

Dear Church at Bergen,

As we enter the season of Advent, you are invited to lean into, and reflect on, the coming of Jesus and what His arrival means for us, especially in times and days of trouble. Each day from December 1st through Christmas, this guide seeks to help us uncover aspects of hope rooted in Scripture, exploring how the birth of Christ brings light into even the darkest of circumstances.

In a world that is overwhelmed by bad news, Advent reminds us that in the midst of all our troubles, God's promises are unwavering. This guide encourages us to look to Jesus, the ultimate source of peace, joy, and strength, and to hold fast to the hope His coming offers us.

Each daily reading includes:

- **A scripture passage that points us to a certain aspect of hope in Christ,**
- **A brief thought that connects God's Word to our world today,**
- **A time to reflect on how this personally resonates with you and your life currently, and**
- **A prayer that asks God to bring our hearts closer to Him as we walk through this season.**

My prayer for you as you engage with these reflections is that you'll experience a renewed sense of who God is, His love for you, and the unshakable hope we have in Christ. May this season of Advent be a time where you feel, experience, and truly know His peace, strength, and love afresh, guiding you into a deeper relationship with Him.

As we walk through these readings together, may the light of Christ fill your heart and mind, anchoring you in His promises, giving you strength to share this hope with a world that so desperately needs it.

Your brother in Christ,

Dave Levesque

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DECEMBER 1ST

HOPE

IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS

Isaiah 9:2-7

*“The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.*

*3 You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.*

*4 For the yoke of his burden,
and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.*

*5 For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.*

*6 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.
7 Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”*

Bad news seems to be everywhere we look. Headlines broadcast turmoil, social media amplifies tragedies, and our personal lives may even echo this sense of darkness. The weight of the world's problems (political turmoil, death, war, injustice, environmental crises, suffering) can feel overwhelming, leaving many of us anxious, discouraged, or even numb to the brokenness that surrounds us.

Yet, Isaiah speaks to a people who understood darkness intimately. His words pierce through the bleakness: a great light has dawned. This prophecy points us to Jesus, the Light of the World, whose coming we anticipate during Advent. Even in their captivity and despair, Isaiah's audience was given hope of a future where God's presence would make all things right.

In our own lives, the darkness might manifest in different ways: through personal struggles, the pain of loss, or the overwhelming reality of today's constant bad news. With social media and 24/7 news cycles, we are more exposed to suffering than ever before. We witness tragedies and feel powerless to do anything about them. It can create a sense of burden we weren't meant to carry, a feeling of trying to be "like God" in knowing everything but lacking the strength to act.

But here's the good news: we were never meant to carry that burden. In the midst of our fragmented, weary world, Jesus enters our reality, bringing hope that transcends circumstances. He offers a light that the darkness cannot overcome, a peace that the chaos of the world cannot take away.

This Advent, as we reflect on the coming of Jesus, we are reminded that God has not left us in the dark. The hope that came with the birth of Jesus is the same hope that we cling to today. He is the light that guides us through uncertain times, the beacon

of hope for a future where all things will be made new. We are not called to fix every problem in the world, but to trust in the One who already has the victory.

As we begin this Advent journey, let's fix our eyes on the light that shines in the darkness. Jesus, the light of the world, has come and He is our hope.

Reflect: *Think about a time you felt surrounded by darkness. How did God's light bring you comfort or direction?*

Pray: Lord, we acknowledge the darkness that surrounds us, the brokenness in the world, the burdens we carry, and the news that often overwhelms us. But today, we thank You that in Jesus, a great light has dawned. Help us to trust in Your presence with us, even when the world feels heavy and our hearts feel troubled. As we journey through this Advent season, renew our hope in You. Remind us that we do not need to be in control of everything, but we can rest in the knowledge that You are. Teach us to release the burdens that we were never meant to carry, and give us the faith to walk in Your light. Help us to see the world through Your eyes of hope and compassion, and let that hope shine through us to others who are weary and burdened. May Your light dispel the darkness in our hearts, in our homes, and in our world. Amen.

