



# CHRISTMAS PROMISES

ADVENT 2020

## PROMISES!

*For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.*  
(2 Corinthians 1:20, NIV)

Just reading this verse brings joy! But what does it mean? The Bible lists many, many promises – promises to individuals, to Israel, to all people everywhere; promises with conditions and those without; promises made centuries before Jesus was born; promises Jesus made for us; promises fulfilled and those not yet fulfilled. God promises He says “Yes” to every promise He has made.

Our confidence that God will do what He says is built on His attributes. He is holy, trustworthy, faithful, mighty, good. He is love. His greatest promise is hinted at throughout the entire Old Testament. God sent His Son to share our humanness, perfectly, and to restore us to peace with Him. Jesus came – His first advent – to be born as a baby. Incredible promise fulfilled!

We have confident hope that He will return as He promised  
– His second advent.

*And just as it is appointed for people to die once—and after this, judgment—so also Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*  
(Hebrews 9:27-28)

Promises concerning the work of Jesus on the cross, and promises concerning the end of the story—where Eve’s offspring crushes the serpent’s head and all will be made right—hinge on His birth. The Prince of Peace left heaven to be born a human being in order to abolish evil, show us the Father, and make peace between God and man.

*“But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*  
(2 Peter 3:8-9)

# WEEK 1

## CHRISTMAS PROMISES ADVENT 2020

Sunday, November 29

### Redemption

*And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11)*

There are over 7,000 promises in the Bible. While some reiterate a promise already made, I think it's a way God is reassuring us that when He makes a promise, He keeps it. Of the many and very crucial promises God made, for me, one in particular is the most important of all. That is the promise of sending His Son to redeem us from eternity without Him.

John explained the promise: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16-17). In Luke 2, the angel announced the joyful news that He was born.

Christ would offer Himself as a sacrifice to provide redemption for all. What a blessed and wonderful promise God gave us! Knowing Christ died for me, forgave me of all my sins, and now has prepared a place for me in Heaven is the reason this promise means so much to me and my family.

This time of year has always been a special time in my life, not just because of gifts we exchange or even our family gatherings – and both are great – but because I can celebrate the birth of my Savior, Jesus Christ, knowing He did all of this for me.

By Ted Beard

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*Ted and Mona Beard joined First Baptist in 2010, and are members of the Encouragers Sunday School class. Ted currently serves as a deacon and on the Personnel and Baptism Committees. They have lived in Brentwood for 30 years. Mona is a retired pharmaceutical sales rep, and Ted has been in sales & marketing throughout his career.*

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Monday, November 30

## A Home in Heaven

*In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. (John 14:2-3)*

Any time I read these verses or hear them read, my memory travels back to a Sunday afternoon 65+ years ago. When I was three months old, my daddy died unexpectedly of kidney failure. After his death, Mom and I lived with her parents while she healed and started over with her life. In my mind's eye, I see myself sitting on the four-poster bed in the bedroom my mother and I shared in my grandparents' home in Jackson, Mississippi.

That memorable afternoon, Mom, an elementary school teacher, had helped me sound out the words and read these verses in her Bible. Even though I was not old enough to comprehend all I read, I later understood that she wanted me to know Jesus' wonderful promise that comforted and sustained her in her deepest sorrow. As she explained to me, Jesus had prepared homes in heaven for His disciples and all who believe in Him. My daddy was in heaven, and some day we would live there, too.

Now, fast forward to another Sunday afternoon 60 years later. Mom was 98 years old, and her sister and another family member had gone to visit with her in her assisted living apartment in Nashville. When Mom did not respond to their knocks, they pushed open the door and found her lying on the floor. She had a smile on her face, and I have no doubt her eyes were on Jesus as she slipped away to her heavenly home.

*Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown  
when Thou camest to earth for me, But in Bethlehem's home was there found no room for Thy holy nativity. O  
come to my heart, Lord Jesus! There is room in my heart for Thee.*

By Gay Campbell

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*During her 43 years as a member of First Baptist Nashville, Gay Campbell has served as a deacon, on numerous committees, and as a member of the Family mission trip team. Gay is a member of the Encouragers class and has worked with young marrieds and singles in Sunday School. She has two children, Ben Campbell and Jenna (Zach Rozar), and three grandchildren. Gay is retired from the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt.*

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Tuesday, December 1

## Eternal Life

*"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand." (John 10:28)*

Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand."

I'm reminded of walking together with my kids and now grandkids. Parents know that to keep a child safe, preventing a fall or a dart out in front of a car, it's best to hold their hand rather than let the child hold *your* hand. Otherwise, the child may slip, trip, or let go of the parent's hand and fall.

In verses 29-30 of John 10, Jesus says, "My father is greater than ALL and I and my Father are one." Growing up, I thought my dad was the absolute best at everything. Now picture the image of Jesus Christ the Son and God the Father holding us by the hand. The hands that created everything, that healed the sick, that raised the dead, and that rescued Peter when he was sinking after he took his eyes off Jesus. Those same hands ... which hold the past, present, and future throughout eternity ... are holding on to us.

The promise of this passage is clear – when we are born again, we are eternally saved. We are God's children and joint heirs with Christ. Jesus' death for us on the cross was an eternal sacrifice, once for all. Jesus triumphantly proclaimed on the cross, "It is finished." The good shepherd with those nail-pierced hands firmly, yet lovingly, holds and protects us, his sheep. This verse reminds us that we have eternal security as believers. It reminds us of the loving relationship between God and His children. God has us and ain't nobody or nothing going to snatch us from His grip. Our God always keeps His promises.

Jesus is born! And "all the promises of God find their YES in Him." (2 Corinthians 1:20)

*By Steve Goins*

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*Steve and Alyssa Goins joined NFBC in 1982. Both are retired. Alyssa enjoys doing crafts, and Steve likes chasing the golf ball around the links. He works part-time for Missional Business Services owned by Nathan Edwards (Mark's son) providing support for churches around the southeast. Their three children were at NFBC from birth through high school: Drew (Rachel), Diana (Mark Newlin), and Emily (Ryan Thomas). They have three grandsons and three granddaughters.*

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Wednesday, December 2

## Baby Jesus

*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)*

Oliver and I grieved a miscarriage early last year. In the midst of it all, the word on our hearts was *Immanuel*—*God with us*. We wanted so badly to be in a different reality that didn't hurt so much, or at least to have the ability to skip that season and fast-forward to "the happy part" when we would hold a baby we had so longed for in our arms.

But that desire, though completely human, was not God's promise to us. He didn't promise that this walk through our earthly lives wouldn't hurt, nor did He promise we'd one day have a baby. The promise was His presence and the peace and reassurance that though we would not be spared seasons of trial and tears, He would be with us always.

We felt His presence oh so clearly during those days! We felt Him during our reading of Scripture and during our times of prayer and quiet reflection. We felt Him as our friends, family, and fellow church members loved us and were the hands and feet of Christ. We felt God with us, gently guiding us and walking with us day by day.

