 13:5 NIV

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Hebrews 10:23 NIV

ELIZABETH

LUKE 1:5-25

A woman who had not found joy in spite of her faithfulness to God forces us to face those inner unanswered questions that can rob us of joy.

MONDAY

December 7

Brian & Anna Kleinsasser

Every Christmas we proclaim, “Joy to the World, the Lord has come, let earth receive her king!” When the angels told the shepherds of the birth of Jesus, they said, “*Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great **joy** for all the people.*” The shepherds not only went to see Jesus, they went forth and shared with people what they heard and saw.

Isaiah 55:12 tells us, “You will go out in **joy** and be led forth in peace.” That’s what the shepherds did. That is what we can do!

When the wise men saw the star, Matthew 2:10 tells us “... *they rejoiced exceedingly with great **joy**.*” That’s what we can do!

When the followers of Jesus were at their darkest day, Jesus had been crucified and buried, they went to the tomb. When an angel told them to go tell others that Jesus is alive, they left the tomb afraid, yet filled with **joy** (Matthew 28:8). That is what we can do! In between those events of Jesus’ birth and His resurrection, He told His disciples, “*These things I have spoken to you, that My **joy** may be in you, and that your **joy** may be full*” (John 15:11).

Walking in that **joy** that God gives us, we remember what Nehemiah 8:10 says: “... *the **joy** of the Lord is your strength.*” His **joy** and strength are available for us!

We are so glad that in serving God, it is not about our strength, but His. When I (Anna) was younger and a junior high counselor and a camp counselor, God and Glenkirk gave me the opportunity to serve His kingdom. Later, being in Evangelism Explosion or Lay Counseling or as a missionary sent out by Glenkirk, we (Brian and Anna) were given more opportunities to serve. Looking back on those experiences brings us **joy**.

In 1992, we moved to Hong Kong with Youth With A Mission (YWAM). In the past 28 years, we have appreciated the partnership with Glenkirk. We think of the words of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 4:1, “*Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my **joy** and crown, ... stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!*” Thank you, Glenkirk, for being a vessel of **joy** from the Lord.

*[Jesus said,] “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your **joy** may be full.”*

John 15:11 NIV

TUESDAY

December 8

Stephanie Nelson

When Betsy gave me a list of devotional topics to write on showing how God has shown up during the pandemic—**joy, hope, love, waiting or peace**—I had to pause. I thought, “Lord, I don’t know that I have much to say on being very successful at any of those choices during the last five months. Maybe if ‘in a funk’ were on the list—I’ve successfully done that.”

As I talked to God again and pondered in which area I had seen Him work the most during the pandemic, I realized the question was not about me seeing myself successfully mastering **joy, hope, love, peace or waiting**, but about where God had shown up. And yes, of course, God was present in the pandemic desiring to provide for me in all of those areas. So, the real question was not where did God show up, but did I embrace these things in the pandemic or did I remain in a funk?

God was there every day gently knocking—did I let him in? As I thought more about which gift to write about, I said to myself, “Waiting and hope are truly the seasoned themes in my life—be it waiting and hoping for progress with our autistic son or waiting and hoping for more days as my husband declines with dementia or learning more and more in those hard challenges that true hope does not come from your circumstances but from what Christ has done for us on the cross.

Hope or waiting seemed to be the likely choice, but then God said, “No, pick **joy**!! Choose joy, Stephanie, choose **joy**.” And, of course, in my sinful nature I thought, “Gosh, Lord, I don’t

know that I feel very **joyful**.” But then I knew that deep down true **joy** is a choice. And life’s circumstances will always give us an excuse if we choose to be **joyless**, but God’s promise of providing full **joy** in His presence is His Word and Truth. The psalmist says, “*In Your presence there is fullness of joy*” (Psalm 16:11). The choice is then ours. Do we receive this gift of **joy** graciously as God gives it to us?

As I thought back over the months, I knew God had allowed me to find **joy**, especially when things seemed bleak. He helped me to find **joy** in moments that many likely found very difficult. The one thing that really stood out was the **joy** of being able to participate in weekly church services online.

When Easter Eve arrived and so many were sad to know they’d be spending Easter at home, I was filled with **joy** to turn on the television and have it loaded with so many Easter services of worship and praise. And then on Easter morning I could be part of Glenkirk’s Easter service. I could embrace **joy** in the fullness of God’s presence with my church family. I gave thanks and found great **joy**. For the first time in many years when my caregiving responsibilities kept me from celebrating Easter with everyone else, this year God brought Easter to me!!

