

Promises Kept



NOVEMBER 22, 2021 – JANUARY 1, 2022

GLENKIRK CHURCH CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONALS 2021

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*But now, this is what the LORD says—
he who created you, Jacob,
he who formed you, Israel:
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
² When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.
³ For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”*

Isaiah 43:1-3 NIV

Promises Kept

One of the names given to Jesus in Revelation 19 is “Faithful and True.” In the midst of all that goes on around us, we have One who is faithful and true to His word, His promises. This Christmas season our sermon series is titled: “Promises Kept.” God keeps His promises; it is in His character. By looking at some of the ways that Jesus fulfilled God’s past promises, we gain confidence in trusting Him to keep His promises for today and for tomorrow.

This booklet contains personal testimonies regarding how individuals in our congregation have experienced the faithfulness of God as He has kept promises to them. May they inspire you to continue to hang on in whatever situation you find yourself in, to not fear even though you might feel you are completely out of control—because you have a Savior. A Savior not just for the forgiveness of sins, not just for after you die, but One who has the power to save now, to save both you and your family.

We have also included the daily office readings and some instructions for taking time every morning and evening to just be with God. Often, we want God to speak to us, to hear His voice, His Word for whatever we are facing. God does speak, but most often it is through His Word, and His still small voice applying that Word to our situation.

So, as you prepare for the new year (and Advent begins the new year), take time to prepare your heart to receive the birth of something more of God into your life this Christmas. Expect Him to show up during the times you set aside to just enjoy Him. As you begin and end each session, be sure to take just 1-2 minutes and just be still with God. As the psalmist says, “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10 NIV). Or maybe better yet, “Cease striving and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10 NASB).

COVID has been hard, but God is saving us through COVID into something new, into the fulfillment of His ultimate promise of His Kingdom coming to earth. God’s ultimate call is for us to join Him in that work. Will we step out on the promise of His bringing all things together under His rule, trusting in the power of the Spirit to use us and work through us for His glorious purposes?

In the Morning

TAKE 15-20 MINUTES

Begin by just sitting for 2 minutes 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 for 2 minutes. 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.

Take two minutes and just sit with God quietly. Release yourself to God for the night, asking that you would be conscious of His love as you sleep.

Readings for Advent

Monday, November 22	<i>Psalm 76; Daniel 7:19-27; Revelation 11:1-14</i>
Tuesday, November 23	<i>Psalm 76; Ezekiel 29:1-12; Revelation 11:15-19</i>
Wednesday, November 24	<i>Psalm 76; Ezekiel 30:20-26; John 16:25-33</i>
Thursday, November 25	<i>Psalm 25:1-10; Nehemiah 9:6-15; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11</i>
Friday, November 26	<i>Psalm 25:1-10; Nehemiah 9:16-25; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22</i>
Saturday, November 27	<i>Psalm 25:1-10; Nehemiah 9:26-31; Luke 21:20-24</i>
Sunday, November 28	<i>Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-26</i>
Monday, November 29	<i>Psalm 90; Numbers 17:1-11; 2 Peter 3:1-18</i>
Tuesday, November 30	<i>Psalm 90; 2 Samuel 7:18-29; Revelation 22:12-16</i>
Wednesday, December 1	<i>Psalm 90; Isaiah 1:24-31; Luke 11:29-32</i>
Thursday, December 2	<i>Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:5-12; Philippians 1:12-18a</i>
Friday, December 3	<i>Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:13-18; Philippians 1:18b-26</i>
Saturday, December 4	<i>Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 4:1-6; Luke 9:1-6</i>
Sunday, December 5	<i>Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 1:68-79; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6</i>
Monday, December 6	<i>Psalm 126; Isaiah 40:1-11; Romans 8:22-25</i>
Tuesday, December 7	<i>Psalm 126; Isaiah 19:18-25; 2 Peter 1:2-15</i>
Wednesday, December 8	<i>Psalm 126; Isaiah 35:3-7; Luke 7:18-30</i>
Thursday, December 9	<i>Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 6:1-8; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15</i>
Friday, December 10	<i>Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 8:4-12; 2 Corinthians 9:1-15</i>
Saturday, December 11	<i>Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 9:8-15; Luke 1:57-66</i>
Sunday, December 12	<i>Zephaniah 3:14-20; Isaiah 12:2-6; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18</i>

Monday, December 13	<i>Isaiah 11:1-9; Numbers 16:1-19; Hebrews 13:7-17</i>
Tuesday, December 14	<i>Isaiah 11:1-9; Numbers 16:20-35; Acts 28:23-31</i>
Wednesday, December 15	<i>Isaiah 11:1-9; Micah 4:8-13; Luke 7:31-35</i>
Thursday, December 16	<i>Psalms 80:1-7; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 10:10-18</i>
Friday, December 17	<i>Psalms 80:1-7; Isaiah 42:10-18; Hebrews 10:32-39</i>
Saturday, December 18	<i>Psalms 80:1-7; Isaiah 66:7-11; Luke 13:31-35</i>
Sunday, December 19	<i>Micah 5:2-5a; Psalms 80:1-7; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-55</i>
Monday, December 20	<i>Psalms 113; Genesis 25:19-28; Colossians 1:15-20</i>
Tuesday, December 21	<i>Psalms 113; Genesis 30:1-24; Romans 8:18-30</i>
Wednesday, December 22	<i>Luke 1:46b-55; Micah 4:1-5; Ephesians 2:11-22</i>
Thursday, December 23	<i>Luke 1:46b-55; Micah 4:6-8; 2 Peter 1:16-21</i>
Friday, December 24	<i>Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalms 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14</i>
Saturday, December 25	<i>Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalms 98; Hebrews 1:1-4; John 1:1-14</i>
Sunday, December 26	<i>1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Psalms 148; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52</i>
Monday, December 27	<i>Psalms 148; Proverbs 8:32-36; John 21:19b-24</i>
Tuesday, December 28	<i>Psalms 148; Isaiah 54:1-13; Revelation 21:1-7</i>
Wednesday, December 29	<i>Psalms 147:12-20; 1 Chronicles 28:1-10; 1 Corinthians 3:10-17</i>
Thursday, December 30	<i>Psalms 147:12-20; 2 Chronicles 1:7-13; Mark 13:32-37</i>
Friday, December 31	<i>Psalms 147:12-20; 1 Kings 3:5-14; John 8:12-19</i>
Saturday, January 1, 2022	<i>Ecclesiastes 3:1-13; Psalms 8; Revelation 21:1-6a; Matthew 25:31-45</i>
Sunday, January 2, 2022	<i>Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalms 147:12-20; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:10-18</i>

Week One

Monday

Grace Moorefield

November 22, 2021

Flashback to my first nursing school apartment and the flimsy homemade orange and yellow felt scroll that hung on my dining room wall as I so diligently studied. It read, “Immanuel. God with Us.” Back then I knew I needed God’s strength, courage, and confidence if I was going to be “successful” as a nurse. I had no idea, however, how much I would need Him even 40 years later, not just as a nurse, but in every single area of my life. I have needed Him to be the hope that gets me out of bed in the morning, the determination that propels me through whatever impossibility I may face on a given day, and my eagle strength when I am overcome with discouraging exhaustion.

This past year has been beyond challenging. I have had to navigate what it means to be a nurse educator during extremely difficult times. I have also butted up against my own limitations as a wife, mother, grandma, aunt, and friend. Walking alongside students and colleagues in the midst of confusion, trauma, grief and loss as a result

of COVID-19 has been heartbreaking. Witnessing the political unrest, discrimination and hatred that has permeated our world has been appalling. But even more personally, in the silence of the “stay-at-home” restraints, I came eyeball to eyeball with the temptation to give in to grand discouragement over life’s disappointments. Doubt also crept in at times as I struggled with yet to be answered life-altering prayers.

Flashback to my first nursing school apartment and the flimsy homemade orange and yellow felt scroll that hung on my dining room wall—some 40 years later. Yes, Immanuel, God has been with me and ever so near.

He has been my strength, my courage, and the source through which I have overcome temptation and fears. He has been my hope and tenacity of spirit. He has answered prayers, and I know I can trust Him with the unanswered ones. The Lord my God has been, is, and will always be with me wherever I go, even when I am to be masked in public or when I cannot go anywhere at all.

**Have I not commanded you?
Be strong and courageous.
Do not be terrified, do not
be discouraged, for the LORD
your God will be with you
wherever you go.
Joshua 1:9 NIV**

Tuesday

Julianna Mountain

November 23, 2021

The year of 2021 has definitely been a journey of change and the unknown for me, but I can confidently say that I've learned a lot about myself along the way.

I came into the month of January attending my high school classes on Zoom. Throughout the school year, I had faced many challenges in adapting to online learning. I struggled with motivation, anxiety, a lack of connection with my friends, and overall confidence in myself. During this period, there were many moments when I couldn't feel God's presence in my life. I didn't have the energy or desire to spend time with Him, and instead I let myself fall into a downward spiral of self-doubt and stress.