Shortly after our season of pain, God so kindly and graciously gave us Ivan, whom we got to welcome into our arms and our home in January. Even so, the Lord's promise to us was not the hope of our precious baby Ivan, but the hope found only in precious Baby Jesus—Immanuel—whom Mary held in her arms one starry night in Bethlehem long, long ago.

*By Savannah Payne*

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*Savannah Payne is wife to Oliver and new mama to Ivan. She has called Nashville First home since 2016 and teaches 1<sup>st</sup> through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade Sunday School for First Kids.*

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Thursday, December 3

## When We Pray

*"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)*

"What if the armies of the Lord, picked up and dusted off their swords; vowed to set the captives free and not let Satan have one more."

That's the start of an old (2003) Casting Crowns song entitled "What if His People Prayed."

As Jesus' followers we are called to pray, and we are called to act as well in accordance with God's plan and direction. But first and foremost we are called to PRAY, to seek God, to spend time in communion daily with our Father.

Each day we encounter challenges and situations that only our Father can truly solve. 2020 has certainly shown us that! We cannot walk through this life alone, and we really don't ever know what tomorrow may bring. Jesus reminded us to pray with that in mind: Give us THIS day our daily bread. Humbly seek our Father TODAY and follow where He leads us.

Pray in all things ... in ALL things!

God promises that if we do humble ourselves, repent of sin in our lives, pray, and seek His face, He will heal our land. God is the answer. But we must SEEK Him, knowing that He has the answers and that it's not about us. It is about our God – the God who saves.

He is the God who sent His one and only Son to die for our sins. The veil separating us from God was torn in two. We can directly seek God – seek His face and His will. Jesus made the way.

- Commit with me today – individually – TO PRAY.
- As a church body – TO PRAY.
- As a city – TO PRAY.
- As a people of God – TO PRAY.

Prayer is our greatest weapon. And as the song says: pick up and dust off your sword and do not let Satan have one more. Commune with the Father daily and seek HIS will.

May God Bless you and keep each of you – DAILY.

*By John Galloway*

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*John Galloway has attended Nashville First since he and Sarah married here in 1999. They have three sons – James (19), Will (15) and Chandler (12). John works for a local construction company and enjoys watching sports and coaching youth baseball.*

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Friday, December 4

## A New Heaven and Earth

*But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

(2 Peter 3:13)

Second Peter 3:13 includes themes of promises, waiting, and righteousness, but the central subject is the idea of new heavens and new earth. Advent, as we know, is a season of expectant waiting as we reflect on how the Jewish people waited long for the coming of a Messiah who would deliver them from the rule of the Roman Empire and lead them to an era of peace.

Just as ancient Jews waited for the deliverance and a hope of peace, followers of Christ have awaited and continue to wait for a second coming which shall bring new heavens and new earth where righteousness and justice will be at home. As Galatians 3:28 informs us, this new heaven and earth will transcend gender, race, ethnicity and other divisive qualifiers and make us one in Christ. There will be peace and civility, forgiveness and compassion, and respect and empathy for all other beings.

But this dream of new heaven and new earth is not one we have to passively wait for. We can actively do our part as followers of Christ's teachings to care for the least of these, to love our neighbors and our enemies, and to strive to make earth as it is in heaven. We can fight injustice where we see it rather than being complacent with our current systems of disparities and discrimination. We can recognize where we ourselves have bias and prejudice, and seek to educate ourselves so that we can love others well, as they would be loved in new heaven and new earth. God loves people of all races and ethnic groups, all political persuasions, all religions and those of no religion, the righteous and the unrighteous. All are precious to God.

When we fight injustice in this world, we are honoring God and Christ's example to contribute to a just and righteous earth here as it is in heaven and as it will be in the promised new heavens and a new earth.

*By Lucinda Stewart and Emily Stewart*

*Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:9-10)*

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Lucinda Stewart, a Southern Baptist preacher's kid, joined Nashville FBC in 1987, and has served as a member of the choir, dinner theater, and medical on-call team. She and her husband, Tim Stewart, are active in the Galatians 3:28 S.S. Class. Their children, Benjamin and Emily, are members of the Young Professionals S.S. class.

Emily Stewart works full-time at Vanderbilt University and part time at the Green Hills YMCA as a swim and lifeguard instructor. Her hobbies include playing the harp, acting, dance, wellness, and women's rights.

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Saturday, December 5

## The Advent Candle Words

One evening after dinner, my Arab housemates, Khalid and Moullor (from Egypt and Saudi Arabia), were talking about the words HOPE, PEACE, JOY, and LOVE. They told me how these words are used in their countries.

**HOPE – (*Tamana* in Arabic).** A positive emotion from heart to head. Hoping that something good will happen.  
(*Inshallah – if Allah wills*)

**PEACE – (*Salam* in Arabic. *Shalom* in Hebrew).** No violence. Comfortable. Seeks the best for neighbor.

**JOY – (*Sadah* in Arabic).** Happiness. Creates positive action. Achievement of a goal.

**LOVE – (*Hob* in Arabic).** Feeling/actions towards others. The idea of "Do unto others."

Conversation in my home, with these men (Coptic and Muslim), reminded me that word meanings may vary greatly according to the culture in which they are used.

Where we are living, people also give various meanings to these words depending on the context. When we are speaking of biblical truth, these word meanings are based on the character of God.

**HOPE – (*Yakal* in Hebrew).** Rather than optimism, this is waiting and expecting that God Himself will act to rescue all of creation for a better future than the present.

**PEACE – (*Shalom* in Hebrew).** Not just the absence of conflict but the presence of completeness. It restores wholeness from brokenness.

**JOY – (*Chara* in Hebrew).** Not just happiness, which is a mood based on circumstances, but an attitude of anticipating the future with gladness.

**LOVE – (*Agape* in Greek)** Seeking the well being of others regardless of their response and without expecting anything in return. Trusting that God loves.

The question for us: How do you define these words that we read and hear in the season of Advent, and as we light the Advent candles?

*By Fred Linkenhoker*

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*Born in Virginia, Fred Linkenhoker has been educated at various universities and seminary. He has lived and taught in various countries for about 20 years. At present Fred is an ESL teacher for a community center, an active member of Nashville First Baptist since 2001, and also active in the Sanctuary Choir. He is basically enjoying LIFE.*

# WEEK 2

# CHRISTMAS PROMISES ADVENT 2020

Sunday, December 6

## The Holy Spirit

*I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. (John 14:16-17)*

With the many customs and celebrations we have surrounding the Advent season that remind us of God's ultimate gift of Jesus, we should also be aware of the gift that Jesus left with us after His time on Earth – the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit in a person is the key identifier of a Christian life, and it is the greatest power that we are left with to help us grow in relationship with our Creator.