I can’t help but wonder how many others found **joy** at feeling included. As life progresses and days feel long and things feel uncertain in this world, we may have to search a little harder to find the things that bring us **joy**, but we have the assurance of God’s promise that “in His presence there is fullness of **joy**.” When I draw close to God, not only will the **joy** follow, but I’ll be able to embrace the **joy** He wants to provide and He gives so willingly.

In Your presence there is fullness of joy.

Psalm 16:11 NIV

WEDNESDAY

December 9

Stephanie Arnold

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

This year with the pandemic additional stresses required strength and guidance that was often challenging to manage. At times, I felt overwhelmed and discouraged while trying my best to figure out a solution. Then I realized that God had control, not me. He has provided me great **joy** through the times when I have been walking with Him.

This year has been the first year within the past several years of my life when I haven't had to battle depression. Before this year, my loss of hope brought me down so low that I never imagined a way out until I found God. Every day I thank Him for His grace, love, and support.

I never imagined going through a pandemic. If this had happened three years prior, I may have given up. When God entered my life, He taught me to love and honor myself so that I can help others. This means so much to me, being a teacher and a mother. He allows me to be me, to take time for self-care, and to not worry about things.

“Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matthew 6:34)

By taking care of myself and focusing on my health problems, I become a stronger person. As a result, I have more love and encouragement to share with my students, family, and friends. Teaching distance learning as a high school special education teacher has taught me so much about patience and love. It brings me great **joy** to help others who struggle. God has provided me tools to support the kids who need extra help and guidance. He encourages me to not give up and to keep helping our kids who need love and understanding during these tragic times.

God allows me to be patient and make logical decisions. This has enabled me to focus on helping rather than fixing. As I make better day-to-day decisions with God's help, I feel more relaxed, more patient and, honestly, more **joyful**. I'm eternally grateful for everything He has done to support me during these trying times.

I have told you these things, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have oppression; but cheer up! I have overcome the world.

John 16:33 NIV

THURSDAY

December 10

Jim Robertson

In July 2019 I was diagnosed with leukemia and needed hospitalization in five days—five days to settle my affairs in case therapy failed!

I didn't really want to die at age 66. I thought, "But if God chose to call me home, so be it." Besides, I did have some place to go and there was only one way to get there. If leukemia should take me, my biggest concern was my wife. I absolutely, positively was unwilling to run off and leave her behind.

While I was in the shower that night after I was diagnosed with leukemia, God's Spirit filled me and I suddenly erupted into a song of praise to the Father. It was a song that I hadn't thought of in decades. The lyrics were about God's providence and how He is always with me.

The song that suddenly sprung forth from my soul was clearly God telling me that right at that moment He was with me, and the lyrics likewise were a reminder that He always is. Nothing could or would happen to me throughout these next weeks or months that He didn't already know about and approve beforehand. It was a reminder from my God to trust Him completely.

Over the next days, my wife and I talked about what she would do if God called me home. The content of the conversations is private, but I will say that one day her words were exactly what I needed to hear to settle my heart, convincing me that if God were to take me, somehow she would be okay. Once again, at that moment, I felt God being with us and telling me not to worry.

As departure time for the hospital approached, it finally became real to me that I was going into the hospital and I might not be coming back. That was the moment when it really hurt. As the emotions hit, I was ready for them. Whatever was to happen, I knew that God was with me, that He would look after my wife, and that it would be okay. I really was at peace.

Six months later, I came home from the City of Hope in remission after three months of hospitalizations for chemotherapy, numerous blood transfusions, a stem cell (bone marrow) transplant, and two near-death experiences. At this time my life expectancy is still unknown.

Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

Joshua 1:8 NIV

FRIDAY

December 11

Tim Olson

“**Joy**” is one of those words that doesn’t surface much in my everyday engineering work environment. It is a word that typically doesn’t surface in my everyday conversations either. **Joy** is not typically used in news and media reporting. But maybe, just maybe, that is just what our world (and my life) is missing—more life experienced with **joy**.

When I hear the word **joy**, the first thing that comes to my mind is the Christmas carol, “**Joy** to the World,” which touts these lyrics: “The Lord is come; let earth receive her King.” This carol is a testament to the **joy** that we as Christians have together in the birth, existence, and presence of our personal Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The year 2020 has been a year of trials of many kinds! I’m not sure anyone can say that he or she hasn’t faced unexpected trials of many kinds in 2020. We are facing individual trials, and then globally and locally we have collectively faced trials together. It is our choice as to how to respond to the trials we face, both individually and collectively.