DECEMBER 2ND

HOPE

FOR REST IN A RESTLESS WORLD

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30 ESV)

In our current, modern age, the pace of life has accelerated beyond what previous generations could have ever imagined. Our constant connectedness through smartphones and the internet means we are always accessible, always plugged in, and often overwhelmed. Work follows us home or happens at home, social media leads us to compare ourselves to others, and the 24-hour news cycle bombards us with information, much of it distressing. The line between rest and work has blurred, leaving us exhausted and yearning for relief.

Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11:28-30 speaks directly into our perpetual busyness and burden. He calls out to all who labor and are heavy laden, not just with physical work, but with the emotional and spiritual weight of life's pressures. His promise is relief: "I will give you rest."

This rest isn't merely bringing something to an end or a temporary escape. It's a deep, soul-level rest that comes from being in His presence. Jesus offers us His yoke, which may seem counterintuitive at first. A yoke implies work and burden. But unlike the yokes we've been carrying: the relentless demands of society, the self-imposed expectations, the anxiety over things we can't control, His yoke is easy, and His burden is light.

By taking His yoke upon us, we're invited into a partnership with Him. He doesn't add to our load, He shares it. He guides us, teaches us, and walks alongside us. In learning

from Him, we discover gentleness and humility, attributes that stand in stark contrast to the harshness and pride often celebrated in our culture today.

Hope emerges when we realize we don't have to navigate life's complexities on our own. We weren't designed to carry the weight of the world, to be "like God" in knowing and managing everything. Jesus acknowledges our limitations and offers a better way. His rest restores us, reorients our priorities, and refreshes our dry and weary souls with a wellspring of living water.

As we continue through this Advent season, let's consider what burdens we might lay down at His feet. Where are we striving in our own strength? In what areas have we allowed the world's demands to overshadow His gentle call? Accepting His invitation means embracing the hope that we can find true rest, not in our circumstances changing, but in His unchanging presence with us.

Reflect: *What burdens are you carrying right now? How might resting in Jesus' presence with you lighten them?*

Pray: Heavenly Father, we come before You acknowledging the weariness that so often fills our hearts. We are tired of striving, of carrying burdens too heavy for us to bear. Thank You for sending Jesus, who invites us to come to Him for rest. Help us to accept His invitation today. Teach us to take His yoke upon us, to learn from His gentle and humble heart. Show us how to walk in step with Him, allowing Him to guide our paths and lighten our loads. In this season of Advent, may we find our rest and hope in You alone. Renew our spirits, quiet our minds, and fill us with the peace that surpasses all understanding. Let us be a people who reflect Your restfulness in a restless world, pointing others to the hope we have found in You. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.

DECEMBER 3RD

HOPE

IN GOD'S PROMISES

"The Lord had 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 NIV)

Uncertainty is a common thread woven into the fabric of our lives. We face unpredictable circumstances: job instability, health challenges, relational strife, and a world that seems to shift beneath our feet daily. The constant barrage of uncertainty can make the future feel bleak and unsettled. In such times, where do we find solid ground?

Abram (whom God later renamed Abraham) faced immense uncertainty when God called him to leave everything familiar: his country, his people, his father's household, and go to an unknown land. God's command was bold and disruptive: "Go... to the land I will show you." There were no maps, no detailed plans, just a promise.

Yet, it was in this promise that Abram found hope. God assured him that He would make Abram into a great nation, bless him, and make his name great so that he would be a blessing to others. Moreover, God promised that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you," a prophecy pointing ultimately to Jesus Christ, a descendant of Abraham, who would bring salvation to the world.

Abram's hope rested not in his own understanding or ability to control the future but in God's faithfulness to His word. He chose to trust God's character and promises despite the uncertainties ahead. His journey wasn't without challenges, doubts, or

failures, but God's covenant remained steadfast as God had promised.

We, too, are called to cling to God's promises within uncertainty. While we may not be asked to leave our homes (although we might be!), we often face situations where the path forward isn't clear. The chaos we see around us can shake our sense of security. Yet, God's promises stand firm.

Scripture is filled with assurances that God is with us, that He will never leave nor forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6), that He has plans to give us hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11), and that all His promises are "Yes" in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20).

This Advent season, as we reflect on the coming of Jesus, we are reminded that God's ultimate promise has been fulfilled. The birth of Christ is the embodiment of God's faithfulness, a tangible expression of His commitment to redeem and restore. Jesus is the promised Savior who brings hope to all nations, just as God declared to Abram.