It was certainly a difficult time, but when I began going back to school in April, things improved. I reconnected with people I hadn't seen in months—people I cared about. I pushed myself to keep going, even if I was overwhelmed by schoolwork and still adjusting to my new daily life. As the end of my sophomore year drew

closer, I prepared for exams and tests in an attempt to finish strong. Although it wasn't easy, I didn't give up and summer finally came. Through events like Glenkirk VBS and the Engage mission trip to LA, I regained a lot of joy and excitement that I hadn't had during the school year. I talked to God once more, becoming aware that although I had not been able to see it, He had indeed been present in my life this year.

I had gone through some dark places mentally, but God had pulled me out of them and surrounded me with people who loved and supported me. I was by no means worthy of this. I had neglected to turn to Him at the time I most needed it. I didn't see that He was there even when it was right in front of my face. Nevertheless, He still chose to love me unconditionally, and for that I owe it all to Him.

When I look back at where I was at the beginning of the year, I am so proud of how far I've come. The truth is, I'm a messed-up person. I still struggle with accepting myself and fighting off anxiety when it comes. I've sinned and made bad choices, and I don't know a lot of things. But what I do know is that I don't want to live my life if God isn't there to encourage me, love me, and guide me along the way like He did this past year.

“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet My unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

Isaiah 54:10 NIV

Wednesday

Bill Boocock

November 24, 2021

Promises Are Not Created Equal

Mary, the mother of Jesus, knew very well that God was one who kept His promises. After all, neither she nor her aunt, Elizabeth, could have become pregnant (by human means)—Elizabeth was barren and too old to have children, and Mary was a virgin. God sent Gabriel, His special angelic emissary, to bring the news to Mary that she was to give birth to the Messiah and that Elizabeth was already miraculously pregnant. Mary watched eagerly in faith as God’s promises were being fulfilled before her very eyes. Gabriel’s final word to her lingered in her ears: “No word from God will ever fail” (Luke 1:37).

I don’t know about you, but when I think of the promises of God, I like to think of ones like this: “*I will never leave you nor forsake you*” (Hebrews 13:5), or “*‘I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’*” (Jeremiah 29:11). But not all the promises of God give

you that warm and fuzzy feeling, do they? Here are a few examples that come to my mind.

Promise of Inquiry.

“He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart”
(1 Corinthians 4:5).

Promise of Judgment. *“God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil”* (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Promise of Suffering. To Peter from Jesus: “... when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will tie you up and take you where you do not want to go” (John 21:18).

Promise of Uncertainty. The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you” (Genesis 12:1).

Promise of Distress. Jesus to the disciples (and us) “*In this world you will have trouble*” (John 16:33).

You can imagine some of the thoughts running through Mary’s head when a new prophecy from the Almighty was delivered so soon after the others had been fulfilled. But this time, she likely wanted the promise to stay unfulfilled.

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”
Hebrews 13:5 NIV

It was delivered by an older man at the temple only a week after Jesus' birth. Simeon spoke to her directly about her son, and then he added: "... a sword will pierce your soul as well ..." (Luke 2:35).

These are not words that anyone wants to hear. But Mary trusted God, "... for He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23b). She trusted that He had a broader plan beyond her limited personal scope.

As I read the Bible, I get the sense that it's reading me. And what I keep hearing it say is that God is more interested in my character than in my comfort. So why do I keep praying for things revolving around my comfort and less so my character? Have security and comfort become my twin idols? In regard to God's promises, I expect things to happen that He never promised and reject things He has promised that I just don't like. I want to be like Mary who trusted God. I want to embrace the God of promises, even when His Word doesn't make sense to me.

This has been quite an "interesting" several months since last when I did an advent devotional where I wrote:

Whether in the forbearance to endure
Or the power to overcome,
Whether in the bravery to forge ahead
Or the wisdom to hold back,
I must abide in Him

We have had our share of health challenges in the past few months: quadruple bypass surgery, stroke, COVID-19, and cancer. In all this, we are "more than conquerors" (Romans 8:37) as we echo one of our favorite worship songs:

*All my life You have been faithful.
All my life You have been so, so good.
With every breath that I am able,
I will sing of the goodness of God.*

May you and your family have a blessed, Christ-filled Christmas season!

Thursday

Luanne Jaime

November 25, 2021

One of the most meaningful of God's promises to me is the Isaiah passage that promises strength to believers. But the promise is more than mere strength. It is a promise that even through the process of suffering, we will soar on wings of eagles. God has kept this promise to me during the darkest moments of my life.

After the death of my first husband, I had three children to raise on my own. God was immediately present through family and friends. He provided for me through Glenkirk Church, which graciously extended my employment to full-time and provided benefits, making it possible to stay close to home while working full-time. When I suffered a clinical depression a few years later, He was by my side and directed my recovery. Over the years I experienced amazing blessings and incredible fulfillment. Each year at Thanksgiving, I realized anew that my blessings were abundant, and I felt thankful for the years spent "*soaring on wings like eagles*" while understanding that my hope in Jesus Christ would sustain me.

Then God sent me Phil. We became immediate friends and that relationship moved to something deeper. After 14 years of relationship, we got married at the beginning

of the COVID pandemic in a Zoom wedding beneath the cross at Glenkirk. At the end of May, 2021, we left our homes and friends of 40+ years and moved to Spokane, Washington. We built a wonderful new home with large windows looking out on a pine forest. We moved into the house on January 15, 2021. Five short months later Phil passed away and went to be with the Lord. My heart still breaks thinking about the short period of time he got to spend in our new marriage and new home.

I felt devastated and like I was frozen in time and would never be myself again. I felt weak, disoriented, fearful and alienated. Has God continued to keep His promise of strength? Of course, He has! Family and friends surrounded me, providing comfort and hope. New neighbors and people from a local church whom I had never met sent cards, called, prayed for me, and sat with me as I processed Phil's death.

As my strength and hope are slowly coming back, I feel God's love and protection. I know from my past experiences that God will continue to renew my strength, and I will once again "*soar on wings like eagles*." As Thanksgiving approaches, I continue to be thankful that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior and that my hope in Him will continue to give me the strength that I cannot provide on my own.

**Do you not know? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God, the
Creator of the ends of the earth. He
will not grow tired or weary, and His
understanding no one can fathom.
He gives strength to the weary and
increases the power of the weak. Even
youth grow tired and weary, and young
men stumble and fall; but those who
hope in the LORD will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.**

Isaiah 40: 28-31 NIV

Friday

John Reynolds

November 26, 2021

A Promised Victory

One of the really wonderful things about serving an All-Powerful, All-Knowing God is that nothing ever catches Him by surprise. He has not chosen to explain to us why He allowed sin to enter the world in the first place, but when it happened, as recorded in Genesis 3, He already had a plan in place to deal with it, crafted from eternity.

The account of the fall of Adam and Eve into the sin of disobedience, when tempted by Satan, is well-known. They fell for what has become one of Satan's favorite ploys when he asks, "Did God really say?" As we know, God knew what He had commanded and so punishment had to follow, which came in the form of curses, banishment, and eventual death.

But it was not all bad news since our gracious God proceeded to offer a promise of HOPE. Genesis 3:15 has become known in theological circles as the "protoevangelium" or

"first gospel," since at the very moment when punishment was being meted out, God was making a promise that one day someone would come as the seed of the woman to "crush the head" of Satan and open the way to redemption and forgiveness for all the descendants of Adam and Eve who were willing to embrace it. Even as the relationship between man and God was being damaged by sin, God was offering hope that this relationship between Him and mankind could be restored through His Son, Jesus Christ.

When we speak of hoping that something will, or will not, happen, we accept that there is probably a 50/50 chance either way. But when God speaks about hope, it is a "certain hope." It is

definitely going to happen, and we know that what He has promised will come to pass. Scripture is full of the promises of God, and even a cursory examination will show that He always comes through. What He promised Adam and Eve as they stood before Him in the Garden of Eden came completely true when Jesus walked out of another garden millennial later and went to the cross to destroy the works of Satan once and for all. We can be assured, like this first promise of the Savior, that He loves us and is always victorious over the power of sin—our hope is in Him!

**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.**

Genesis 3:15 NIV



Week Two

Monday

Gina Conner

November 29, 2021

When the “floor falls from beneath your feet,” it really can reveal what you are made of in those moments. When my husband became ill suddenly, I took him to the hospital emergency room. From there, they moved him to the 2nd floor, then down to the ICU, then back to the 2nd floor, back down to the ICU—you get the picture. He moved from floor to floor and was medically unstable and hospitalized over a month. He had over seven doctors assigned, and we were told he was at risk for not making it. All stability was hanging in the balance.