Personally, 2020 has presented me with various unexpected trials. There are adjustments in my workplace—although I’m working in my office, my business interactions have been drastically modified in 2020. My youngest child’s freshman and now sophomore years in college are far from what was expected. My wife is teaching first grade remotely from our home. My ability to interact with my 91-year-old mother in her retirement community is very different than expected. Probably equally as much a trial for Glenkirk as for myself, who has always been an active participant of a church community, our church “normal” is far from what I have known as normal for the 52 years of my life.

But you know what? Despite these trials of 2020, I believe one’s perspective is key. I have found more opportunities for real quality conversations and communication with friends, family, neighbors and co-workers that probably would not have transpired without the trials of 2020. I have had more conversations within my workplace where faith and prayer have been referred to as our only reasonable solution to seemingly overwhelming, compounding trials of 2020.

It is a natural tendency to face trials and adverse situations with swift sternness, sometimes distraught disengagement, or even anger. I challenge you to join me this Christmas season to find the “**Joy** to the World,” found only in Jesus, as we close out a very trial-bound year of 2020.

*Consider it pure **joy**, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.*

James 1:2-3 NIV

SATURDAY

December 12

Josh Linden

Has this been a difficult season—or year—for you to pray? Have you ever doubted that God has not heard your prayer?

This year, probably more than any others as far as I can recall, has required a lot of prayer. I began my first year of marriage, helped my parents move to a different state, and witnessed both my wife and I adapt to new technology to teach and disciple students. Yet, throughout the ups and downs of this year, there have been times where I have experienced **joy**, and I thank God because experiencing **joy** is something for which I find myself constantly praying.

As I read Luke 1:5-25, a phrase jumped out at me that has important implications for all who have chosen to include prayer as part of their lives. When Zechariah entered the temple, he realized that he was not the only one there—an angel appeared standing before the alter. *“When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard.’”* (vv. 12-13)

While it may be tempting to just jump ahead to the promise of the angel or Zechariah’s doubt, too often we miss a key phrase at the beginning of the angel’s message. After trying to calm Zechariah’s nerves by saying, *“Do not be afraid,”* the very first part of the angel’s message is, *“Your prayer has been heard.”*

This is important because all too often when we pray we may wonder or doubt if God really hears us. It is in this first part of the angel’s message to Zechariah that we can see that God really does hear our prayers. It was years, maybe even decades, that Zechariah and Elizabeth had prayed for a child and had maybe even given up now that they were old.

But whether our prayer was spoken five minutes ago or five years ago, God has heard it, and He has been working—and *perhaps waiting for the right time*—to give us the best possible answer at the perfect time and in the perfect way from His kingdom perspective.

May you continue to draw closer to God in prayer over this upcoming year and rest assured that your prayers, much like Zechariah’s, do not fall on deaf ears, but they are heard by a loving and gracious Father.

When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard.”

Luke 1:12-13 NIV

MARY

LUKE 1:26-38

A young teenage woman who fled into the hills country because of an unexpected pregnancy shows us that unexpected and even unwanted developments in our lives may actually be the loving acts of God.

MONDAY

December 14

Eric and Christine Helgemo, *Three Angels Haiti*

As I write this devotional, Eric and I have just returned home to the country of Haiti, where we have served with the ministry Three Angels Children's Relief (Three Angels Haiti) for the past nine years. Like many, we evacuated the country as COVID swept in. It was not an easy choice to leave the ministry we loved and served with, but it was the best decision for our family at the time. We were confident that the local leadership would provide good oversight in our absence.

The six-months stay back in the states was challenging. Hardships were compounded by our inability to connect with other believers in the usual way. Without existing friendships, with the churches closed, and with large gatherings prohibited, it became more difficult to experience the fellowship and worship we craved. We started to feel disconnected—from our family, from our friends, and from the Lord Himself.

Perhaps you did not evacuate to a new home during COVID, but you experienced similar emotions. During this time of isolation, many of us feel increasingly disconnected from each other and possibly even from

God. Add to that the mental, physical, and perhaps financial hardships arising during the crises and we can start to question whether God is really still there for us, watching over us, **loving** us.

During these challenging times, the words of the psalmist provide great comfort: "**I love** those who **love** me, and those who seek me diligently find me" (Proverbs 8:17). He **loves** us, and He wants us to seek Him.

Maybe we don't feel His **love** as strongly because we have forsaken the practice of actually *seeking* Him. We can get so comfortable with our church routine that we easily get sidetracked in our relationship with Him, not actively seeking His face through prayer and reading His Word—yet both of these can be done without ever leaving our homes. How convenient, yet how difficult at times!