Luckily, we don't need spells, icons, or rituals to awaken this power. We simply have to let the Spirit move and then live in submission to what we are being told by the Father through the Spirit. In my experience, the Holy Spirit never yells out to us. Therefore, it becomes very important to be intentional about mindfulness and meditation in our busy lives so we can develop habits that illuminate our calling.

Much of the time, life is too loud to hear the whispers of the Spirit. And it is only by quieting our minds and retreating from the droning background noise of our daily routine that we can hear these whispers and be in touch with God's calling on our life.

Only when we learn to lean on and listen to the Spirit will we be able to see His fruits in our life. Jesus was given to the world so that we could have a relationship with the Father. Submitting to the voice of the Spirit in our lives is the only way that we as Christians can fully enjoy and be changed by this relationship with our Creator.

This Christmas season, pay close attention to moments in which you feel slight tugs or quiet whispers from the Spirit. These simple truths, if noted and acted upon, will build themselves into the story that God wants your relationship with Him to become.

By Spencer Dunn

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*Spencer Dunn is a freshman at Auburn University studying Software Engineering. He is the son of Brad and Melanie Dunn and the brother of Connor and Mitchell Dunn.*

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Monday, December 7

## Joy

*"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." (John 15:9-11, NIV)*

Over the last two summers, I have been keeping a careful eye on the hot pink crepe myrtle we have in our backyard. An invasive vine keeps re-growing, trying to establish itself and overtake the crepe myrtle. With a bit of selective pruning, however, the life source of the vine can be removed, and it will die off, protecting the desired plant.

In John 15, Christ is instructing His disciples about the value of connection to the source of life ... to Christ Himself. He "is the vine" and His true followers "are the branches" (John 15:5). He instructs us to abide in Him and His words (John 15:7). And He promises that if we do, we will bear fruit (John 15:2), that our Christ-anchored prayers will be heard and answered (John 15:7), and we will be filled with the joy and presence of His love. As a Christ follower, it is essential that I remain connected to Christ, not merely to survive, but also to thrive. And I should ask myself from time to time: Am I still connected to Christ? Is my connection stronger to Christ today than yesterday or last year or the last life season?

Seasons come and go in our lives ... and, boy, has 2020 come, and most of us have longed for it to go. Our individual struggles are many and varied. We long for our community and familial connections which have been lost to isolation and social distancing precautions. My year started with the promise of job loss even before the advent of the pandemic, but His promise to provide remained ever present, unyielding, and timely throughout this most unusual year. Circumstances are often outside of our control, but if I/we remain, abide in, and choose to trust Christ, we will continually find our source of life, joy, peace, and so much more.

By Roger Jackson

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*Roger Jackson is an Instructor of Biology at Volunteer State Community College. He is married to Jill and is the father of Anna. Roger and Jill are part of the Open Door class in the Cornerstone Department, and both are members of the Sanctuary Choir.*

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Tuesday, December 8

## The Kingdom of God

*Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." (Mark 1:14-15 NRSV)*

What is "the gospel?" In the original Greek the word is *euangelion*—where we get our words "evangelism" and "evangelical." The most simple understanding of "gospel" is what we read in Mark 1: "the good news."

When Jesus was born, the angel said to the shepherds, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." People were in need of some good news. Rome ruled, demanding heavy taxes. Religious rulers laid burdens on them and did not practice what they taught (Matthew 23:4). The people longed for the return of glory days long past, when the prophesied king would "reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom" (Isaiah 9:7).

Early in Jesus' ministry, His extraordinary actions and teachings drew attention. People began to turn to Him. And He had good news to share! The kingdom of God had come, in part – an upside-down kingdom, characterized by kindness, peace, love, and joy. A kingdom near, but yet to come fully.

Just as in Jesus' day, we don't have to look hard or far to find things in our world we would describe as "bleak." War, famine, poverty, hunger, homelessness, illness, and an inexhaustible list of other maladies seem to dominate our world today. But Jesus' good news is as much an invitation to repent and believe for us today as it was for Galileans 2,000 years ago.

Even more than an invitation, Jesus' message is a promise. God is already at work in the world—the kingdom has come near—and *we* are invited to participate, preaching the good news to a world that can seem so bleak. This Advent season, take time to identify the kingdom of God around you and how God is working in the world. How might Jesus be calling you to join in the work God is accomplishing?

*By Jonathan Higdon*

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*Jonathan Higdon teaches Sunday School in the Young Professionals class and is Associate Editor for VBS at Cokesbury. He is the grandson of Charles and Betty West.*

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Wednesday, December 9

## Strength for the Weary

*He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths 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 40:29-31)*

He.

He gives.

He gives strength.

He gives strength to the weary ...

I've lived off this promise on many days, many weeks, many years. The older I get, the more encouraging it sounds. All over the Bible we find assurance of God's strength and His availability to each person. As a rock collector, I celebrate the Hebrew and Greek words which translate STRENGTH/ROCK/STONE. (According to Strong's concordance, over 762 verses refer to rock or rocks, stone or stones, strength).

This promise is all about relationship. God and me. The Sovereign God in His powerful goodness strengthens me, His child. At any age and any location. I trust my Sovereign God and He expects me to be responsible with that gift. Or put another way: He expects me to respond to Him. My part is putting my hope in the Lord. That's it, folks! Receive a gift ... practice hope.

From the hymn, "The Solid Rock," we sing: "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. / On Christ the solid rock (strength) I stand." Our wonderful time of Advent reminds us that He came. He lived. He died. He arose. Christ will come again!

If you haven't read all of Isaiah chapter 40 in awhile, I urge you to do that now. *Stirring words* about Almighty God, who wants to take away your weariness today.

God.

Jesus.

You.

*By Martha Kirkland*

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*A member at FBC for 36 years, Martha Kirkland has taught Children's Choirs most of those years. She is a member of the Sanctuary Choir and the Devotional Service group. She retired after 22 years as a Lifeway Music & Worship consultant. Her four children include Amy McNeilly and Joy Fisher; she is grandmother of 7.*

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Thursday, December 10

## Joy and Peace through Hope

*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)*

In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson paraphrased Romans 15:7-13:

*So reach out and welcome one another to God's glory. ... Jesus, staying true to God's purposes, reached out in a special way to the Jewish insiders so that the old ancestral promises would come true for them. As a result, the non-Jewish outsiders have been able to experience mercy and to show appreciation to God. Just think of all the Scriptures that will come true in what we do!*

*For instance:*

*... Outsiders and insiders, rejoice together! (Deuteronomy 32:43)*

*And again:*

*People of all nations, celebrate God!*

*All colors and races, give hearty praise! ... (Psalm 117:1)*

*Oh! May the God of green hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope!*

Last Christmas morning all of our kids, their spouses, and the grandchildren were sitting around dozens of gifts with a full, stuffed stocking for each person. Preston, my 6-year-old grandson, sweetly but dejectedly dumped out his stocking and said, "Don't they know they're not supposed to put food and juice boxes in here – just toys and gift cards and stuff I want!"