My husband was my rock, my best friend, the person I rolled my eyes at when he told the worst puns ever, and the father to our children. My “floor fell” and I was falling to what felt like my impending death. In those desperate and unknown moments, I realized what I wanted was to have control over outcomes, to be able to rely 100% on what our seven doctors were reporting to me every day. What I wanted was to have a comfortable life without any bumps and the assurance of having a relatively peaceful life here on earth. I took God and His power, His provision, His peace, and His authority out of the equation every time I tried to place my trust in either myself or our doctors.

Through encouragement from our family, our church family, our pastors, our small group, our friends and coworkers who were praying for us, my eyes began to look upward rather than to myself or the world. I began realizing that God is the Author of life; we are His beloved and He is working for our good all the time. When I began to embrace that, I felt His presence, I felt His peace that surpasses all understanding, and I felt His strength sustaining me. I started remembering lyrics to worship songs: “All my life you have been faithful, all my life you have been so, so good.” “Your plans are still to prosper. You have not forgotten us. You’re with us in the fire and the flood. You’re faithful forever, perfect in love. You are sovereign over us.” “Waymaker, Miracle Worker, Promise Keeper, light in the darkness, my God, that is who you are.”

So when your “floor is falling beneath you,” look up and remember the Lord is close to the brokenhearted. And when you feel like you have lost all control, remember His promises and what His Word says:

**I lift my eyes up to the mountains—
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
Psalm 121:1-2 NIV**

“Do not be anxious in anything but in prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God and the peace of God, which transcends ALL understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7)

“I lift my eyes up to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.” (Psalm 121:1-2)

Lastly, lean into your church family—they will love you well. Let them be God’s hands and feet to love you and lift you up.

Tuesday

Marlene Lamerson

November 30, 2021

In March of 2020, I stood in the bedroom of my new 2-bedroom apartment. (After five years as a single parent, with God's help my son and I were finally able to move into our own apartment.) Just a month after we moved in, I was filled with a sense of dread as I contemplated the news. We were learning about a virus that seemed to affect a disproportionate number of people 60 and older. I was eyeing my 60th in a few short months.

I lifted my eyes to the corner of the room and began to pray: "Lord, how can this be?" I asked. "You have brought my son and I so far, now this? Is this the end? Please help us." As I continued to pray, something strange and wonderful happened. A calm settled on me. I was reminded of God's promise found in Philippians 4:6-7: *"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." I believe it was this peace of God that I was experiencing.

And it was this promise and this peace that sustained me as the images of that year began to bombard our senses. It is so comforting to know that in the midst of social unrest, a global pandemic, a changing political landscape, and broken relationships, God is the one constant we can rely on. Unlike others who break their promises – world leaders, politicians, loved ones whom we trusted – God remains faithful, and His promises are true. God keeps His promises.

Even today, as I look into that corner of my room, I'm reminded that I should not be troubled because no matter what happens, God promises me that I have a room in His house where I will be with Him forever (John 14:1-3).

**Every good and perfect gift
is from above, coming down
from the Father of the heavenly
lights, who does not change
like shifting shadows.**

James 1:17 NIV

God's promises offer us peace. And such peace is a gift. When we consider the giving and receiving of gifts at this season, may we be reminded at Christmas time and always that *"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows"* (James 1:17).

May God's promises keep you in peace now and forevermore.

Wednesday

Ellan Shelton

December 1, 2021

Just before the pandemic began, I learned that the financial inheritance I thought I might receive someday was gone. Poof! An inheritance was never an overt thought of mine until it was gone. It was a difficult time. Not only were my aging parents in a financial crisis, they were in emotional turmoil as well.

A few months prior to this, I had begun a simple Bible reading challenge, along with my sisters-in-law, to read through the Bible in a year—along with many women across the country (biblereadingchallenge.christkirk.com). What began as a half-hearted commitment turned into a year of yearning to understand better who God is and what He has done.

In reading through the stories of the wilderness and acquisition of the Promised Land, I became acutely aware of one promise in particular that God kept toward His people and still keeps today—that of the promise of His presence as our ultimate inheritance.

While in the wilderness, the Israelites yearned for a home—the land that had been promised to them as their inheritance. *Home*—security, comfort, sustenance.

When the Lord keeps that promise and the Israelites acquire their promised land, the Lord allots land to each tribe (Joshua 15-21). However, one tribe receives no inheritance of land—the Levites. The Levites, a priesthood, worked day and night to maintain the Lord's physical presence via the Tabernacle and keeping the Old Testament law and covenant. However, when it came time to divvy up the Israelites' land, God gave the Levites none, instead stating that He, the Lord Himself, was their share and inheritance (Deuteronomy 18:2).

God's *presence* would be their portion.

When I reflect on what it means to be living under the New Covenant—God's presence dwelling within me through the Holy Spirit by the grace afforded me

through the blood of Jesus Christ—I can't help but think we are all called to be modern-day Levites. We no longer do the Old Covenant work of maintaining a tabernacle—sewing tarps, laying out bread, mending the lampstands, keeping the washbasins full—to maintain the Lord's presence. Instead, we freely live with God graciously drawing near to us in the fullness of His presence, simply because we trust Him. He no longer requires a tabernacle. Instead, He requires our complete devotion. We have already received in full our inheritance. He kept His promise to the Levites, and He now keeps that promise to us.

They shall have no inheritance among their fellow Israelites; the LORD is their inheritance, as He promised them.

Deuteronomy 18:2 NIV

Thursday

Laura Cina

December 2, 2021

A global pandemic is an odd thing to be thankful for, yet I am deeply grateful for the experiences of the last year. This last year has been one of exceptional peace despite the ugliness and chaos in the world around us. As a family, we experienced the simple joys of being together without the demands of the world. When all the busyness was stripped away, what we were left with was a deep appreciation for each other and an awareness of what really made us happy.

It seemed like such an odd feeling to have this peace amid the physical suffering, social and political unrest, and economic devastation. It seemed that everything around us was falling apart; yet we were enveloped in a cocoon of peace. At times, we even felt guilty for how happy and content we were. My heart ached deeply for all of those who were in pain, but for the first time in a long time we were not the one's suffering.

The last few years held our share of pain, struggles, and trauma, so it almost felt surreal that all of that seemed

to have vanished from our lives. That led to us having the space to feel again, to breathe in the peace that only God could provide, and to enter a new season of learning and growing. My children thrived in their learning while so many other kids struggled. I stepped out in faith and returned to school after a 20-year break to embark on a new path in life. My husband shouldered unexpected work responsibilities because of COVID-19 and managed to learn and thrive in the uncertainty of his new role.

Everything was wrong—everywhere—but for us it was also righter than it has been in a long time. Only God could have made this so. Only God could have provided a peaceful way in such turbulent and uncertain times. Only God could have taken something so difficult and turned it into something so transformational. I am reminded of the lyrics to one of my favorite worship songs, “Beautiful Things” by Gungor:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

*All this pain,
I wonder if I'll ever find my way.
I wonder if my life could really change, at all.
All this earth,
Could all that is lost ever be found?
Could a garden come out from this ground, at all?
You make beautiful things.
You make beautiful things out of the dust.
You make beautiful things.
You make beautiful things out of us.*

Friday

Mary and Tom Nail

December 3, 2021

In August of this year, we lost our older brother Kirk—known by many as “Rails”—at the young age of 44. In a moment, our world instantly darkened. But just as quickly, we felt God’s presence over us. The love of others has been a candle of God’s light, pushing back the darkness.

We feel God’s presence, love, and light from everyone in our community. We are so touched by the community of Glenkirk, who cried with us, prayed with us, cooked for us, loved us, and helped us grieve. We read in 1 Peter 5:2 (NIV), *“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve.”* We are so humbled and grateful for all the love and support we have received from our church family.

We’re also reminded of Job, who when he lost all of his children and all that belonged to him, he fell to his knees in praise for the blessings God had given him. We, too,

are seeing that the best response to loss or thwarted hopes is praise. Job 1:21 (ESV) states, *“The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD.”*

All good things—possessions, family, friends, health, time—are gifts from God. Instead of feeling entitled to these blessings, we respond with gratitude. We are called to be prepared to let go of anything God takes from us, but we must never let go of His hand!

Our hearts ache as we are missing our big brother, but we can’t help but praise God for the blessing Kirk was in our lives, and we are so very thankful that God gave us 44 years with him.

Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve.

1 Peter 5:2 NIV

Saturday

David Woo

December 4, 2021

“The LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’” (Genesis 12:1-3)

When Abraham was seventy-five years old, God called him to leave Haran to go to a land that God would show him. God promised Abraham that he would be a great nation, that his name would be great, that he would be a blessing, and that *“all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”* (Genesis 12:1-3). God had promised Abraham that one of his descendants would be a blessing to all peoples on the earth. The birth of Jesus was the beginning of God keeping this promise. Jesus would die on the Cross to offer salvation to all.

God is a promise-keeping God; what He says, He will do. His Word says, *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all*

your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5-6). Therefore, we can always trust Him and rely on the many promises He has given to us.