When the future feels uncertain, and the world's chaos threatens to overwhelm us, we can find hope in God's unchanging promises. Like Abraham, we are invited to trust not in what we can see but in the One who sees all. His covenant of love remains true, and His faithfulness continues through all generations.

Reflect: *What promises from God have encouraged you during hard times? How can you cling to these today?*

Pray: Faithful God, we thank You that Your promises are sure and steadfast. In a world filled with uncertainty and chaos, we choose to place our hope in You. Just as Abraham trusted You and stepped out in faith, help us to rely on Your word and character rather than our understanding. Forgive us when we allow fear and doubt to overshadow our faith. Remind us of Your faithfulness throughout history and in our own lives. Strengthen our hearts to hold firmly to Your promises, knowing that You are working all things for the good of those who love You. This Advent season, deepen our trust in You. As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the fulfillment of Your greatest promise, may our hope be renewed. Let us be carriers of this hope to others, shining Your light in a world that so desperately needs it. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.

DECEMBER 4TH

HOPE

FOR PEACE IN A TROUBLED WORLD

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:27 ESV)

In today's world, peace often feels like a distant dream. We are constantly confronted with conflicts: international tensions, political divisions, social unrest, and personal strife. The media bombards us with images of war, acts of violence, and stories of injustice. Even within our own lives, we may experience turmoil in relationships, stress at work, or anxiety about the future. All of this adds up and can leave us feeling unsettled and fearful.

Upon this backdrop, Jesus' words in John 14:27 offer a transformative promise: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." This isn't just any peace, it's a peace unlike what the world offers. Worldly peace is temporary and dependent on circumstances, a ceasefire, a moment of quiet, a fleeting sense of well-being. It's fragile and easily broken.

Jesus, however, gives us His peace, a deep, abiding sense of wholeness and calm that persists regardless of everything that is happening around us. This peace comes from knowing Him, trusting in His sovereignty, and resting in His love. It's a peace rooted in the assurance that He has overcome the world.

In John 14, Jesus is preparing His disciples for when He will have to leave them. He knows they will face trials and persecution. Yet, He encourages them not to let their hearts be troubled or afraid. His peace will be their anchor.

For us, this promise remains just as relevant. The same Jesus who spoke these words is present with us through the Holy Spirit. When we feel overwhelmed by the chaos

around us, we can turn to Him and receive His peace. It's a peace that guards our hearts and minds, transcending understanding.

But how do we experience this peace? It begins with a relationship with Jesus, spending time in His Word, communicating with Him in prayer, and cultivating a heart of trust. It involves surrendering our fears and anxieties to Him, acknowledging that while we may not control our circumstances, He does. As we shift our focus from the worries of this world to the steadfastness of Christ, our perspective changes.

This Advent season, as we reflect on the coming of the Prince of Peace, we're reminded that Jesus entered a world filled with its own troubles. Yet, His arrival signaled the beginning of reconciliation between God and humanity, a pathway to true peace. He doesn't promise a life free from conflict but offers us His peace within it.

In a world desperate for peace, we are called not only to receive Jesus' peace but also to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). By embodying His love and peace, we can be agents of reconciliation in our families, in our churches, in our communities, and beyond.

Let us anchor our hope in Jesus' assurance that He has overcome the world. His peace is a gift freely given, one that calms our hearts and dispels fear.

Reflect: *When the world feels chaotic, what practices help you focus on the peace Jesus offers?*

Pray: Lord Jesus, we thank You for the gift of Your peace, a peace that surpasses all understanding and guards our hearts and minds. In the midst of a troubled world, we confess that our hearts are often anxious and fearful. We are weighed down by the conflicts and uncertainties that surround us. Help us to receive Your peace today. Teach us to fix our eyes on You rather than the storms around us. Remind us that You have overcome the world, and in You, we can find rest for our souls. As we navigate our daily lives, empower us to be instruments of Your peace. Fill us with Your love so that we may bring reconciliation and hope to those we encounter. Let us reflect Your light in the darkness, pointing others to the source of true peace. This Advent season, deepen our understanding of what it means to trust You fully. May Your peace reign in our hearts, dispelling fear and anxiety. We place our hope in Your unchanging

promises. In Your mighty name, we pray. Amen.