Often we as students and adults are expecting God to put exactly what we want and need inside of our life experiences. Sometimes we express disappointment and at other moments confusion when life's not what we expected and what we had planned. So we replace hope with issues like irritability, resentment, loss, bitterness, sadness, and anger. But the purpose of life is to celebrate the life given to us by God, the Father.

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As Eugene Peterson says in his paraphrase, insiders and outsiders and people of all nations, races and colors, come together to celebrate Him. The two things we can always anticipate with God's gift to us are joy and peace. That's a promise that He has kept in the past and we anticipate in the future. I'm glad He gets to choose how He fulfills His assurance instead of putting "in our life-stockings" what I would want or think I need. Now that's what hope looks like!

*By Tony Rankin*

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*Tony Rankin is a clinical therapist, speaker, author, husband, father, grandfather, and the Minister to Pastoral Care at First Baptist Church Nashville. He has been married for 37 years and has three adult children, one daughter-in-law, a grandson and a granddaughter, and a son-in-law. He loves to collect baseball and train memorabilia and walk.*



### **Don and Judith King**

Many years ago, when Don and I were members of a church in South Carolina, I was asked to make some large, 3D banners for different seasons. I made this banner for Advent. It is a depiction of Isaiah prophesying the birth of Jesus. The verse on the banner is Isaiah 7:14.

### **Lloyd and Sue Elder**

*The Lord bless you, and keep you; The Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. (Proverbs 3:5-6)*

“During the first year of our marriage, Sue and I claimed this promise as our own. We have found it true and instructive through our whole journey. (Our 67th wedding anniversary was September 4.) We are blessed. Thanks to all of you.

### **Sharon Roberts**

Glory to God in the highest!  
It's hard to imagine now, but angel decorations were not always so popular. Years ago, in Memphis, TN, I found four large paper mâché angels that have become the beginnings of my Christmas decorations every year – first ones on the tree. Through the years I have been gifted many times over with unique angels. They represent friendships, trips taken, beautiful craftsmanship – but most of all the joy and hope of the season. Joy to the world! The Lord is come!”



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Friday, December 11

## Answered Questions

*"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8)*

As a former math teacher, I used to develop mathematical thinking by giving students a new math problem to solve without any context. I would meander around the classroom stopping, waiting for students to ask a question to show deep understanding of the problem. I let students know that I would answer questions that were mathematically sound. If a student asked, "What's the answer?" my frustrating response would be, "That's not the right question." Students would try their hardest to figure out the questions that would lead me to give them the much-sought-after answer. I would continually respond this way until someone asked the important question that unlocked the problem and showed they were thinking mathematically.

Matthew's gospel reminds me of this experience. We often ask God for the final answer. The verses make it sound so easy. *Knock, and the door will be opened. Ask and an answer will be given. Seek and you'll find it.* When looking closely though, these verses call us to create within ourselves a Christlike mindset. God says to ask, and ask again. He tells us to seek, referring to a continual pursuit of His response. God has the answers. He waits on the other side of the door.

Unfortunately, like my students, we often get caught up on superficial questions, and what we seek doesn't line up with the plan God has for us. Our questions may seem to go unanswered. We may seek worldly things without success. We can't seem to find what our heart thinks it desires. When we change our mindset and ask questions with a Christlike focus, God promises to answer the door, to deliver the answers which we seek, and to reveal to us his plan.

Are you standing at the door, feeling locked out? Maybe you are not asking the right question.

*By Zach Williams*

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*Zach Williams is a Data & Assessment Coordinator for LEAD Southeast Middle and High School, a part of the LEAD Charter network in Nashville. He is from South Carolina and has attended First Baptist for the past three years. Currently he serves as the Sanctuary Choir Vice President and works with the Grades 3-6 Children's Choir.*

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Saturday, December 12

## What Child Is This?

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

### Wonderful

- Completely unique
- God and man in one individual.
- Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5)

### Counselor

- Has all the wisdom of His Father and reveals it to His people (Isaiah 28:26,29; 29:14; Psalm 16:7)
- Intercedes for us (Romans 8:34)

### Mighty God

Jesus performed similar miracles to miracles of God, such as

- Power over nature (Exodus 14; Mark 4:35-41)
- Feeding thousands (Exodus 16&17; Matthew 14)
- Healing infirmities (2 Kings 5; John 9)
- Raising dead to life (1 Kings 17, Luke 7)

### Both Son and Father:

- The "only begotten Son of God" (John 3:16)

### Everlasting Father

- Eternal/Everlasting (John 1:1)
- Not bound by time (Psalm 105:8; 2 Peter 3:8)
- Here I am with the children God gave me. Now since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these ... (Hebrews 2:13-14)

### Prince of Peace

- Our peace (Ephesians 2:14-17)
- Peace with God (Romans 5:1)
- Peace among men (Luke 2:14)
- Peace in mind and heart (John 14:27)
- Peace in nature (Isaiah 11:6)
- Will rule in peace (Micah 5:2-5)

# WEEK 3

# CHRISTMAS PROMISES ADVENT 2020

Sunday, December 13

## Peace in Jesus

*"I have told you all this so that you may have peace in Me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33, NLT)

These comforting words from Jesus to His disciples are most timely for us as we face the coronavirus pandemic. As we prepare for the celebration of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, we all seek the peace from the Prince of Peace who "became human and dwelt among us" that first Christmas.

The wearing of masks, social-distancing, hygienic protection, and a host of other precautions have altered our way of living and brought anxiety to us for fear of contracting this terrible disease. However, far worse than COVID-19 is the sin that has plagued the human race since the disobedience of Eve and Adam.

But Jesus, dying on a cruel cross, took my sin and yours upon Himself and provided the healing for our sin-sick soul!

*Heal me, hands of Jesus, and search out all my pain; restore my hope, remove my fear, and bring me peace again.*

*Cleanse me, blood of Jesus, take bitterness away; let me forgive as one forgiven and bring me peace today.*

*Know me, mind of Jesus, and show me all my sin; dispel the memories of guilt, and bring me peace within.*

*Fill me, joy of Jesus: anxiety shall cease and heaven's serenity be mine, for Jesus brings me peace!*

Michael Perry: "Heal Me, Hands of Jesus" – *Celebrating Grace Hymnal* #541

By Jerry Brown

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*Jerry Brown and his wife, Mary Alice, were married for 47 years. Jerry was stationed in Korea in the Army. He served as minister of music in South Carolina, Alabama, and Tennessee churches, retiring in 1999. Jerry has three children, David, Stephanie, and Kevin, and three grandchildren. At Nashville First Baptist, he sings in the Sanctuary Choir and teaches 4th and 5th graders in Sunday School. Jerry likes writing greeting cards of all kinds, watching sports, and traveling. He enjoys his quiet time every morning, reading the Bible and devotional books.*

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Monday, December 14

## Peaceful Sleep

*I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. (Psalm 4:8)*

When I read this verse, it's like taking a deep breath. Yes! Of course! Only the promise of the Lord can make me lie down, sleep in peace, and dwell in safety.