Other promises in His Word: *“The LORD Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged”* (Deuteronomy 31:8). 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). These words bring comfort to our anxious souls in these troubled days. In our worries we can thoroughly rely on the comfort of God’s promises because we know that He is a promise-keeping God.

Abraham was blessed to be a blessing to the world. God’s blessings are intended to pass through us so that we can be a blessing to others. As we are blessed through the birth, life, and death of Christ, we are to pass on this Good News so that others can be blessed. We are to be like a water pipe where the Water of Life that God pours into our hearts flows through us to quench the thirst of others.

A retired friend of mine has a great love for people and a generous heart. In her giving she gives liberally not just to her local church, but to missions, seminary students, and to others in need. She says that she has been blessed to be a blessing.

How are you being a blessing to others?

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6 NIV

Week Three

Monday

Christine Boling

December 6, 2021

When I am weak, then I am strong.

I am the daughter of Depression Era parents who prospered after World War II. As a child, I was given every opportunity and advantage. When I showed an aptitude for music, I was given piano, violin, and guitar lessons. When I dreamed of being a dancer, I was enrolled in ballet lessons and learned ballroom dancing and deportment at Cotillion. Education was everything in my family. Dad believed a good education included travel and being in community, so our family took nice vacations every summer and we entertained frequently in the winter. Mom believed an education was nothing if it didn't include good manners and God. I count her as the first of many "pillars of faith" in my life.

If there was any fault in my upbringing, it was that I didn't have to face adversity. It wasn't until I had a family of my own that I faced any real responsibility, felt real fear or faced adversity. It has taken me many years to develop "grit," the ability to learn and grow through

adversity. It allows one to persevere through hard times and turn a negative into a positive.

The apostle Paul knew this when he wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10: *"Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."* It seems counter-intuitive to welcome adversity, but very often this is when God does His best work in us. God promises He will never leave us nor forsake us.*

My family is facing what may prove to be the hardest thing yet: the sickness and probable shortened life of a loved-one.

While we can find no good in the thought of this, already it has brought us closer. An estranged child—a prodigal daughter—

has returned to us. A relationship restored! God can and does redeem even the ugliest situations. I can't wait to see what more He will do. All praise to Him!

But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV

*Deuteronomy 31:6&8, Joshua 1:5&9, Psalms 73:23, Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 28:20, Hebrews 13:6, 1 Peter 2:9, 1 Peter 5:7, Revelation 3:10.

Tuesday

Ismael Perez

December 7, 2021

God's promise has become more evident to me this past year, a year in which so many prayers have been heard and granted. It is not to say that this is the only time in my life where I witnessed prayers being answered, but it has also been a year where my faith in prayer and God's promise to hear them has been practiced with the greatest confidence, although it has been a long road in getting to this point.

The year 2014 was one I will never forget. It was an especially humbling time in my life, where I got on my knees and prayed harder than ever in my life. In May, on Mexican Mother's Day, we lost my paternal grandmother, Maria; and in October, we also lost my maternal grandmother, Eleanora. This was tough on our entire family and we prayed for their beautiful souls to be received by Him. Praying individually and with the family provided me with comfort and peace. Unfortunately, this was not the end of the wild ride 2014 would be.

Not too long after my grandmother Eleanora's passing, my mother was diagnosed with cancer. This was very difficult

and with such uncertainty of how effective the treatments would be, I knelt before Him and prayed unlike I have ever done in my life. My mother's surgery took place just after Christmas Day 2014, with treatments for the next few months. This event in my life brought me to my knees, yes, but it was the greatest example of Him fulfilling His promise. My mother made it past her 5-year anniversary and was declared free of cancer.

In 2020-2021, prayer was never more necessary. My confidence in Him answering our prayers has matured. I know He answered our prayers when my mother fell seriously ill with COVID, as well as a brother in the church falling ill of another illness.

This time I felt like a true prayer warrior. I prayed alongside my church family and any follower I felt I could request prayer from. It has solidified my comfort and faith in Him and I know He is listening.

My faith will continue to be strengthened, and I encourage all to pray to Him ... and never fear asking others to pray with you, for you and for your loved ones. He keeps His promises! Hallelujah! The meaning of my name Ismael is "God hears" or "God has heard," and it gives me a chuckle at how much I believe that now more than ever.

He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.

Psalm 91:15 NIV

Wednesday

Venus Wan

December 8, 2021

“Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33)

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5)

These are promises and guidance from God that guided my family significantly in the past few years.

When my husband and I believed that it was God’s will for us to move our family from Boston to LA six years ago, we struggled with our insecurities about a new environment for a whole year. God encouraged us through many messages and answered our prayers until we couldn’t deny His direction. Eventually, we surrendered and came here, and God blessed us with a very smooth transition.

However, we didn’t know that our 18-month-old son was going to be diagnosed with asthma, followed by 3-4 years of constant runs to the Urgent Care, ER, and even one night ending up in the hospital with RSV. Looking back, we are amazed by God’s grace after we surrendered ourselves to Him. Glenkirk hired me, and my husband worked remotely for his former Bostonian employer for 3-4 years while our son was in his most critical health conditions. When we

felt so hopeless as our son was so sick, God surrounded me with kind and understanding coworkers and supervisors, and gave my husband the flexible schedule to be the back-up at home should anything happen to our son while he was in school. Our lives would have been very difficult if we had different jobs or worked in a different area. God saw what we couldn’t see, and He knew what we needed even before our challenges began.

Last year during the pandemic, my husband wanted to switch to a different job that’s close to home, but he lost an opportunity that he had highly anticipated. For several

months we sought different ways to improve his work commute, including moving closer to his work area. We began a several-months-long house-hunting journey with daily prayers, seeking God’s guidance for this big change. We encountered a few places where we saw great possibilities, and we were so close to finalizing the process, but these potential homes all fell through. We kept praying for God to either open doors or shut them, but at least let us see/know why.

In all those months we tried to find a house, but we were disappointed, and we tried again, and waited. Then one day a new thought suddenly crossed both my mind and my husband’s mind that perhaps this is not God’s plan for us at this time. We discussed this seriously and agreed that we would let go of our attempts to find my husband a new job and a new house. Shortly after that, the job opportunity that my husband lost shockingly came back to him, and it would not have made sense if we had moved to a different area as his commute would have been doubled. I am glad we were sensitive and patient, and I am once again thankful that God saw what we couldn’t see.

Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Matthew 6:33 NIV

Thursday

Sarah Landowski

December 9, 2021

“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)

I initially heard that verse during the darkest year of my life when someone quoted it while praying over me. I rejected it like spoiled milk. My anxiety disorder rendered me incapable of trusting anything other than prescription sedatives then, which made me feel *“anxious about nothing”* for three hours at a time. I abused them until God lifted my compulsion to use in 2013. That remains the most pivotal moment of my life for which I thank Him daily.

I belong to a fellowship that suggests “turning your will over to the care of God.” I did not take that seriously at first. I then read a book by Dr. M. Scott Peck who convinced me to try it.

Three months into my recovery, I sincerely prayed for God to guide my will. As I did that, I felt an energy swirl around me with delight. Its embrace felt magical.

God revealed that He, being the Author of Truth, only works with honesty. I ran with that; my prayers became raw.

I “presented my petitions to God” by unearthing my despair, rage, and resentments. Over time, the black static of fear in my stomach dissipated and the chatter in my mind dialed down. Prayer purified and reoriented my will in a healthy direction.

Although I still experience emotional challenges, my mind is exponentially quieter now than it was before. I now experience satisfaction in my spirit and warmth in my heart that clears my mind of most residual noise. The best part is that my newfound serenity never wears off because its Source is infinite and eternal. I had to let God take out my emotional garbage before I even had space for peace.

Drugs provide counterfeit relief. Instead of “guarding my heart and mind,” as the Scripture promises that “the peace of God” does, the enemy used my desperation to try to kill me and take everything that I possessed.

God’s peace is a multidimensional gem; inner calmness is one facet of its treasure. It is the satisfaction of actions with sincere motives, for peace comes from doing the right thing for the right reason. It is laughing at our imperfections. It is the faith that He will one day replace the law of the jungle with the restoration of paradise.

Peace begins with prayer over a dour skeptic and ends with His promise fulfilled.

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

Friday

Wayne Herman

December 10, 2021

A Promised King

“The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until He to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be His.”
(Genesis 49:10)

Jacob’s blessing to his son, Judah, included the promise of a coming king. When eventually one of Judah’s heirs, David, was established as the king of Israel, the people recognized him as the one of whom the LORD had said, *“You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler”* (2 Samuel 5:2). When the leaders of Israel affirmed David as king, they made a covenant with him and anointed him as their ruler.

When we come to the New Testament, we find that Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14) who knows His sheep and gives His life for them. He is also recognized as the Promised King (Matthew 2:2). God fulfilled the promise uttered by Jacob initially through David, but finally and completely through Jesus. When God fulfills His promises, that fulfillment requires a response on the part of His people. Just as the leaders of Israel recognized David as king and

chose to follow him, so Jesus’ disciples recognize Him as their Shepherd and King and choose to follow Him.