DECEMBER 5TH

HOPE

THAT OVERCOMES FEAR

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

In an age where alarming headlines dominate our news feeds and social media platforms amplify every crisis, fear can easily take root in our hearts. This constant exposure can leave us feeling anxious and powerless. It's natural to respond with fear when we're confronted with situations that seem beyond our control.

However, the Apostle Paul reminds us in his letter to Timothy that fear is not the defining characteristic of those who belong to Christ. "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." This powerful statement shifts our perspective from one of apprehension to one of empowerment.

Paul wrote these words to Timothy, a young leader in the early church facing significant challenges and opposition. Timothy might have felt intimidated by the responsibilities before him and the obstacles in his path. Yet, Paul encourages him, and us, not to succumb to fear but to embrace the spirit that God has given.

This spirit of power means we are equipped by God to face difficulties with courage. It's not our own strength but His power working within us. The spirit of love enables us to reach out to others, even when fear might tempt us to withdraw or act selfishly. Love drives out fear (1 John 4:18) and compels us to serve and care for those around us. The spirit of self-control and sound mind allows us to remain steady and disciplined, not overwhelmed by panic or hysteria.

This verse is profoundly relevant for us in our here and now. We might feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of problems we see in the world, problems that

we often feel helpless to solve. The temptation is to retreat into fear, allowing it to dictate our actions and outlook. But God's Word calls us to a different response.

Our hope lies in the truth that God is sovereign over all circumstances. He has not left us defenseless but has equipped us with everything we need to navigate these times. When we anchor ourselves in His promises, fear loses its grip. We can face the future unafraid, not because challenges won't come, but because we know who holds the future.

This Advent season, as we anticipate the coming of Jesus, we're reminded that His birth was the ultimate demonstration of God's love conquering fear. The angels proclaimed to the shepherds, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10). Jesus' arrival ushered in hope, peace, and salvation, reasons for us to reject fear and embrace faith.

Let us, therefore, choose to live by the spirit God has given us. Let us be people of power, love, and self-control, shining His light in a world often overshadowed by fear.

Reflect: *Consider what fears might be overwhelming you. How does God's love give you courage to face them?*

Pray: Heavenly Father, we acknowledge that fear often tries to take hold of our hearts amid the uncertainties and troubles of this world. We confess that we sometimes allow fear to dictate our thoughts and actions. But we thank You for the spirit You have given us, a spirit of power, love, and self-control. Help us to embrace this spirit daily. Strengthen us with Your power to face challenges courageously. Fill us with Your love so that we may reach out to others compassionately. Grant us self-control to remain steadfast and clear-minded in uncertain times. As we walk through this Advent season, fix our eyes on Jesus, whose coming dispelled fear and brought hope to all humanity. May His presence in our lives empower us to live unafraid, trusting in Your sovereign care. Use us, Lord, as instruments of Your peace and vessels of hope. Let our lives testify to the truth that with You, we have nothing to fear. In Jesus' mighty name, we pray. Amen.

DECEMBER 6TH

HOPE

FOR THE BROKENHEARTED

"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." (Psalm 34:18 ESV)

Life in this world inevitably brings moments of deep sorrow and heartbreak.

Personal losses such as the death of a loved one, the end of a significant relationship, or the shattering of a long-held dream can leave us feeling isolated and overwhelmed by grief. On a global scale, tragedies like natural disasters, acts of violence, and widespread injustice can weigh heavily on us, amplifying a sense of despair.

In such times, it's common to feel as though no one truly understands the depth of our pain. We might question where God is amongst all the suffering, wondering if He sees our tears or hears our cries. The overwhelming nature of grief can make us feel distant from Him, as if we're walking through a deep, dark tunnel all alone.

Yet, Psalm 34:18 offers hope-filled reassurance: "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." This is not a distant, detached God but a compassionate Heavenly Father who draws close to us in our most vulnerable and dark moments. He doesn't simply observe our pain from afar, He enters right into it with us.

The Hebrew word for "brokenhearted" conveys a sense of being shattered into pieces. When our hearts feel shattered into pieces, God steps in as the healer who mends and restores. His nearness is the balm for our wounds, and His presence brings comfort that transcends all our understanding.