These days, with two young children at home, sometimes sleep doesn't come easily to our house. The kids are up and down. They request one more glass of water. They ask for someone to lie down with them because they don't want to be alone. We hear these things nightly, we deal with them, and we move on with the evening.

Then, when it's finally my turn to lie down for the night, my brain decides to turn ON, and sleep seems to evade me. I cycle back over the things I've done during the day, or didn't do, or could have done better. Can you relate?

When we lay our heads on the pillow at night, the only security we have is God's presence. Even with all of the world's security systems and planning for the future, the only real peace we can find comes from knowing that we will never face life alone. God will always be there with us.

I've had to work a lot on coming to terms with the fact that I am not in control of my life, my children's lives, or what happens to my family and friends. I often remind myself that when I gave my life to Christ, He didn't erase my problems or make things easy for me. But I am now firmly in the grasp of the One who will protect me, watch over me, help me through my problems, and make me a better person because of them. I can rest in peace knowing that I am never alone and that God is always watching over me.

My prayer for this season, and every season of life, is that you will be able to lie down AND sleep, knowing that the Lord is in control and will keep us safe.

**By Marissa Moore**

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*Marissa (Gentry) Moore began attending Nashville First as a second grader in 1987 and was involved in the children and student ministries from that time on. She and her husband, Jeremy, moved back to Nashville in June of 2019 and joined Nashville First along with their two children, Gentry Claire (8) and Jackson (5). Marissa currently serves as director of our weekday program: First Preschool Child Development Center.*

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Tuesday, December 15

## He Will Always Be with Us

*I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corner I called you. I said, "You are my servant"; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:9-10, NIV)*

I love these verses in Isaiah because God is assuring us that we, as God's people, do not have a reason to fear. God has not rejected us but has called us to be His own. He promises that He is with us at all times. He has given us the strength to overcome. We can rest in the security of His power and love. God is greater than any circumstance, any evil, any man. This is great news!

Many times in my life I have needed to trust in these assurances from God. Difficult times when I have dealt with health issues, relationship problems, deaths of loved ones. Times of uncertainty and fear. I have had to rely on God to fight for me and to trust that He is in control.

One such time was when I became a foster parent. I was very afraid because I knew that bringing a toddler and a baby into our home would be a very difficult and emotional journey. These little ones had already dealt with so much in their short lives. Could I handle their needs as a single mom? My other two children were a high school senior and a junior in college. I was no longer a young mom. Overnight, our home life changed. There were meetings, court dates, visitations. Not to mention diapers and sleepless nights. We grew very attached to these beautiful babies and dreaded the day that we might have to say goodbye.

I prayed constantly for God's strength because mine was gone. God came through every time. He put people into our lives to walk beside us. Even older moms like myself who were going through the adoption journey at the same time. He gave us peace after a judge decided to send one child back to live with her family and the other stayed with us. What a blessing! God sustained us through years of uncertainty and fear. We learned yet again that we can lean on Him!

*By Darlene Cates*

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*Darlene Cates has been a member of Nashville First Baptist for 32 years and is a member of the Eaton/Smith Sunday School class. She is the mother of three wonderful children. Hannah is married to Matt and teaches 5th grade in Nolensville. Wesley is a software engineer living in Connecticut. And Jason is a 5th grade student. Darlene enjoys outdoor activities, sports, and volunteering.*

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Wednesday, December 16

## The Gift of Peace

*I am leaving you with a gift – peace of mind and heart.*

*And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid. (John 14:27, NLT)*

During this past year we have seen abundant changes, and the comforts of our world have been threatened. The news cycle and discussions among friends have often taken on a tone of fear, anger, and an endless search for answers from sources that can be trusted. There are parallels between these days and those when Jesus was facing His death on the cross. His disciples were confused and hurt by the events that ultimately took the human life of the Son of God. We can read in the gospel of John about the fear and inner turmoil the disciples were experiencing leading up to His death on the cross.

Our human nature equates peace with worldly comforts such as good circumstances and good health. Jesus, however, prepared His disciples for an upheaval in their world by giving them the gift of peace, telling them that “the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give.” This is one of God's promises to all of us: In the most troubling of times in our lives we can have peace through our heavenly Father.

Many people in today's world do not know who Jesus is and cannot comprehend the wonderful gift of His peace. We can choose to live in the encompassing love and peace of Jesus. We can find strength and comfort knowing that regardless of current circumstances or tragic events in life, our heavenly Father is always faithful and always honors His promises. In the midst of turmoil, God offers us his gift of peace and it is ours to accept.

*By Joy Harris*

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*Joy Harris is the wife of Dennis and mother of Julia (9) and Vann (7). She attends the Young Married Sunday School class and is a Trustee of NFBC. She likes being active in her community and enjoys most hobbies; a few of her favorites are hiking, tennis, and reading.*

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Thursday, December 17

## Peace of Mind

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)*

*been able to experience mercy and to show appreciation to God. Just think of all the Scriptures that will come true in what we but dejectedly dumped out his stocking and said, "Don't they know they're not supposed to put food and juice boxes in here – just toys and gift cards and stuff I want!"*

I am a planner. I like having a general idea of what to expect in any given situation (daily activities, personal goals, etc.). Sometimes my plans are successful, but sometimes everything seems to go awry. Daily activities can be easily adjusted. But when the unexpected happens in life – jobs, health, relationships – it is easy to worry. Sometimes worry quickly turns into anxiety that overwhelms me. It makes me feel helpless and desperate.

The Bible does not say we will not worry or feel anxious. But it does remind us God is near and we do not have to worry or be anxious about anything. Not only is it okay to admit when we feel overwhelmed or helpless, as believers it is empowering. In that moment we can truly humble ourselves and admit God's sovereignty. It does not have to be a moment of weakness but of strength. We can approach the foot of God's throne through Jesus in prayer, express our worries, and rest in thanksgiving for His love and sovereignty in all things.

We are never alone in our trials. God is near. He promises that when we turn to Him, tell Him our worries and focus on who He is, He will protect us with His peace that guards our hearts and minds.

I am learning that planning – in everything – must begin with prayer, so that when the unexpected happens, I can rely on God's peace to center my thoughts and emotions on what is true and honorable in Christ Jesus. The more I pray and petition God, the more I am reminded and thankful for His promise of peace, nearness, sovereignty, and love.