Perhaps a silver lining in this pandemic cloud is the reminder of our need to connect personally with God, to seek Him daily. If so, I urge you: do not abandon this practice! God **loves** us and wants to be in relationship with us, regardless of the storms that may be raging. He is our "*strong tower*" (Proverbs 18:10). Run to Him and dwell in His **love**!

I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.

Proverbs 8:17 NIV

TUESDAY

December 15

Leslie Stockham

In my kitchen I have a bulletin board with a collage of pictures: new babies, friends, engagement and wedding photos, loved ones who are no longer with us, our Compassion International child, Clementine, and some goofy ones of my grandkids. The collage is kind of messy because I keep adding to it, but it makes me happy because the pictures are all of people whom I **love** and with whom I have a relationship.

This year I have felt God calling me more than ever to have a closer relationship with Him as well. It's been a year of "fear" and "faith" for me. The pandemic created fear in me. Would I keep working? Would we get sick? Was my family going to be okay? So many unknowns! I was not relying on God or putting my faith and trust in Him. But God tells me over and over again to not be afraid. Psalm 27:1 says, *"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?"*

So, every day I continued with Glenkirk's daily devotions, as well as re-reading *The Storm*, which is the Bible as one continuous story. It is full of stories where God shows up in impossible situations. Time and time again

He shows us that He is faithful, even when we are not. And why would my small bubble of a lifetime be any different? Thousands of years of faithfulness! It's so encouraging! Less fear—more faith. *"Great is His faithfulness; His loving kindness begins afresh each day"* (Lamentations 3:23).

God continues to be faithful with a year full of blessings: good health, a loving and growing family, a wonderful church, and continued work. I don't know what 2021 will bring, but I will go into this season with less fear and more faith, knowing that my God will never abandon me. Romans 8:38-39 are two of my favorite verses as I imagine myself in the palm of God's big, loving hands!

*For I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from His **love**. Death can't, and life can't. The angels won't, and all the powers of hell itself cannot keep God's **love** away. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, or where we are—high above the sky, or in the deepest ocean—nothing will ever be able to separate us from the **love** of God demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ when He died for us.*

Romans 8:38-39 TLB

WEDNESDAY

December 16

Carmen K. Hustad

I have been a Christian all my life. Sunday School, Bible Study, church attendance, etc. I had the most godly experience when I was “born again.”

When my husband died, I could not attend church alone. I went to Calvary Chapel with my stepdaughter for about a year. One Sunday I went up to the altar when they held an “Altar Call for Prayer.” I walked away from there a different person. I felt like I was encased in the Shining Light of God. John 3:3 says: “*Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.*”

God is giving me patience to deal with the lockdown. I was invited to a family function, then uninvited because I am old and may get somebody sick, or I may get sick. I was so upset and really had to take charge of my patience and understanding to act in an adult way. With God’s help through prayer, I held my anger and was able to understand the situation.

God is there every day leading me through these days: staying home; wearing a mask; understanding why we can’t go to church, restaurants, and events; and understanding why we can’t meet friends and engage in business functions.

I keep these Scriptures close to my heart, ever mindful of God’s promises:

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for Him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil. For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land.

Psalms 37: 7-9 NIV

The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:9 NIV

Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly.

Proverbs 14:29 NIV

THURSDAY

December 17

John Wiedmann

Since the last week of February 2020, I have been hunkered down at home with my beautiful wife, Ginny. God knew we would be in this pandemic for a long-haul. We did not. However, He helped us get a good start on our imposed isolation.

Contrary to my reluctance about the quest, we ventured out on March 2 to get a Labradoodle puppy, Ellie Mae. She has clearly been a wonderful source of tonic and sanity during this time of lock-down. Bouncy, playful, beautiful, pleasant, fast-of-foot and really cute. She can almost—but not quite—do no wrong. She continuously makes us laugh with her puppy antics. God is responsible for this. He changed my heart that had been saying “No more dogs!” since our long-time faithful friend, Zoe, was put to sleep in September 2018.

There is another more profound way God has interacted with me. In spite of the joy Ellie Mae brought, I was growing increasingly concerned about my relevance in the insanity of today’s world. Being an 81-year-old

male with a chronic kidney condition, contracting COVID-19 was not appealing. Being isolated to prevent that from happening made the issue of relevance all the more difficult. How could I be a meaningful influence in God’s kingdom?