In the middle of all our personal loss and all of our world's global tragedies, we can

find hope in knowing that God is intimately aware of our suffering. Jesus Himself was "a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). He wept at the tomb of Lazarus, grieved over Jerusalem, and ultimately bore the weight of all sin and sorrow on the cross. Because of this, He is uniquely qualified to empathize with our pain.

Moreover, God's closeness doesn't just offer relief, it brings salvation to the "crushed in spirit." He rescues us from despair, infuses us with strength, and guides us toward healing. This doesn't mean the pain instantly disappears, but it does mean we're not alone in our carrying of it and journey through it.

As we walk as sojourners in this world where bad news seems unending and suffering threatens to overwhelm us, we can cling to the hope that God's presence is a constant. He invites us to pour out our hearts to Him, assuring us that He listens and cares deeply.

This Advent season, as we reflect on the coming of Jesus, we're reminded that His birth was God's profound declaration of His nearness to humanity. Emmanuel, "God with us" entered into our broken world to bring redemption and hope. In Jesus, we see the fulfillment of God's promise to be close to the brokenhearted.

If you're experiencing heartbreak today, know that God is nearer to you than your heartbreak ever could be. Allow His presence to comfort you, His love to surround you, and His hope to fill the empty places in your heart.

Reflect: *Who do you know that is hurting or brokenhearted? How can you offer them comfort today?*

Pray: Gracious Father, we come before You with hearts that are broken and spirits that feel crushed by the weight of sorrow. You know the depths of our pain and the tears we've shed. Thank You for the promise that You are near to us in these moments, offering comfort and healing. We invite You into our grief, Lord. Help us to sense Your presence and to trust that You are working even when we cannot see it. Mend our hearts where they are shattered, and restore hope where it has faded. Teach us to lean on You fully, finding refuge in Your unfailing love. As we walk through this season of Advent, may we be reminded that Jesus came to bind up the brokenhearted and bring beauty from ashes. Use our experiences of pain to deepen our compassion for others who are hurting. Empower us to be instruments of Your

comfort, sharing the hope we've found in You with a world in need. In the healing name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

DECEMBER 7TH

HOPE

FOR FORGIVENESS & REDEMPTION

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace." (Ephesians 1:7 ESV)

In a world marred by flaws and failures, we often come face to face with our own shortcomings and the mistakes we've made. The weight of guilt and shame can pull us down and burden our hearts, making us feel unworthy or distant from God. We see the brokenness around us and within us, and it can be overwhelming. How do we find hope while feeling crushed by the weight of our shortcomings and sin?

The Apostle Paul, writing to the Ephesians, reminds us of this truth: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace." This single verse encapsulates the heart of the Gospel, the good news that through Jesus Christ, we are forgiven and redeemed.

This redemption is a release from bondage, a freedom from the chains that once held us captive. Through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross, the debt of our sin has been paid in full and His righteousness has been given and credited to us. His blood was the price of our freedom. This isn't due to any merit of our own but is entirely "according to the riches of his grace." God's grace is abundant, overflowing beyond measure, extending forgiveness to all who come to Him in faith.

Acknowledging our imperfections is the first step toward embracing this hope. When we confess our sins, we open our hearts to receive God's mercy. Instead of being defined by our past mistakes, we are given a new identity in Christ. His grace doesn't just cover our sins, it transforms us from the inside out and makes us new.

We are often pressured to present a flawless image, especially with the rise of social

media where imperfections are filtered out. Yet, deep down, we know we fall short. The hope we find in Christ allows us to be authentic about our struggles, knowing that our worth is not determined by our failures but by God's unchanging love.

This redemption reshapes our future. We are not bound to repeat the cycles of the past. With the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, we are empowered to live differently, to pursue righteousness, to love others genuinely, and to reflect God's grace to the world around us.

As we journey through this Advent season, we celebrate the coming of Jesus, who made this redemption possible. His birth was the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan, prophesied throughout the Old Testament and realized in the New. In Jesus, we have the ultimate expression of God's desire to reconcile us to Himself.

Let us embrace this hope of forgiveness and redemption. No matter what lies behind us, God's grace is sufficient to redeem and renew us. He invites us to step into the future with confidence, knowing that we are forgiven and loved.