*By Renee Matthews*

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*Renee Matthews has been a member of Nashville First since 2010. She has enjoyed serving in various leadership positions at church: GA director, Family Enrichment Committee member and chairperson, Childhood Ministry chairperson, VBS, and 7th grade AXIS leader. Renee and her husband, Andy, have three children Harper, Dabbs, and Catherine.*

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Friday, December 18

## Guidance

*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)*

I sometimes tease my wife, Eleanor, by telling her something that is not true or is make-believe. Something like, "My friend Tom is finally getting a pet snake." She will look at me startled, "You're kidding." "No," I reply, "He's gone after it now." She looks at me again and asks, "Do you promise?" With a grin I say, "No, I'm just kidding you." Her "do you promise" always brings out the truth from me.

This Scripture passage is a promise, not a tease. It is true. If we trust God, we don't try to figure out the things we are incapable of knowing. We say, "I know that God will follow through. He'll make things the way they should be according to His will." *Trusting* is faith in action. It is knowing that a parent will help a child when they tell her, "Jump in the water, I'll catch you."

Trust implies dependence. The sense of trust in this passage is compared to leaning against a big oak tree and knowing it will not fall over. It is a conscious dependence on God. It is bringing Him into life choices before trying to figure things out completely on our own or relying on our own perceptions.

When we acknowledge God, we observe His actions in our lives and get to know Him in the process of living. In doing so, we find that time and time again, God makes things work. He will guide and direct us in the correctness of life's decisions. He is trustworthy, and He is faithful – even when we are not. He prepares the way for us when we rely on His goodness and faithfulness. He will do what is best for us – if we are attentive to His leadership.

This verse is my life verse and the life verse of my grandson, Jacob Whitehurst. We attest that it is true.

I promise!

*By Larry Yarborough*

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*Larry Yarborough loves Eleanor, his children, his grandchildren, hiking (it used to be running) and reading. He serves our church by working with newborns (this is his 45th year) and as a life-deacon. Larry is a volunteer chaplain for BrightStone (an organization with a ministry to adults with special needs) and the Gilda's Club (multiple myeloma patients).*

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Saturday, December 19

## Promises Kept

*For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him ..." (2 Corinthians 1:20)*

If you are of a certain era, you may remember the Burt Bacharach tune, sung by Dionne Warwick, "Promises, Promises." Every day we make promises, and promises are made to us. Most are kept. Many are not.

God has made promises to His people throughout history. The Bible calls them covenants. Unlike our promises, God's promises have all been kept.

He promised Noah that never again would a flood destroy the earth, and set His rainbow in the clouds as a sign of the covenant.

He promised Abram, whom He renamed Abraham, and his descendants, that He would be their God and that through Abraham all nations on earth would be blessed.

He promised the children of Israel through Moses that if they would obey Him, they would be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. He gave them the law, the sacrificial system and the Passover, when the Angel of Death passed over the firstborn of each house where the blood of the lamb was smeared on the doorpost.

He promised David that His throne would be established forever.

He promised through His prophets a Messiah who would deliver His people.

Then, at just the right time, when oppression reigned and deliverance seemed impossible, He sent Jesus. Jesus fulfilled perfectly the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah, born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem, descendant of David, riding on a donkey, not a bone would be broken, and many more. He fulfilled the promise of the prophet Isaiah, that the people living in darkness would see a great light.

The Old Covenant pointed to Christ, our Passover, the perfect, sufficient sacrifice.

Jesus fulfilled the Old covenant and in its place gave the New Covenant of His blood, "which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

We are heirs to these covenant promises of God. All have been kept. Look at history, and you will see. This Christmas, Jesus offers you the greatest of all gifts, heirship to the kept promises of God. Have you claimed your gift?

*By Wes Turner*

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*Wes Turner came to First Baptist in 1978, just out of law school, with new wife Vicki, to take a position with a Nashville law firm where he has worked for 42 years. Wes and Vicki raised three children, Becca, Sarah, and Will, at FBC, and now he has been blessed with 12 grandchildren. Vicki passed away in 2018. At FBC Wes is a deacon, co-teacher of the Encouragers Sunday School Class, and currently on the Building and Finance Committees.*

# WEEK 4

# CHRISTMAS PROMISES ADVENT 2020

Sunday, December 20

## Indestructible Love

*But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37-39)*

The early morning hours of Tuesday, March 3, of this year will be forever etched in our minds. With little warning, we experienced the full force of the powerful EF3 tornado as it passed through our house. While the event itself lasted less than a minute, the feeling of complete helplessness overcame us; we were powerless to control it in any way.

Once it had passed, we realized that we were all physically fine but did not know the full extent of the damage the tornado had caused. It wasn't until sunrise that we were able to see the full extent of the physical damage and realized that our house was left in an unlivable state. We were faced with the tremendous task of not only cleaning up the damage but also securing and furnishing another location to live.

The days that followed were nothing short of miraculous as people began showing up, out of the blue, to help out. An individual that I hadn't known previously came with a chainsaw and helped remove the fallen trees in our backyard. Many friends also came to help. On Thursday of that week, I lost count of how many friends and coworkers showed up to help pack, put tarps on, and board up the shattered windows. By the end of the week, all our salvageable possessions had been moved and situated in our rental house by our friends, who even stocked the refrigerator and kitchen pantry with food.

Despite the traumatic event of the tornado and still facing issues rebuilding our house, we feel blessed. The individuals who helped us that week demonstrated God's love to us and helped us make it through what was one of the worst weeks of our lives. The tornado left a trail of destruction that we have never seen or hope to see again. But even with its power to destroy, it is powerless to separate God's love from us, His children.

By Jason and Michelle Harper

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*Jason Harper has been a member at NFBC since 1997. He works for HCA in IT&S department. Michelle, a member of NFBC since childhood, is an RN. They have celebrated 20 years of marriage. They are active in the Cornerstone Department and a part of the Open Door Sunday School and serve in various roles around the church. Their children, Will and Abigail, are active in the children's ministry.*

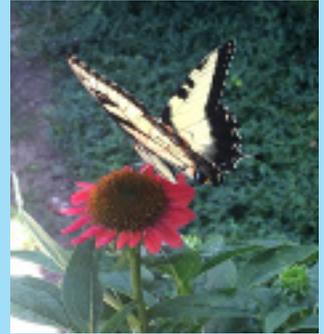
## **Helen Owens**

*“Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” (Jeremiah 33:3)*

“I once heard this promise Scripture called ‘God’s telephone number’. Even though ‘Jeremiah 33:3’ is a very dated style phone number, He does answer, sometimes unexpectedly, as promised.”

## **Bill and Rose Carve**

A butterfly symbolizes a transition from an old life to a new life, the meaning of hope of eternal life through Christ.



## **Meredith Rodriguez**

*The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you but will rejoice over you with singing. (Zephaniah 3:17)*

“Out of habit over the years, any time I pick up a new Bible, Zephaniah 3:17 is usually the first verse I turn to and read. This Scripture has always been one of my favorite verses, initially because I was drawn to the image of our Lord lovingly singing over His children with delight! Additionally, the victorious tone here inspires much confidence and hope and serves as a reminder that we face nothing alone; our mighty God, our Savior, is present in and among us ... rejoicing!”