To counter the perceived lack of relevance, God gave me two things—my men’s group that meets for one precious hour each week, and then just recently a phone call from Glenkirk asking if I would be an active Elder! I did not need to pray much for the answer—definitely “yes.” It clearly occurred to me that God is not finished using me yet.

I can look back and vividly see how God has been carrying me along during difficult times, choosing the direction of my path, sometimes via dramatic and quick changes that were confusing at the time. However, looking back after time had passed and the dust settled, I could understand the twists and turns, the ups and downs. God was guiding my life. My role was to lean on Him whenever confusion and questions arose. We have been created by an amazingly **loving** God.

[The Lord says,] “I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.”

Psalms 32:8 NIV

FRIDAY

December 18

Shane and Christa Crowell

Counting our blessings one by one.

As our family reflects upon the last year, we know everything we've experienced as a result of the pandemic has been historic. We've faced a slew of emotions, both highs and lows, but we have found peace and comfort knowing God has been walking alongside us every step of the way. Proverbs 16:9 provides us a good reminder: *"In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps."*

God has given us the gift of time over the past year to spend time with friends and loved ones whom we would not have seen if our routine would have remained status quo. Experiencing the pandemic in 2020 and eliminating all commitments has given us the gift to reconnect.

We had a dear friend who at age 49 was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Before she passed in July of 2020, we had countless opportunities to spend time together and make memories. We had the time because we were not commuting back and forth to work; we were not

attending various sports events that we always thought were so important; and we were not filling our evenings with media-hyped entertainment. We were just enjoying one another's company and sharing conversations that normally would not have occurred. These memories are a gift that will live on in our hearts forever. Every day that we spent together I thanked God for this time of clarity and purpose.

In addition, our calendar, along with everyone else's, was filled with a record number of deleted or canceled events for which we had been looking forward to attending, one of which was our daughter's college graduation. It was a bitter sweet time as her graduation date came and went. But while we looked at the disappointment in not being at the school in person for a graduation ceremony, we celebrated that we could be with grandparents and other family members who would not have been able to make the ceremony due to scheduling conflicts or distance. Our virtual celebration was truly memorable and was an unexpected blessing.

May you all have a blessed Christmas. As you reflect on the past year and look into the future, may you be able to see God's plan unfolding in your life, and may that provide to you peace and everlasting joy.

In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.

Proverbs 16:9 NIV

SATURDAY

December 19

Rev. Andrea Messinger

Our world has been shaken in 2020. A pandemic has changed our everyday lives. We have seen raging fires, destructive hurricanes, and social unrest across our country. This has brought feelings of fear with all the “what-ifs” that wake us up in the middle of the night. Mary could not have imagined our world today, but then maybe we would have a tough time living in hers.

Let’s take a few moments to ponder some of the ways Mary’s world shook in the time leading up to the birth of Christ.

Mary, a devout, godly woman, was planning her wedding. How excited she must have been, her imagination filled with her new life with Joseph. Suddenly her world and all its plans were rocked by an angelic appearance and news of a miraculous and unexpected birth of a baby. Imagine all the worries that would have plagued this unmarried virgin. Consider all the attached judgments, scorn, and assumptions that would be made about her.

What is revealed in Luke 1:26-38 is a very frightened virgin and a God who comforts through His precious

promises. Mary is highly favored; the Lord God is with her. In the midst of her very understandable trembling, she is encouraged to put her fear aside and trust the Holy One who looks upon her with favor.

The pandemic has shaken all of us up. Some have suffered in greater ways than others, but for all of us this has been a reminder that life can change in a heartbeat. But every promise of our God is true. In this passage the angel reminds us that no word from God will ever fail.

When trouble, loss, and fear come—and they will—our unshakable hope is in the presence of God. Let me challenge you to give yourself and your family a Christmas present that won’t wear out and that will never fail you. Make a decision to be consistently in God’s Word and challenge yourself to memorize one precious promise. My gift to you is one of my favorite passages:

‘For the LORD your God has arrived to live among you. He is a mighty Savior. He will give you victory. He will rejoice over you with great gladness; He will love you and not accuse you.’ Is that a joyous choir I hear? No, it is the LORD Himself exulting over you in happy song. ‘I have gathered your wounded and taken away your reproach.’

Zephaniah 3:17-18 TLB

And so with a few days left in 2020, we don’t know what 2021 holds. We can, however, know the One who holds us in His perfect will, just as He held Mary.

SUNDAY

December 20

John Thornton

It had been a lousy month. We were six months deep into a pandemic separating us from our friends and family. A contentious presidential election. Racial tensions rising so high that they almost eclipsed the fires burning down the towns around us. Trouble at work had sucked the life out of the thing I enjoyed most—teaching. Face-to-face had become face-to-screen.