Reflect: *Is there something in your past you feel God cannot forgive? How does Jesus' redemption assure you otherwise?*

Pray: Merciful Father, we come before You acknowledging our sins and shortcomings. We confess that we have fallen short of Your glory and are in need of Your forgiveness. Thank You for the gift of redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ. We are humbled by the riches of Your grace that You lavish upon us. Help us to fully grasp the depth of Your love and to accept the forgiveness You so freely offer. Transform our hearts, Lord, so that we may walk in newness of life. As we reflect on the birth of Jesus this Advent season, may we be reminded of the immense sacrifice made on our behalf. Let this truth fill us with hope and gratitude. Empower us to live as redeemed people, sharing Your love and grace with those around us. We pray that our lives would be a testimony to Your redeeming power. Use us to bring hope to others who feel burdened by guilt and shame. All glory and honor be to You, now and forever. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.

DECEMBER 8TH

HOPE

IN GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

*"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.*

*They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

*I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him.'" (Lamentations 3:22-24 NIV)*

Uncertainty is a constant in our lives. Whether it's global events like economic instability, natural disasters, or personal challenges such as health issues, job insecurity, or strained relationships, we often find ourselves grappling with the unknown.

In the midst of such instability, the words of the prophet Jeremiah in Lamentations offer us an incredible beacon of hope. Written during a time of profound suffering, the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of its people, Jeremiah's lament turns into a declaration of faith: "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail."

Jeremiah acknowledges the crippling circumstances but chooses to focus on God's unwavering character. Despite the devastation surrounding him, he recognizes that it is solely because of God's steadfast love that they are not utterly destroyed. His mercies are not occasional or limited, they are "new every morning." Each day brings a fresh outpouring of His compassion, regardless of the challenges we face.

This passage reminds us that God's faithfulness is not dependent on our circumstances. It doesn't waver with the changing tides of our lives or the world's

events. His faithfulness is a constant, an anchor in the storm. When everything else seems uncertain, we can rely on His unchanging nature.

Jeremiah goes on to say, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." To declare that the Lord is our portion means that He is our inheritance, our sustenance, the source of our hope and satisfaction. When we place our trust in God rather than in temporary things, we find stability and peace that transcend understanding.

We may feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of global and personal instability. The temptation is to become disheartened and discouraged, questioning where God is in the midst of our chaos. Yet, Lamentations invites us to shift our focus from the uncertainties around us to the certainty of God's faithfulness.

This Advent season, as we anticipate the coming of Jesus, we are reminded of the ultimate expression of God's faithfulness. In Christ, all of God's promises are fulfilled. Jesus' birth is the visible demonstration that God is faithful to His word, bringing redemption and hope to a weary world.

Each morning, as we face new challenges or the continuation of ongoing struggles, we can choose to remember that God's mercies are new for us. Our hope is renewed daily, not because our circumstances have changed, but because of His great faithfulness.

Let us hold onto this truth: No matter what uncertainties we face, God's love never fails, His compassion does not run out, and His faithfulness is indeed great.

Reflect: *Think of a time God was faithful in your life. How can remembering this help you trust Him today?*

Pray: Faithful God, we thank You that in a world filled with uncertainty, You remain constant and true. Your mercies are new every morning, and Your compassion never fails. Great is Your faithfulness, O Lord. When we are overwhelmed by life's challenges, help us to remember that You are our portion. Teach us to place our hope in You alone, waiting patiently for Your guidance and provision. Forgive us for the times we've allowed doubt to overshadow our faith. Renew our hearts each day, grounding us in the truth of who You are. As we journey through this Advent season, deepen our awareness of Your steadfast love. May we find peace in Your presence

and confidence in Your unchanging character. Let our lives be a testimony to Your faithfulness, so that others may see and be drawn to the hope we have in You. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.

DECEMBER 9TH

HOPE

FOR DELIVERANCE

"And Moses said to the people, 'Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.'"
(Exodus 14:13-14 ESV)

There are moments in life when we feel utterly trapped, boxed in by circumstances beyond our control, with no visible way out. Perhaps it's a health crisis, financial burdens, worn relationships, or the weight of anxiety and depression. Our circumstances can leave us feeling helpless and overwhelmed, much like the Israelites found themselves trapped between the Red Sea and the pursuing Egyptian army.