My wife and I have recently reflected on God’s promises to us, especially over the past two years. God has not promised us ease or good health or wealth, as much as we might prefer those things. What He has promised is to be the Good Shepherd, caring for us as we follow Him. He has promised His presence, His loving kindness, His provision of our needs, and His grace.

We have experienced all these things in abundance, despite wishing we could have spent more time with family, wishing my father had not passed away last December, and wishing I could spend more time with colleagues in-person rather than on Zoom. My wife sensed God’s leading and presence as He called her to spend more time last year caring for the three young girls whom she nannies, helping them do their schoolwork from home so that their parents could continue working. God used her experience of homeschooling for more than 20 years to make His presence known in this family.

As we celebrate God’s fulfillment of His promise, let’s commit to following our Good Shepherd and King.

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until He to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be His.

Genesis 49:10 NIV



Week Four

Monday

Jessica Reed

December 13, 2021

“God is within her, she will not fall; He will help her at break of day.” (Psalm 46:5)

This Scripture has been my morning mantra every single day since the beginning of this pandemic. Psalm 46 has always had a special place in my heart with the birth of our daughter, Olivia Marie, in 2017. After being blessed with two beautiful boys, we were finally having a precious girl.

As the pandemic ramped up in March of 2020, one morning I woke up feeling severe anxiety when I walked into Olivia’s room where this psalm is written on her wall. I began the practice of repeating this hymn over and over daily. *“God is within her, she will not fall.”* This promise from Him has carried me through some very dark times in 2020. Working in healthcare became scary and unpredictable. Could I be bringing home this deadly virus to my family? I pressed on knowing that our heavenly Father would not let me fall. He was within me and would protect me.

In early December, my father was diagnosed with a massive cancerous tumor in his face that was spreading rapidly and needed to be removed immediately. Hospital operating rooms were ordered to shut down due to the pandemic. Panic overtook me knowing that, though there is never a good time for cancer, this was the worst possible timing for this diagnosis. The surgeons ultimately deemed this an emergency and the 14-hour surgery was scheduled. There were no visitors allowed in the hospital, and with the virus running rampant, new concern and anxiety overtook me.

Though these dark moments of 2020 are still very much engrained in my memory.

I knew that our God is a big, big God and that He was within me and would carry me through. I turned to the book of Isaiah where I found promises of hope, protection, redemption, and rescue. God is near. He is in control. We have nothing to fear. Cry out for Him and He will hold you. Our troubles are not too big for Him.

As I leaned into Him, I knew everything would be okay. He has a plan! He is ALWAYS in control! Trust Him! The vaccine was made available to my father just before his surgery. His tumor was successfully removed in its entirety with no cancer spread to his nodes. He completed radiation with no complications and, PRAISE GOD, my dad is now cancer free!

**God is within her, she
will not fall; He will help
her at break of day.**

Psalm 46:5 NIV

Tuesday

Paty Moeller

December 14, 2021

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7)

It’s hard to put into words where I’ve seen God’s promises kept in my life—not because I can’t see them, but because there have been many.

Let me explain. I have chosen to focus on God’s promises these last handful of years. Let me tell you that it has not been easy. I’ve had to really dig deep and sort through all the life crud and challenges to see His promises. I know that I have not been alone and that God has been with me the whole time (promise), that He hasn’t forsaken me (promise), that when I sit in His presence and quiet myself, I feel His peace (promise).

I’ve been working on letting go of control. I’m a work in progress in this department for sure. With that said, this is where I’ve seen His promises shine through.

I have two boys, well, okay, young adult men. (Why is that so hard to say?) Seeing them grow up and make their own life decisions has been a true joy but also very hard. Why, you might ask. Did I mention It’s hard for me to give up control?

This has been the hardest season of letting go and yet it’s part of life. I say this as I try to convince myself.

Our kids grow up and we pray that we’ve taught them all the things for them to not just survive but to thrive in whom God has created them to be. As a parent, especially a mom, this is hard. We question ourselves—well, at least I have. Have we taught them everything? Did we have the important conversations? Did we walk through different life scenarios? I tell you—control issues.

With that said, I know that these questions were coming from fear, from not trusting God. I’ve seen how offering my boys grace instead of advice has brought me peace and so much comfort. That’s a promise of God’s love for His people—a peace that surpasses all understanding, which happens through faith in Him alone.

**For we walk by faith,
not by sight.**

2 Corinthians 5:7 NIV

I know that God’s promises hold true for my boys. God loves them and they are His children. We need to look for God’s love and promises as we navigate this life during this time in history. I need to remind myself of this every day.

I’ve seen God’s promises kept in my life with the peace that I now have. I need to continue to walk by faith, not by sight, and remind myself that God is in control. We know how the story ends and that’s the biggest promise.

Wednesday

Jeff and Brooke Kugel

December 15, 2021

This time of year, the traditional holiday season beginning with Thanksgiving through Advent, Christmas and the New Year, is the time when we reflect on all we have. All we have may include: shelter, food, health, and relationships. We profess thankfulness for these things, credit God's favor and sometimes His direct intervention on occasions when we are saved from great threats to all that we have—threats such as illness, loss of a job, or loss of an important family relationship.

The theme of this year's advent is "Promises Kept." What is a promise of God that we have seen Him keep and to what end?

Of all of the promises given, one of the most important is the gift of the Holy Spirit. *"If you love Me, obey My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive Him, because it isn't looking for Him and doesn't recognize Him. But you know Him, because He lives with you now and later will be in you"* (John 14:15-17 NLT).

In times of difficulty and joy, we find it important to reflect on this promise and particularly through the "gifts"

and "fruit" of the Holy Spirit. These include love, patience, kindness, wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. These are the things that God has promised through the Holy Spirit. They are permanent and cannot be lost.

These promises were particularly made evident to us this year as we reflected on our marriage by celebrating our 25th wedding anniversary. We fondly remember all of the good, and we are thankful for making it through some of the difficult years of our marriage. We are reminded of why we are so thankful that God and His promise of the Holy Spirit is the cornerstone of our faith and the knowledge that God will never leave us.

On that day 25 years ago, we made vows of commitment to each other to love, honor and cherish one another until death in front of our family, friends and God. We understood the significance of our commitment to one another and promised to do all that we could to maintain a life-long, happy and healthy relationship.

Sometimes life can get tricky and put a strain on a relationship; without God in our lives, this may have caused us to give up on our marriage. Our deep feelings of gratitude for His Holy Spirit and guidance began on our wedding day and continues to grow each and every day. Clearly, He has been the bond and strength that has been constant throughout our lives together.

The Holy Spirit's guidance and God's love for us is evidenced through His Word. For instance, in Ephesians 4:32 (NLT), Paul states, *"Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."* And in Ephesians 4:2-3 (TLB), he reminds us to *"Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Try always to be led along together by the Holy Spirit, and so be at peace with one another."* We have found that our relationship may not always be perfect, but it has always been a blessing. As long as we keep God at the center of our marriage, we will continue to reap the benefits of all that it has to offer.

Thursday

Rhonda Barnes

December 16, 2021

“I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.” (Psalm 27:13)

On July 19 my 75-year-old father received a *brand-new* heart. For 20 years he has lived with heart problems that have included a heart attack, quadruple bypass, a pacemaker, and congestive heart failure. This spring when the heart failure was at its peak, sending him to the ER continually, we began to understand that his options were running out.

This is precisely when God’s goodness became so tangible.

The local cardiologist realized that there was nothing more he could do, but he was able to get my dad to UCLA Medical Center, one of the best hospitals in the nation. Within hours a bed opened in the needed unit.

God’s goodness came in the care my dad received from his nurses, who were attentive, kind and highly skilled over the three months when he was hospitalized.

God’s goodness came in the expertise of my dad’s medical team, a group of doctors who worked closely together to determine that my dad was a candidate for a heart transplant. They cared for him until a donor was available.

God’s goodness came during the tough times when it was uncertain if the “rocket fuel” they were using to keep him alive would be enough to get him alive until the heart transplant.

God’s goodness came during the pandemic when there was a window of time where visitors were allowed into his part of the hospital, sandwiched between times of visitor shutdown.

His goodness came in the support of our church family, neighbors, friends, and coworkers who prayed, checked in with us, and walked this journey with my family.

His goodness came through the surgeon’s hands during the long transplant surgery and the unexpected surgeries that came in the following days after complications set in.

And God’s goodness showed up most beautifully in the donor family who lovingly gave our family a second chance in the midst of their own grief.

Through all of the ups and downs of the past year, the Lord has been wonderfully faithful. I am in awe that He made a way when there didn’t seem to be one.

I am most grateful that each of us can be sure that what God promises in His Word is true. And despite the difficult circumstances we are facing, He promises to walk with us. Even in times of uncertainty, God is with us, making His goodness visible.