I wanted to change the world, but I couldn't even change my attitude. So when we set up our lawn chairs that smokey Sunday morning at Glenkirk for worship, I was ill-prepared to change my attitude, mentally and spiritually.

When the song lyrics rang out,

“For God so **loved**
the world that He gave us
His one and only
Son to save us ...”

All I could think was, “Why?” Why does God **love** us? We are so incredibly unlovable. We bicker and fight. We complain. We are petty and judgmental. We are anything but lovable. So why does He **love** us?

While I was absorbed in thought, the band sang on,

“Bring all your failures,	At the foot of the cross.
Bring your addictions,	Jesus is waiting there
Come lay them down	With open arms.”

And then I remembered: God's **love** for me has everything to do with His character and nothing to do with mine. That's why His **love** is unconditional. God **loves** me because of who He is, not who I am. In that moment, I remembered a verse I memorized in my childhood:

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:17b-19 NIV

Suddenly, He lifted my spirit. And I felt just how deeply He **loved** me, how deeply He **loves** us. So as the tears rolled down my cheek, I joined in worship:

“Praise God,
Praise God
From whom all blessings flow.
Praise Him,
Praise Him
For the wonders of His **love**,
His amazing **love**.”

ANNA

LUKE 2:36-40

An older woman who had worshipped God for a long, long time, even in the midst of hardship, helps us to consider whether the *waiting* is actually worth it all. Is the long-expected Jesus, born in a lowly manger, the Messiah and Savior of the world?

MONDAY

December 21

Amy Minick

During this season of quarantine (some nine months come December), I have watched and heard birth pangs of activity. “What are you up to, Lord?” I asked myself when I was sent home on March 13 from teaching at my high school only to finish teaching via the computer and then to start the Fall semester also teaching on the computer.

I want to have ears to hear and eyes to see what goodness the Lord is bringing to the land of the living. I want to have a patient and **waiting** heart for God. But I have struggled with fear. I have flirted with worry. I have held hands with loneliness and slept with confusion. But He is faithful every morning with new mercies. God is enough. His presence is enough. I am so thankful for His faithfulness to me.

God told me that I needed to use this time to pray more, reach out by phone more, and be more creative with how I was communicating. But ultimately, He was telling me to **wait** on Him. He is ALWAYS at work. He doesn't sleep. Nothing catches Him by surprise. He is at work!

And, so, I **wait**. I watch. I pray. I do not want to be caught sleeping.

Do we truly believe Jesus is going to return? Are we looking for it? We need to be ready. While we are **waiting** patiently for His return, He is **still** working and wants us to be **still** working for Him in His kingdom. Eternity is now, my brothers and sisters. We need to be living as subjects of the King in His kingdom while we are here on earth.

I don't want to miss out on anything He has for me. I pray and trust that you don't want to miss out either. We all have a lot to learn. The civil unrest and political upheaval should not be ignored, but neither should they take the place of the Lamb on the Throne. Ask Him what He would have you do and learn. Ask Him for patience.

*Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer **waits** for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently **waiting** for the autumn and spring rains. You, too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.*

James 5:7-8 NIV

TUESDAY

December 22

Sheryl Patton

Has COVID-19 **interrupted** your life as you knew it in January 2020? Let me count the ways! Several years ago, I heard a devotion about lives in the Christmas Story that were **interrupted**. Here are some “stories of interruption.”

Mary, a young Jewish woman in the city of Nazareth, fell asleep, perhaps thinking of her engagement to her future husband, Joseph. Her sleep was **interrupted** by the angel Gabriel. “*The Lord is with you. ... Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God*” (Luke 1:28, 30). She was to be the mother of the Christ-Child and she was willing to accept the **interruption**. “*May it be to me as you have said*” (v. 38).

Joseph was engaged to Mary and they were planning their future. But before they got married, things changed; Mary became pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Joseph’s sleep was **interrupted** by an angel who told him to take Mary as his wife. So “*... he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife*” (Matthew 1:18-24).

Caesar Augustus decided to **interrupt** everyone’s life and conduct a census that would take people to their hometowns to register. So, the entire Roman kingdom was disrupted; “*everyone went to his own town to register*” (Luke 2:1-3).

The trip to Bethlehem was not a part of Mary and Joseph’s plan. But oh, what a night it was! The baby Jesus was born. The shepherds were out on the fields keeping watch over their sheep. And the angels began to sing, **interrupting** the quiet of a stary night. “*Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about,*” the shepherds said (Luke 2:15). They changed their plans for the night.