In Exodus 14, the Israelites faced what seemed like an impossible situation. They had just escaped slavery in Egypt, only to find themselves cornered with the sea before them and Pharaoh's chariots closing in behind. Panic and fear gripped the people as they questioned Moses and even regretted leaving Egypt. It was a defining moment where their faith was tested to the extreme.

Moses' response to the people's fear is just as instructive for us today as it was then: "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today... The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent." Instead of urging them to take immediate action or come up with an escape plan, Moses calls them to trust in God's deliverance.

This passage reminds us that when we are at the end of ourselves, when we've exhausted all options and see no path forward, God is not limited by our limitations.

His power to deliver transcends our circumstances. Our role, like the Israelites', is to "stand firm," place our hope and trust in Him, and be still as we wait and watch expectantly as God does the unimaginable.

We often feel the pressure to fix our problems through our own efforts. The world's message is to hustle harder, to rely on self-sufficiency, and to control everything. Yet, our strength is simply not enough, and acknowledging this can be both humbling and freeing.

The hope we find in this story is that God is actively involved in the lives of His people. He sees our distress and moves on our behalf. Just as He parted the Red Sea, making a way where there was none, He can intervene in our situations in ways we could never imagine.

This doesn't mean we take a passive stance in life but rather that we recognize that we must surrender our striving and trust in God's sovereignty. It involves releasing our fears and choosing to believe that He is able and willing to fight for us.

As we continue our journey through this Advent season, reflecting on the coming of Jesus, we are reminded of the ultimate deliverance God provided through His Son. Jesus came to free us from the bondage of sin and death, a rescue we could never accomplish on our own. His birth, life, death, and resurrection are the fulfillment of God's promise to fight for us and deliver us.

Whatever you may be facing today, take heart in knowing that God is your deliverer. He invites you to stand firm in faith, to be still before Him, and to witness His salvation. Our hope rests not in our abilities but in His mighty power to save.

Reflect: *In what areas do you feel "trapped" right now? Pray for God's deliverance and trust in His timing.*

Pray: Almighty God, we come before You acknowledging the times when we feel trapped and powerless. The challenges we face can seem insurmountable, and fear threatens to overwhelm us. But we thank You for the reminder that You are our deliverer, the One who fights for us. Help us to stand firm in faith trusting in Your power rather than our own efforts. Teach us to be still before You, releasing our fears and anxieties into Your capable hands. Strengthen our hearts to believe that You are working on our behalf, even when we cannot see the way forward. As we reflect on

the deliverance You've provided through Jesus, fill us with hope and gratitude. May we live each day confident in Your salvation and ready to testify to Your goodness. Use our stories of deliverance to encourage others who feel trapped and hopeless. Let our lives point to You, the One who makes a way where there seems to be no way. In the powerful name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

DECEMBER 10TH

HOPE

FOR JUSTICE

"But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5:24 NIV)

We are constantly confronted with stories of injustice. Newsfeeds are filled with accounts of corruption, inequality, oppression, and acts of violence against the innocent. So often this can leave us feeling frustrated, angry, and helpless, questioning whether righteousness will ever overcome it all. The weight of these injustices and personal injustices can weigh heavy in our hearts, making us yearn for true justice.

The prophet Amos delivered God's message to the people of Israel during a time of great prosperity combined with great wickedness. While religious rituals were very carefully observed, there was a glaring neglect of justice and righteousness. Amos's call was a stark reminder that God desires genuine devotion expressed through just actions and righteous living: "But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!"

This vivid imagery portrays justice as a powerful, ever-flowing river, unstoppable and life-giving. Rivers shape our landscape, carving paths through the hardest rock over time. Similarly, God's heart for justice is an enduring, never-ending river that seeks to transform societies and hearts.

His call is not just for occasional acts of justice but for justice and righteousness to permeate every aspect of life continually.

In the face of overwhelming injustice, where can we find hope? Our hope rests in the character of God Himself. Isaiah 30:18 says, "Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of

justice; blessed are all those who wait for him." God is a God of justice, who hears the cries of the oppressed and acts on their behalf. Throughout Scripture, we see His commitment to setting things right, from delivering the Israelites from slavery to Jesus's ministry of healing and restoring those who were outcast by society.