**I remain confident
of this: I will see the
goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.**

Psalm 27:13 NIV

Friday

Norma Larson

December 17, 2021

Believing my husband had several years left to live, the oncologist gave us our two options, shattering what remained of my breaking heart. While refusing to look at me, my husband firmly stated, “I want to go home.” I collapsed in sobs. Nineteen hours later, surrounded by a circle of prayer, he lay dead in our living room.

The first indication I had that my husband might still be present was when the hospice nurse took me aside about an hour after his passing. Her shocked demeanor and look of awe were palpable. “In all my years of working with hospice, I have never experienced anything like it,” she said. She felt Victor’s soul leave his body and rise upward toward the skies. The experience had covered her entire body with chills. And while I pleaded with her not to be telling me this to spare me of my heartbreak, she assured me—swore to me, in fact—that she was not. She got goose bumps again in front of me when she spoke of it. All I could feel was grief.

After that, my mountain of troubles quickly began to escalate. Facing enormous medical bills, I struggled to fight off the creditors. Threatened with eviction, I was forced to begin preparing for a possible move. Then the ex-wife and my husband’s adult children came looking to me for money.

“Are we in the will?” they asked. They caused all kinds of trouble and demanded to see the will. And the list goes on.

“How could You have let this happen, God?” I asked. “Others have experienced miracles. Why not us?”

Many had prayed for my husband’s recovery, and the stress over the last few years had been crippling. I continued to pray—well, beg—as I had ever since we discovered that my husband first had prostate cancer. But this time it was for God to take my life. And when that prayer too went unanswered, I began to pray for help. How was I going to pay the medical bills? Avoid eviction? Prepare for a possible lawsuit against people I had no responsibility for?

Slowly, painfully slowly it seemed, it became clear that the coincidences were too many to be ignored. It was as if I were surrounded with fierce angels, both seen and unseen, all part of an army that nothing could pierce. Every time someone came after me to do me harm, their efforts were crushed. It was as if I was untouchable!!

I received a grant to help pay for the medical bills. The landlord went away. My husband’s former family had no case.

And then I began to wonder...

“You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry.” (Exodus 22:22-24 NKJV)

“The LORD will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow.” (Proverbs 15:25 NKJV)

“He relieveth the fatherless and widow; but the way of the wicked He turneth upside down.” (Psalm 146:9 NKJV)

Lord, I don’t know why you didn’t answer my prayers and spare my husband’s life. But of this I’m sure: You answered his prayer and took him Home.

(In Memory of Victor Penrod)

Saturday

Caitlyn Schan

December 18, 2021

I have always been a schedule-oriented person. I like to have a plan. When my husband and I got married, we had a plan about when we would have our first child. However, after a miscarriage, I discovered some health issues that required our plan to be put on hold. At the time, I felt that God was just telling us He had a different timeline in mind that would be better; but as the years passed, I started to think He forgot.

Then in July of 2020, we found out that we were finally expecting, and God's timing could not have been more perfect. In a year where it seemed like there was nothing to look forward to, when there were nearly no milestones to even pass the time—as holidays went by seemingly unnoticed—we had a celebration every single week as we experienced our daughter grow and develop inside me. She has been the light at the end of our COVID tunnel, and oh what a beautiful light she is!

When I went for my very first doctor appointment, I was terrified, but God gave me a song. It's called "Peace be Still" by Hope Darst. "Even when my eyes can't see,

I will trust the voice that speaks: 'Peace' over me." That became our theme song as I played it on the way to every one of my appointments over and over and over again. God gave me an amazing sense of peace, unexplainable peace, as each day I began to trust more and more that He was answering my prayer and fulfilling His promise.

"Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel"

(Isaiah 7:14). I can't help but think of Mary, as baby Jesus grew inside of her, also celebrating each little movement and kick she felt. I think of her holding that sweet little baby, God with us, and the pure delight and wonder she must have felt. God fulfilled His promises from long ago with that baby boy. He sent His son as the fulfillment of what so many were waiting for, and His timing was perfect.

My daughter was born on March 16. At the time I didn't realize it, but later someone mentioned that she was born on 3-16, like John 3:16: *"God so loved the world that He gave His son."* What a beautiful promise He fulfilled. I am so grateful that He showed His love and faithfulness to me through my sweet baby girl, and that is something I will always hold on to when hard times come: God is faithful.

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:14 NIV

The background is a bright yellow color with a fine, pebbled texture. Two diagonal stripes, one in a slightly darker shade of yellow and one in a light cream color, run from the top-left towards the bottom-right, creating a sense of depth and movement.

Week Five

Monday

Jackie Anderson

December 20, 2021

I was born a week before Christmas and was brought home on Christmas Day 1944. That was the day the Lord showed up. I was abducted from the clinic by another mother & father. When my mother was brought a robust baby boy, she said, “This is not my baby!” (I was a small baby girl.) The nurse tried to talk my mom out of her concern. She turned the baby boy over and displayed the tape on his back that had his name on it; she was told, “Don’t worry.” My mom then heard a car leaving in a hurry from the clinic, and her life of prayer was challenged with a potentially devastating situation. She said she lay in her bed and prayed for an hour or two. Finally, she was rewarded by hospital authorities bringing me, her baby girl, back to her. Her prayer was answered.

The Lord has shown up for me during this long year. I have had physical issues that come with aging. Navigating the challenges of taking care of myself, instead of others, has caused me to lean into the Lord’s promises in a more intense way. Through loving children and prayers

of family and friends, God has been faithful to protect me and keep me sheltered in His care, no matter what circumstances are going on or what future challenges come.

My praise thoughts usually come in the form of an anthem that we are practicing in choir rehearsal, or a praise song that was sung in the Sunday service, or a hymn that was learned in youth group or church as a child, like “Moment by Moment, I’m kept in His love. Moment by Moment, I’ve life from above,” or “When peace like a river attendeth my way; when sorrow like sea billows roll ... whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, ‘It is well, it is well with my soul.’” Other songs: “He turns my sorrow into dancing”; “What have I to dread, what have I to fear, leaning on the Everlasting Arms ... I have blessed peace with my Lord so near ... leaning on the Everlasting Arms.”

“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, but in everything, 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 4:4-7)

**Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, 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**

Tuesday

Lola Finley

December 21, 2021

“Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.”
(Joshua 21:45 NKJV)

When my husband and I were asked to participate in writing a Christmas devotional, we were so nervous. But when we found out the topic was “Promises Kept,” a huge smile came over our faces because, in spite of all the changes in the world, in our lives and in dealing with so much death in our family these past 18 months, God has kept His promise.

The Lord has provided the perfect Scripture at the perfect time. He has brought the perfect people into our lives at the perfect time. When we have felt helpless, someone recommended the perfect prayer book that gave us a renewed hope, a hope that was once long lost. Jesus’ Word became, once again, living truth.

When we see the hope in our son’s and granddaughter’s lives, we see God’s promise being kept. Seeing Jesus

working daily in their lives is like watching a miracle every day in small little bites. We see His promise being kept when we see our granddaughter and her friends doing homework while enjoying worship music in the background. It is such a blessing to see Him touch their hearts through His music. We see His promise when we hear worship music in places where we never thought we would, like our hair salon and gym. It reminds me of Philippians 2:10-11: *“That at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of those in heaven, and those on earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”*

Our hope this Christmas is that we continue to find a renewed hope in the everyday and when reading Scripture, fellowshiping, and worshipping in Jesus’ name. Our hope is not to be blind or in denial of

what is happening, but to remember to immediately turn our hearts to our Heavenly Father, to ask for guidance, and to *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths”* (Proverbs 3:5-6 NKJV).

**Not a word failed of any
good thing which the Lord
had spoken to the house of
Israel. All came to pass.**
JOSHUA 21:45 NKJV

Wednesday

Jo Nichols

December 22, 2021

“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”
(Psalm 119:105 NIV)

A few weeks before Christmas, I start thinking and praying about our family Christmas card collage and the message to send with it. It’s kind of like an annual microscopic Instagram/ Facebook picture review—neither of which I have posted on. But this is also a time of reflection, looking back on God’s blessings.

In last year’s Christmas devo, I shared Mother Teresa’s inspiring quote: “Be the one who offers hope; be the one who brings light into the room; be the one who loves.” Her words encourage us to be the one to love God by loving others, to be a source of blessing and joy!

Come January, I mount our Christmas card on my office wall and give thanks; then I’m off to the next “project” (even during a pandemic)—but not this year. These words resonated with me and God was knocking on the door of my heart. He was pressing my “reset” button to slow down, pause, refresh, pray and be His light in continued challenging, uncertain and divisive times.

Now it was my turn to knock (again) on God’s heart (Matthew 7:7-8) for His wisdom, patience, love, understanding and courage (Joshua 1:9). But this first required removal of my “social mask” worn to disguise my authentic self, a repentant heart, and Jesus’ forgiveness of sins (1 John 2:12).