The wise men who came to Jerusalem were going about their wisely duties when they “*saw His star in the East*” and remembered what the prophet Micah said about the coming Messiah. They left to follow it until they found the Christ-Child with Mary (Matthew 2:1-12). They **interrupted** their plans.

After the Magi from the East visited the Christ-Child, Joseph was warned in a dream to go to Egypt and “*stay there until [God] tells you, for Herod is going to search for the Child to kill Him*” (Matthew 2:13). God altered the plans so that the child would be protected. Joseph and Mary’s plans were once again **interrupted**!

All the people in the Christmas Story who encountered Jesus had their plans **interrupted**, altered, and changed during the early days of our Savior's life. I pray that the Lord **interrupts** my Christmas busyness. Lord, please stop me to focus on the Christ-Child, my Savior and Lord. May the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be praised.

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they [the Magi] returned to their country by another route.

Matthew 2:12 NIV

WEDNESDAY

December 23

Joyce Johnson

What a year we have had. Ups and downs. Places opened and closed. Stay inside or get fresh air. Go outside and wear a mask—but wearing a mask might cause a rise in dementia. Fear or boldness. Speak out or be quiet. What should we do?

In October of 2019, my daughter, Andrea, got married. We gathered in Manhattan, New York. My sisters, their husbands, nieces, nephews, great nephews, Andrea's dad, his sister and husband, her son, his wife and their boys, along with other close family friends. There were around one hundred people to witness Andrea marrying Brittany.

This year my son, Russell, got engaged to Sasha, and they planned on getting married before the end of the year. While I was never that kind of girl who had dreams of my wedding venue, or who was concerned about what friends and family would stand with me on that day, Sasha did.

Sasha was raised in Pleasanton, California. As a child she played with a family friend on their vineyard. They had a beautiful barn-type warehouse. There Sasha

played in the midst of wine barrels. She dreamed of dancing around them at her wedding day celebration. My son just wanted a few things for that day: his long-time friend, mentor, and former youth pastor from Glenkirk, Dave Aramavich, to marry them, an “In-N-Out” truck to feed the guests, and the song “Shout” to start and end the party.

When COVID-19 hit, plans changed and the guest list was reduced. As things got worse, the plans kept changing. As I write this, only immediate family and a few friends are invited guests—no aunts or uncles, no cousins, and so many friends omitted from the guest list. There will be no In-N-Out truck, no dancing, and all will be wearing a mask.

All of this made me think of Mary and Joseph, an engaged couple. Did Mary dream about her wedding day? Did she know which family and friends would light the lamps and gather with the bridegroom? Had she thought about the banquet—who would prepare the family’s favorite dishes. How long did Joseph know that “she was the one” to marry? Did he think about dancing on the shoulders of his friends? Was his mother so

proud of the future wife he had chosen? We do not have answers to these questions. We know a man named Joseph was engaged to marry a woman named Mary. It would become a controversial marriage. Things didn’t go as planned.

But from that union came our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. A man and a woman alone in a barn were part of the greatest birth ever to happen. Jesus was born, and later He died on the cross to cover our sins. Each drop of blood was shed for all of us. No sin is greater than the other. Each drop of blood covers them all. The wedding didn’t go as planned. But two people set their wants and desires aside to follow God’s plan.

I do not always understand the ways and plans of God and life doesn’t always go as planned. I am grateful for a faithful heavenly Father who has directed my paths, which may not always be my wants or desires. But He has been there for me every step of the way.

*In his heart a man plans his course,
but the Lord determines his steps.*

Proverbs 16:9 NIV

THURSDAY

December 24

Jonathan Pierre-Puckett

Never before 2020 have I understood so clearly the joy of receiving good news. For many in our country and in the world, this year has been incredibly difficult with crisis after crisis. Many of us have experienced a deep sense of loss, grief, uncertainty, and despair since last Christmas. Tragedy, darkness, and isolation seem ever-present while messages of good news are few and far between.

The moments when I did receive good news, however, have been etched into my heart and mind: when my mom announced her engagement, when my sister recovered from COVID-19, when I realized that several friendships have grown deeper even though we haven't seen as much of each other face-to-face, and when I received a call to pastor students at Glenkirk Church.

These moments of great joy stand out, especially in a time such as this. But what I find myself most grateful for this Christmas is that we have a Lord whose very existence is "good news"! Good news of a coming peace and everlasting salvation into a kingdom under a good God's

reign! Good news of a Messiah whose name is **Emmanuel**—God with us. Good news that He has returned to creation to comfort His people and bring redemption with Him.