## **Jimmy Hester**

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not on thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him — and He will direct thy paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

“These verses have continued to guide me since the day they were handwritten by my mother in a small New Testament she gave me as I left to serve a year in Viet Nam in the United States Air Force in the Fall of 1969.”

## **Jimmy and Pat White**

The Israelites were looking for a royal, earthly king, as pictured here. Instead, God (with great love) sent His very own Son in the form of a baby ... not to reign on earth, but in the hearts of His people.



Note: We saw the original of this art in Florence, Italy. This is an exact replica.”

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Monday, December 21

## Ever-Present Help in Trouble

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1)*

When I reflect on this verse, I think of God's having been my refuge and strength when people were rude to Skiles and me and cursed at us. We were on a Youth Choir Mission Tour passing out granola bars and informational cards for a church in New York City. God was there with us, two teenagers who were experiencing sadness in an unfamiliar city, and we kept going.

The word "ever-present" is extremely powerful to me because He is always near us. A song that I enjoy says God is our "way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper, and light in the darkness." For many people, the Christmas season is a time that brings back painful memories. These may involve the death of a loved one or the loss of a relationship. People may be experiencing concern over friends who don't know Jesus, unemployment or other financial problems, racial difficulties, health issues, or even grades. The list could go on and on! Things are not as we want. There is a lot of pain and suffering.

But into this world came the Good News – a little baby in a manger – and His name is Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. Trust God as your refuge and strength. We have nothing to fear even when life throws its worst at us. Thank You, God, for giving us Jesus, who is the light that shines in our dark places – no matter where we may be.

**By Ah-Gust Overbeck**

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*Ah-Gust Overbeck is a freshman in high school. In addition to engaging in our youth group, she enjoys running, kayaking, hiking, playing violin, and participating in school clubs such as Student Council and FCA.*

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Tuesday, December 22

## A Good Purpose

*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)*

There are times in the Bible when it becomes clear that the decision to follow Christ is a costly choice. And that following in the steps of Jesus Christ is to follow a path fraught with moments of hurt, discouragement, and disappointment.

It is natural to want to avoid hurt and anguish, but if we believe that all things work together for the good and that our lives are created with intention by God, then we know that there is a purpose in the suffering. We know that there is a purpose in the lament. And that there is a purpose in the *hard*.

In many cases, *good* may be understood to mean easy, financially secure, painless, or even happy. But that is not what this Scripture assures. God's supreme goal for our lives cannot be defined or reduced to our having privileged experiences here on Earth. Ultimate comfort in this life is not the "good" that is promised here.

This verse is a reminder that though God does not promise that our lives will be easy nor that they will be without hardship, He does promise that whatever we experience and endure will be for our good. May we take comfort in knowing that even the difficult moments in life have a purpose and are part of His plan.

My encouragement to you is to embrace the walk with Christ, with all the good and the hard that comes with it, always knowing that in the end, when it is finished, it will all have been a part of His plan for your good. May you embrace and endure with wild abandon and with joy, knowing your Father in heaven watches.

*By Shonna Greer*

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*Shonna Greer enjoys trying new foods and meeting new people. You can find her around church either making lunch plans with the Young Professionals, dancing with children in the Children's ministry, or asking people ice breakers while greeting at the main doors. When she is not at church or hanging out with children, she can be found on Vanderbilt's campus working in Academic Affairs or completing a writing assignment for her Masters in Public Service.*

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Wednesday, December 23

## Power Over Fear

*"For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." (2 Timothy 1:7)*

Such a powerful promise! It's a promise to run to when we have zero control over circumstances that overwhelm us with feelings of impotence and paralyzing fear. Stating the obvious here: this probably includes all of 2020 for nearly everyone. Fear is part of the human condition. What we do with it is the challenge.

It may not be realistic to think we can just pray this verse and the fear will disappear. Yes, God chooses to bless that way sometimes. More often, though, He leads me *through the fear* gradually as I lean on His promise never to leave me, learning to battle the fear by trusting in His love for me. He teaches me the self-control of prayerful dependence and of calling on His power to overcome my fear with faith.

One time, though, He taught me a valuable lesson about fear in a dream. It was a chilling nightmare of raging conflict with demons: they were winning, and I was fatally wounded. But I woke up, and for long minutes continued battling those dream entities that were still with me. I prayed. I sang. I begged God to take away the terror, but He didn't.

Finally, I surrendered and prayed, "Lord, I know this fear isn't coming from You, and I don't understand why You aren't removing it. But if for some reason it's your will for me to continue to be afraid, I know You love me and I yield to You." I immediately fell back asleep. The dream picked back up where it had left off except that now hosts of angels greatly outnumbered the foe. The euphoria of victory and peace was with me when I woke the next morning, and it lasted for weeks afterward.

I've never forgotten the dream's lesson: Our deliverance from fear is possible when we remember the *power* of Almighty God, when we remember His great *love* for us and when we refuse to allow fear to rob us of the disciplines of *self-control* that lead us to the ultimate safety found only in His hands.

*By Margi Hawkins*

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*Margi Hawkins has been a member of NFBC since 1985 and retired after serving almost 23 years on the church support staff. She has two children, Travis and Hannah, and a 5-year-old grandchild, Alice. Margi loves turquoise jewelry, old stuff, and war movies, and she believes in angels. She has had solo parts in many church "Broadway Dinner Theater" productions.*

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Thursday, December 24

## He Cares for You

*Humble yourselves, therefore, ... casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7)*

What are some of those fears so common to the human condition that man is consumed by? A phobia is an extreme or irrational fear of or aversion to something. The *Washington Post* lists these as the top five phobias:

1. Public Speaking (Glossophobia)
2. Heights (Acrophobia)
3. Bugs & Insects (Entomophobia)
4. Drowning (Aquaphobia)
5. Blood & Needles (Trypanophobia)

Do any of these fears describe you?

Acrophobia and Neophobia, are two of my greatest fears. *MedicineNet* describes Neophobia as “the fear of anything new, of innovation, an irrational fear of new situations, places, or things.”

The source of so many mistakes and spiritual pitfalls in my life seems to be Neophobia ... an ugly fear of not allowing God to change, form, and rearrange my life. This fear has caused me to bail on living life in God's design and to settling for less than God's best. I truly realize that fears have the potential to continually rob us of our peace and joy in life.

However, Jesus came so that we might have life and life to the fullest. (John 10:10) That must be why the phrase, “Do not be afraid” is by far the most frequently given biblical command. It seems God's care and love for people moves Him to address this issue so often. He knows that we have lots of fears. (I know I do.)

In the story of Jesus' birth, when an angel appears to different people, the first thing the angel says is, “Fear not.” Over and over we see the Father encouraging and admonishing: “Do not be afraid.”

So, do we have fears? Sure, we do. But as one writer stated, “We weren't saved and redeemed only to limp through life riddled with fear and anxiety.” Remember that God has called us by name; we are His (Isaiah 43:1). And we are living within God's story – watching for Jesus' return (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). The story will end gloriously, joyfully, as promised.