A global pandemic that is still disrupting many aspects of life has presented opportunities for random acts of kindness, comfort and grace. God’s faithful promises, the Holy Spirit and a prayer-filled life (Philippians 4:6) have enabled me to seek God’s will in small ordinary ways, i.e., deliver a contactless meal, make a grocery pickup, write a note, get to know a neighbor, invite them to dinner, pray for them, help paint a fence, share a message of hope in Jesus, pray with small group and prayer partners. It is different for everyone.

The defining moment during the pandemic was when I realized that at the beginning of each day, there should be no room for anybody but Jesus—then build on His foundation instead of lifting up my agenda and crisis du jour first.

If we abide in Jesus, He will abide in us. He is the vine and we are His branches ... but be prepared for pruning so that we can become more like Him and bear good fruit (John 15:1-11). The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). The fruit we bear is a gift of the Holy Spirit to and through us.

JESUS

BORN AS A BABY

PREACHED AS A CHILD

KILLED AS A MAN

AROSE AS A VICTOR

COMING BACK AS THE KING

Prayer, praise, thanksgiving, Zoom worship, Bible Study, and claiming God's promises have been my "shot in the arm" to get me through the week. Putting on God's armor daily has provided protection and strength (Ephesians 6:10-18).

Let us be reminded of the True Light who came to live among us. Jesus wasn't born a celebrity, a politician, or a leader of any remarkable stature. He came as an innocent baby, a baby whose parents said "yes" to the possibilities before them. God came to us—and not for a passing visit, but rather to live with us. His living with us makes all the difference in our living here and now. In the same manner that Mary and Joseph said "yes," may we step into a season of new possibilities in 2022 and be the one to shine His light and share fruit bearing lives so that others may know His love for them.

We serve a sovereign God who has a plan and purpose for each of our lives. May we live out our God-given purpose daily through the grace of Jesus and the power of His promises and Holy Spirit as He shows us the way until He takes us home or returns as King. We know how the story ends!

Thursday

May Lieu

December 23, 2021

Reflecting on this past year brings out a mixed bag of feelings. But the one feeling that remained constant for me was His Presence and His Word. At the onset of the COVID lockdown, my husband's work (tour bus driver) immediately stopped. Naturally, like the rest of the world, we were concerned; but we thought that in two weeks, work and school would resume.

After many, many weeks with no COVID relief, we were feeling the pressure of one income, one roof with four personalities. And I found myself praying (mostly for sanity) moment by moment. Being on my knees, putting my nose in the Word, being helpless, and relearning to trust God seemed to be my new normal. And one verse He gave me years ago kept coming back.

"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." (Isaiah 43:19 NIV)

Truthfully, I didn't see the "new thing." I only saw the "hard thing" that was right in front of us. I asked for a way, but I wasn't seeing one and nothing new sprung up. Instead, it felt like a long season of being in the wilderness.

Slowly we started to see God move. My husband's unemployment case was approved, my job remained secure, and the kids were transitioning well with online learning. With all the unknowns, He sat with us, lending His ear patiently to our bottomless petitions. Each new day He faithfully unloaded new mercies onto our driveway, along with just the right amount of manna for the day.

This season brought many challenges along with many more blessings. We laughed, shared meals, worked on home improvement projects, and prayed more as a family. I experienced God in a deeper and richer way, truly believing that He is faithful and true. When I make space for Him and throw my entire being towards Him like a needy child crying out, "Abba Father, make a way!" then He answered because He delights in providing for His children. I saw Him move and answer abundantly more than I can ever think or imagine.

In typical Jesus-style, He did not give me a quick fix or a roadmap—because He wanted me to need Him, to cry out to Him, and to lean on Him completely. When I finally surrendered my fears, anxieties, and frustrations, and when I got out of His way, He began to show me the beautiful "new thing" that He was creating all along. I was able to see it spring up because I invited Him to lead and to teach me how to trust Him all over again.

**See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not
perceive it? I am making
a way in the wilderness and
streams in the wasteland.
Isaiah 43:19 NIV**

Friday

Giovanny García

December 24, 2021

One of the activities I enjoy most at Christmas is to take some quiet time to look at a nativity scene. Through this simple image, I remember that God through our Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled His promise to come and establish His kingdom in this world. It is fascinating for me to think that the Creator of all fulfills His Word and makes His way from a humble manger to a throne to rule the whole earth with true peace, justice, and wholeness.

Also, as I look at the nativity scene, I am very drawn to Mary and Joseph, a young and humble Hebrew couple recently married and without major privileges within the context of their time. But they openly and courageously take a risk and respond to the Lord's invitation to join the kingdom of God in its nearness in the person of Jesus.

As 2021 comes to an end, my wife and I have received an invitation from the Lord to participate in the extension of His kingdom through one of ECO's (A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians) church planting projects, which aims to plant multiple Latino churches

in the coming years in Southern California. For us this call from God is a beautiful opportunity to make known the gospel of salvation in our Spanish language to so many people in the Latino community who live without Christ.

We also understand this opportunity as a fulfillment of the Lord's promise that He gave us some time ago when He called us to prepare ourselves at Fuller Theological Seminary so that at the end of our studies, we could join a movement of planting new faith communities within the Hispanic context.

Undoubtedly today at the end of the year, we can thank God that He has gone ahead of us in the purpose and mission that He has entrusted to us, opening doors and blessing every step we take in faith.

We thank our Lord specifically because God has provided us with a religious Visa. He has also opened the door at Glenkirk Church so that we can plant a Spanish church in the midst of their ministry. He has also been providing the financial resources through the generosity of many brothers and sisters in Christ. And providentially He has allowed us to meet and contact different people who every day are joining this initiative of the kingdom of God for the Latino community in this area. To Him be the glory.

When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish His kingdom. He is the One who will build a house for My Name, and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever.

2 Samuel 7:12-13 NIV



Week Six

Monday

Kerri Zessau

December 27, 2021

God never promised that life would be easy, but He did promise that we would never be alone.

We clung to these words this past year when we saw the second year of a global pandemic during an economic crisis, racial tensions, and a divisive election.

We were blessed that 2021 was not as difficult for us as it was for others. Our strife was seeing others suffer. Whether it was the loss of a loved one or the loss of a job, people we knew—we loved—were hurting. We struggled with how to comfort others, especially those who did not have a relationship with our Lord.

We were asked the age-old question, “Why does God allow suffering?”

How do you answer such an important question? If we got the answer “wrong,” would it further validate the non-Christian’s beliefs that there is no God, or if there is, why does He not care? We worried our answers would cause more pain to those already suffering. In every season of our lives, there is hurt and suffering; and when the difficulties of life show up, we crave explanation. We cannot help but search for meaning in the face of tragedy.

We thought and we prayed about this, and we knew the answers were in the Bible and we had to share them. The theme of God’s faithfulness and promises kept are throughout the Bible. From His devotion to the Israelites to Daniel, He has been with us—He *is* with us.

The Lord tells us:

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”
(2 Corinthians 4:8-10)

Our Lord will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings, you will find refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

Psalm 91:4 ESV

“Our Lord will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings, you will find refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and buckler.”
(Psalm 91:4 ESV)

Jason Helveston, author of *Tell Me Everything: How Jesus Told Me His Story*, teaches us that there are hardships because God is good. He has intentionally shaped the world in such a way that effort would be required to accomplish significant change, progress, and renewal.

As we reflected on this and prayed, we could not help but be in awe before the Lord. Our Father is a loving and caring God who keeps His promises. He will never leave us nor forsake us.

Praise Him!

Tuesday

Gary and Julie Bannon

December 28, 2021

We, like most others, spent our time at home during the pandemic. Being our 60th Thanksgiving and Christmas together, we had been looking forward to having our children and families come for a special celebration. Because of possible COVID exposure, we all decided to postpone this celebration until next year (2021).

On the day after our Thanksgiving dinner for two, Gary started feeling ill and was not able to stand up. He was rushed to the hospital in the ambulance and thoughts were that maybe his symptoms could be COVID—a bit scary for our age. I was very anxious after the ambulance left and I prayed for God to be with him. I kept praying for him and called our small group to join me in my prayers. After that I felt a sense of peace and that things would work out (Psalm 120:1).

Pomona Valley Hospital tested my husband for COVID, and the results were negative. However, after a series of tests, the doctors learned that he had pneumonia, MRSA, and sepsis all together. They told the family that with his

age and those three things together, things looked a little doubtful. Of course, there could be no hospital visits at that time. Our two sons came to our home from Escondido and Seattle to be with me since my very low eyesight keeps me from driving, as well as doing other things that requires good sight. Our daughter and son-in-law both had contracted COVID, but this didn't keep her from calling the doctors several times a day.