The most difficult part of receiving good news, though, is the time leading up to the moment when the good news comes to fruition. Most of the time, the anticipation is almost unbearable for me! After all of the Christmas parties and celebrations are over, Christmas Eve is essentially the seemingly empty time leading up to Christmas Day—but it's not empty. The good news is that "the Lord returns," and on this day, we see the beautiful sight of Him on His way.

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!' ... When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD will lay bare His holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

Isaiah 52:7-10 NIV

FRIDAY

December 25

Walter Ray

Jeanie received a phone call from a nurse at the hospital telling her that her father had just been admitted to the hospital and was very ill. Jeannie was terribly upset because the last time they talked to each other they had a terrible argument, and the last thing she said to her father as she left the hospital room was, “I hate you!”

Jeanie went to the hospital immediately. When she got to the room, the nurse met her outside and told her, “I am sorry, but your father did not make it.” Jeanie burst into tears. She thought that now she would have this guilt with her all of her life, and that she would be haunted by the last words that she spoke to her father, “I hate you.”

Jeanie ran into the room sobbing and hugged her father while the nurse went in with her. On the floor the nurse saw a little piece of paper with a note on it. She picked up the paper and they both read it. It said: “My dearest Jeanie, I **forgive** you. I pray you will also forgive me. I know that you love me. I love you. Daddy.” What a gift that was!

Jesus told us to **forgive** one another. Some of you are holding on to some resentment, and you need to **forgive** someone else. You say, “But how can I **forgive** so and so when they were wrong and have not apologized?” What is the difference WHO was wrong? Does God **forgive** us only if we were not wrong? You and I were wrong, yet God sent Jesus to be born as a baby for us!! SO **forgive** one another, right now—even if the other person was wrong. Jesus said, “*If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*” (Matthew 6:15).

On Christmas Day we celebrate Jesus’ birth. He grew up; He died on the cross for OUR sins; and He left us a note. The note from Jesus to you says: “I love you. I **forgive** you. My peace I give unto you.” Will you make room for Him now “in the inn” of your life?

Accept the Christmas gift of Christ as your Savior!!

*If you do not **forgive** others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Matthew 6:15 NIV

SATURDAY

December 26

Pam Schubert, *Mission Partner in Turkey*

In Isaiah 30, we read that as the Israelites dealt with real enemies, they didn't make the choice to seek God's plan and trust in Him. Instead, they made an alliance with Egypt and trusted in Egypt's strength to save them from their foes. Rather than turning their eyes to God, they looked to the power of the Egyptians for deliverance.

God pronounces the results of this: "You said, 'We will ride off on swift horses.' Therefore, your pursuers will be swift!" (Isaiah 30:16). Despite the disloyalty of the Israelites, God expresses His heart of steadfast faithfulness to them and promises deliverance and blessing in the remaining verses of this chapter (30:18-33).

"Blessed are all who **wait** for Him [God]." **Waiting** for Him does not mean that we just pause and respond with passivity. **Waiting** is active and requires that we be alert to God—to listen and to watch. It means that regardless of the situation or difficulty which stands looming before us, we are to shift the focus of our thoughts and to fix our eyes on God.

As we gaze on Him, His character and who He is takes the forefront and becomes greater than the concerns

weighing upon us. As stated in Isaiah 30:18 and seen throughout the Scriptures, He longs to be gracious to us; He is compassionate; He is a God of justice.

In **waiting**, in gazing on our Lord God, we gain assurance that He will take action to show His compassion and justice. We gain certainty that in His graciousness, He will lead, provide for and protect His people. Perhaps our expectation shifts—it moves away from being about a desired outcome, benefit, or blessing; instead, He Himself becomes our focus.

Another fruit of this process of fixing our eyes on God is that increasingly we **wait** with eager anticipation and steady expectation for His will and plans. We have surety He will act and do what is right. We lean in on Him and rest in His presence. In the place of worry and fear, we have peace. In the place of struggle and strife, we experience release.

Regarding the difficulty which looms greatest before us, let's take the challenge to "**wait** for Him."

*Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; He rises up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who **wait** for Him.*

Isaiah 30:18 NIV



GlenkirkChurch.org

Glenkirk Church | 1700 Palopinto Ave. Glendora, CA 91741 | 626.914.4833
www.glenkirkchurch.org |  @GlenkirkChurch |  Facebook: GlenkirkChurch