SO ... Don't Live in Fear but LIVE GOD'S STORY!!

*By Gary Morgan*

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*Gary and Johni Morgan have been married for 28 years. Johni is a mercy-oriented lover of life and people. She enjoys recipes and horror movies. They haven't figured out the horror movie part of that yet. They have two daughters at The King's College in NYC: McKenna in her 4th year and Story in her 1st year*

*Gary, Pastor of Urban Missions, says: "My hope is to come alongside those living in and those curious about the story of God by helping them navigate life's challenges in a rapidly changing world, so they can live the story they were designed to live."*

### **Bill and Sharon Chaney**

Sunrise at the ocean always gives us great joy, even feelings of ecstasy, because of its reminder that the Lord is in control." Photo taken by Sharon Chaney, August 11, 2020, at the beach on Hilton Head Island, SC.



### **Ann Beasley**

*Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.*

*(Matthew 6:33)*

"When I was in, I guess you would now call it, middle school, I was in Vacation Bible School. We got cards with Bible verses we were supposed to memorize. Matthew 6:33 is one of the verses that I memorized, and it has stayed with me all of my life."

### **Betty Norwood**

"This picture is from Newfound Gap in the Smoky Mountains.

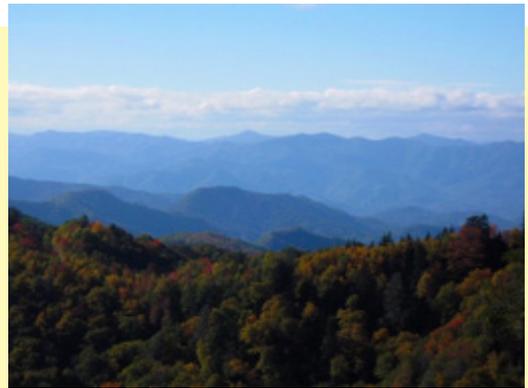
I went to college at Maryville College in Maryville, TN where the Smokies can be seen from the cam-

pus. While a student, I

was in the college choir, and we did an arrangement of Psalm 121 – "I Will Lift up Mine Eyes" by Isadore Freed. These words came to life for me in this setting and became my "go to" Scripture when I became discouraged. Ron and I went to the Smokies for our honeymoon and shared this spot, where he took this picture. When Ashley was born, we selected Psalm 121 as her life verse. We shared the Smokies with our children as they got older.

Ashley chose to attend Maryville College as well and found that Psalm 121 took on even more meaning to her while she was there. She would often look out her window to the mountains and read this verse before starting her day or when she needed reassurance, a calming presence, or inspiration. Now we hope to share these verses as well as the peace, hope, and joy that we as a family have experienced from knowing it."

*I lift up my eyes to the mountains — where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip — he who watches over you will not slumber. (Psalm 121:1-3)*



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Friday, December 25

## He Is Coming Again

*(1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11)*

A number of times this year I have simply whispered the ancient one-word prayer *Maranatha*. This word is a prayer phrase used by the early church and means “Our Lord, come.” It was probably a call for the presence of the Lord similar to what was experienced shortly after the resurrection when Jesus revealed himself in the upper room to the disciples. I believe it became a prayer to hasten the day of his coming for the Bride of Christ, that glorious day when the church would be taken up out of this world and the events that we refer to as end time prophecy begin to unfold.

2020 started off with about twenty of us gathered in the Chapel on New Year's Eve to pray in the new year. We had no idea what the year was going to bring. To say that it has been a year that brought us to our knees would be an understatement. Disease and death, natural disaster, cities under siege, multiple injustices, economic losses, dreams shattered, hopes diminished, setbacks and cancellations that no one dreamed on New Year's Eve. No one. You'd have all been present for the prayer time in our Chapel had you only known.

When I breathe out the phrase *Maranatha, Our Lord Come*, I am begging the eschatological calendar that only God knows to begin to unfold. I want to hear trumpets. I want to see the dead in Christ rise first; then I want to experience the rapture Paul talks about in our text. I am more than ready to be with the Lord and then to see the theology of end-times play out as only God knows it will. *Maranatha, Our Lord, Come!* Put an end to all of this. Come, Lord Jesus, please come.

The promise of His coming is comforting as it assures us of reunion with our loved ones. It reaffirms that God is sovereignly in control of the universe. This promise declares that Christ's kingdom will triumph in the end as Satan is utterly and ultimately defeated.

The promise of His coming is a warning just as certainly as it is a comfort. The coming of Christ for His Bride (the Church) is the plain and clear teaching of Scripture. No one knows when it will happen for it is described as a thief coming in the night. It makes no sense to speculate on the times or the signs of the seasons, but it makes perfect sense to be spiritually prepared for this event. The only way to be prepared is to respond in faith to the convicting awakening of the Holy Spirit who convinces us of the truth of the gospel, that we are dead in our sins and cannot save ourselves.

God, who is rich in mercy, has graciously provided a way of escape through the substitutionary death of Jesus. As the Spirit of God draws us to the Son of God, we can be born again by placing our trust and faith in Jesus. Christ took upon himself the punishment due for the sin of every man, woman, and child. His death was sufficient for all and effective for all who will call on the name of the Lord to be saved. If you have done this, you are prepared for the coming of the Lord Jesus for His Bride. If not, and if His coming were today, you would be lost and separated from Holy God for all eternity. My friend, this promise is a warning. Do not put it off. Trust Christ as your Savior today by throwing yourself on His rich and abundant mercy.

The promise of His coming is also a challenge to every believer to live a life of personal holiness. Your heart must be right with God, your relationship right with your fellowman, and your daily walk consistent with your profession of faith. The promise of His coming encourages you to pursue a godly life that produces the fruit of the Spirit. And if you truly believe in the promise of His coming, you will have a passion to see as many people come to Christ by your witness as possible.

He is coming back again! Let your light be burning bright when He does.

Maranatha! Our Lord Come!

*By Frank Lewis*

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*Frank and Lori Lewis have been a part of the Nashville First family since 1997 when he became the 20<sup>th</sup> Pastor of this church. "We are thankful that we got to raise our children in this church because it gave them an incredible foundation in their faith. Today as we look forward to the ministry that will be supported by our new building, we hope that our best days for reaching young families are ahead of us. Church, thank you for being a blessing to us, and Merry Christmas to each of you!"*

*The 2020 Advent Devotional Guide is a Christmas gift to your family from Nashville First Baptist's Devotional Service Group: Martha Kirkland, Bob Grammer, Judith King, Mary Frances Satterwhite, Megan Wilson, Grace Wilkinson, Jerry Brown, Fred Linkenhoker, and Helen Owens*

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*Note: Unless otherwise noted, printed Scripture passages are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) or Christian Standard Bible (CSB).*

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