Gary was in the hospital for a week; then he came home using a pic line for six weeks. The doctors told him that he was looking better than he should be (James 1:2). However, he was told by two of the doctors that he would need more CT scans over the next few weeks since there was a very suspicious mass in one of his lungs. Gary had been at peace and had asked Jesus to please be with him through it all. He said he had felt Jesus' presence saying, "I've got this, Gary."

Our family, our Small Group, and our Glenkirk family prayed for Gary through it all; and after a few more weeks, everything cleared up. The lung mass disappeared. The power of prayer is truly amazing if you put your trust in God.

"Come to Me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."
(Matthew 11:28-29)

Come to Me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 11:28-29 NIV

Wednesday

Chad Crane

December 29, 2021

I am the Facilities Manager here at Glenkirk Church. Being here is an answer to prayer. I worked at Glenkirk just over 23 years ago. I always loved my time here, but I felt God calling me in a different direction, so I took a job with a company that allowed me to learn and grow in new areas of my life. After about a year there, I went to work for Azusa Pacific University. For many years I worked for APU, eventually working my way up to Assistant Director of University Services. I loved what I was doing, but I was not happy. I felt that God had something more for me to do.

I often thought it would be great to be working at Glenkirk again with Paul and the crew, but I never really thought that would happen. Over the years, I had looked for opportunities periodically at Glenkirk, but I never looked at the right time. Meanwhile, the work environment in my department at APU was diminishing at a quicker pace every day.

Then I was presented with an opportunity to be trained as a Biomedical Technician for a dialysis clinic in Long Beach. After a lot of prayers and thought, I accepted this position. Although I knew this would be a significant reduction in pay to start, I thought that I would be able to start my own biomedical service after my training was complete. God obviously had other plans that I now realize.

My employer failed to fulfill the promise of training on the agreed-upon timeline. This failed promise delayed everything, and I was left wondering and questioning God's plan for me and my family—until one evening last October. I received a Facebook message from Pastor Tim, asking if I would be interested in looking at the Facilities Manager position here at Glenkirk. After wiping the tears from my eyes and looking at my wife with amazement, I, of course, said “Yes” and applied for the position right away. Now I'm back home here at Glenkirk.

For the past several years, things have not been easy for me and my wife Laura's families. We lost my mother-in-law (Laura's mom) to brain cancer after she battled the disease for several years. Then we lost Gloria Thomas (Laura's grandmother). Next, Chuck Thomas (Laura's grandfather) passed away about a year after Gloria. Laura's dad has battled health issues and nearly lost his arm in an accident a few years ago as well. My dad has

I will listen to what God the LORD says; He promises peace to His people, His faithful servants—but let them not turn to folly.

Psalms 85:8 NIV

battled cancer over the past few years, and we nearly lost him to COVID earlier this year. So, as you can see, it's been a very trying few years.

God has let His presence be known at just the right time throughout all of this. It has been very difficult for me at times to stay focused on God, and I have questioned God's plan for my family and me several times through these trials. I know God's presence is always there, but sometimes I need His gentle smack upside my head with a 2 x 4 to realize His overwhelming love and peace. God has and will always be there for my family and me—whether I realize it or not. I am reminded of this when an unexpected blessing appears to happen out of nowhere.

The Scripture that I am constantly reminded of is Psalms 85:8-13:

"I will listen to what God the LORD says; He promises peace to His people, His faithful servants—but let them not turn to folly. Surely His salvation is near those who fear Him, that His glory may dwell in our land. Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. The LORD will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest. Righteousness goes before Him and prepares the way for His steps."

Thursday

Michael Gorski

December 30, 2021

"For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, 'Do not fear; I will help you.'"
(Isaiah 41:13)

There are many times in life when we experience fear. For myself, I think of the fear of not having a partner, whether a best friend or a spouse. As I get to know myself better, I understand that God built me in a way to want to have a really close giving/receiving relationship with one or more people. There have been moments in my life, some of which have felt very long, when I did not have that type of human partner relationship. In those times, I experienced the fear of potentially always being alone in that way. But while feeling alone in a people sense, in a different way God kept His promise to help me.

For almost my entire life I have had dogs. And I have very much loved each dog I have had. I remember a time as an early teenager when I was going to a new school; I didn't have any close relationships outside of my family,

and I felt very alone. I remember the love I received from our dog Missy, who was a sheepdog/collie mix. The love and devotion I received from her helped me get through a time of young loneliness.

As a middle-aged man, I battled the vast feeling of being alone when, through divorce, I lost my first wife and so much time with my kids. During that period of time, I still

**“For I am the LORD your God
who takes hold of your
right hand and says to you,
‘Do not fear; I will help you.’”
Isaiah 41:13 NIV**

had a partner. His name was Boomer, and he was my golden retriever. I will never forget the feeling of grace, partnership, love, and devotion that I received from him when I didn’t think there was a future in receiving that from a person. Today in

the more normal ebb and flow of relationships, I have my dog Mister, also a golden retriever. No matter how a relationship is going, how alone I may momentarily feel, Mister always wants my company, unceasingly shows me grace, and loves me unconditionally.

No matter how alone you may feel, God can help fill that hole in alternative ways. I encourage you to seek out and embrace God’s alternatives. I am so thankful that in my times of being alone that God’s promise to help me has been consistently answered in the form of the love He built within me for “man’s best friend”—a dog.

Friday

Kristi Hawkins

December 31, 2021

This year’s Advent theme is “Promises Kept.” What is a promise of God that you have seen Him keep in your life and to what end?

“In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:4-6)

In this passage, Paul is addressing the church in Philippi. Growing up, I always heard this verse referenced as a promise to me personally—that the Lord would carry out my *personal* good work on to completion. While I believe He does call us individually to do good works to bring His kingdom near, in context, Paul is writing to a *church* here—a body of believers.

If you have been attending Glenkirk for a few years, you know we went through significant changes a few years back. We are once again in the midst of change: We are in the sanctuary again after being physically distanced for so long; our long-time associate pastor is retiring (Thank you, Betsy! We love you!),

and our director of youth ministry position is still vacant (at least at the time of this writing). When will things go “back to normal” around here?

I’ve been asking this question in my personal life for the past eight years now. First, Dan and I fostered for a year, then our church went through a heartbreaking split, then we fought mold in our house for a year and a half while my workplace spun into transition and chaos. Then, just

when we were finding our footing again, the youth pastor left and COVID made an appearance.

And yet, in my prayers for all of you, I am so thankful for your partnership in the gospel. You—our church family, our community—have been there for us. You’ve helped scrub our house walls and move furniture. You’ve babysat our kids. You’ve allowed Dan and I to use our musical gifts in worship. You’ve linked arms in youth

ministry and made sure our Glenkirk students are still loved and cared for during these transitions. The Lord began a good work at Glenkirk back in the 1950’s, and He will be faithful to carry it to completion! We, as a body of Christ, hold on to this promise of hope, even when we grieve the loss of “normal.”

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:4-6 NIV

Saturday

Andrea Messenger

January 1, 2021

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” (Hosea 11:1)

“And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’” (Matthew 2:15)

There is a saying that sometimes we need to go back in order to go forward! In Hosea 11:1 we see the prophet looking back to the deliverance of God’s people from oppressive slavery under the Egyptians. Hosea, whose name means “salvation,” is reminding a wayward people that deliverance is in God alone. Hosea gives us the picture of a holy, loving God who faithfully remembers and redeems His beloved children. In pointing back to God’s faithfulness to Israel, Hosea is offering hope for a people who had turned from God.

Matthew, a Jewish follower of Christ, refers to this verse in Matthew 2:15 as a fulfillment of the prophet’s word in Hosea 11:1. So which is it? Does it point back to Egypt or forward to Christ? Certainly, this verse was not randomly

nor mistakenly quoted (2 Timothy 3:16-17). When Hosea points back to God's faithfulness to His undeserving children in Egyptian captivity, he gives hope to the adulterous, idolatrous people of his day. When Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1, he is proclaiming that Jesus is our ultimate Redeemer and Hope.

And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Matthew 2:15 NIV

Matthew, writing to a Jewish audience, goes to great lengths to show that Jesus' birth, life and death are rooted in the Old Testament and that Jesus was and is at the heart and center of it all. In everything God, through Jesus Christ, is

orchestrating salvation and deliverance. He always was and is our only hope and deliverer. He is not only the "reason for the season" but the reason for everything.

Jesus was and is "*the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end*" (Revelation 21:6). He is the center of it all. He was, is and always will be the hope of glory. Hosea points back to God's faithful deliverance of His beloved Israel, and Matthew puts Jesus at the center of it all. Jesus was and is the promised Messiah, who

delivers us from sin, Satan and death. He was, is and always will be the greatest longing and fulfillment of our hearts.

Hosea and Matthew are both giving a message of hope. Jesus is cast as the true Israel and He is Emmanuel, God with us. Whatever struggle you are going or will go through, God is our Deliverer. May He enter into the very center of our lives, hearts, struggles and joys as we say goodbye to 2021, and may we humbly bow before Him as we enter into 2022.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



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