Jesus embodied God's justice and righteousness. He challenged the oppressive systems of His time, uplifted the downtrodden, and ultimately gave His life away for humanity to be reconciled to God through His sacrifice on the cross. His resurrection is the assurance that evil and injustice do not and will not have the final say.

While we may feel powerless against large-scale injustices, we are invited to participate in God's work by acting justly in our spheres of influence. Micah 6:8 echoes this calling: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

As we reflect on the coming of Jesus during this Advent season, we are reminded that He is the ultimate hope for justice. His return promises the restoration of all things, where righteousness will dwell permanently. Until then, we are called to be agents of His justice, advocating for the oppressed, loving our neighbors, and living in a way that points to His eternal, ever-righteous kingdom.

Let us not grow weary or cynical. Instead, let's anchor our hope in God's promise that justice will indeed roll on like a river, and righteousness like a never-failing stream. Our actions, empowered by His Spirit, contribute to the unfolding of His redemptive plan.

Reflect: *What injustices around you weigh on your heart? How might God be calling you to act or pray for change?*

Pray: Just and Righteous God, we come before You deeply aware of the injustices that plague our world and our own communities. Our hearts ache for those who suffer oppression, discrimination, and violence. We confess that at times we feel helpless and even apathetic in the face of such overwhelming need. Thank You for being a God who sees, who cares, and who acts on behalf of the oppressed. Thank You for sending Jesus, who embodied perfect justice and offers us hope that righteousness will ultimately prevail. Stir our hearts, Lord, to align with Your passion

for justice. Empower us by Your Holy Spirit to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with You. Show us practical ways to advocate for those who are marginalized and to stand against injustice in our daily lives. As we anticipate the coming of Christ this Advent season, may we be reminded that our hope is secure in Your unchanging character. Let us not be overwhelmed by the darkness but be light-bearers who reflect Your love and justice in the world. We pray for the day when justice will roll on like a mighty river, and righteousness like a never-failing stream. Until then, strengthen us to be faithful participants in Your mission. In the name of Jesus, our Hope and Redeemer, we pray. Amen.

HOPE

IN GOD'S UNFAILING LOVE

*"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."
(Romans 8:38-39 ESV)*

In an age where technology connects us more than ever, many people, ironically, feel a very real sense of isolation. Social media platforms, while promising community and connection, often amplify feelings of loneliness, comparison, and inadequacy. We scroll through curated snapshots of others' lives, sometimes believing we are the only ones struggling, the only ones feeling disconnected.

Amidst these feelings of isolation, the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 8 offer comfort and hope. He declares with absolute conviction that nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. This is an all-encompassing statement that covers every possible circumstance or force that might attempt to drive a wedge between us and God's love.

Consider the exhaustive list Paul provides: death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future, any powers, height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation. He leaves no room for exceptions. God's love is steadfast, unchanging, and relentless. It pursues us in our highs and lows, our joys and sorrows, our faithfulness and our failures.

In a world that often feels uncertain and relationships that can be fragile, God's unfaithful love is the anchor for our souls. Unlike human love, which can be conditional or fluctuate based on circumstances, God's love is perfect and unwavering. It doesn't depend on our performance or our abilities. It is a gift freely

given through Jesus Christ.

As we continue walking through this Advent season, we are reminded that Jesus' birth was the ultimate expression of God's unfailing love. Emmanuel, God with us, entered into our world to bridge the gap caused by sin and restore us to a right relationship with the Father. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are the definitive proof that God's love knows no bounds.

When we feel isolated or unworthy, we can rest in the truth that God sees us, knows us fully, and loves us completely. His love reaches into the deepest parts of our hearts, bringing healing, acceptance, and belonging. We are never truly alone because His presence is always with us.

Let this truth sink in: There is nothing you can do to make God love you more, and nothing you can do to make Him love you less. His love is constant, unchanging, and all-encompassing.

As we navigate the complexities of life, let's choose to focus on this unshakable love. Allow it to fill the empty spaces, to drive out fear, and to fuel us to love others in the same way. Our hope is securely rooted in the knowledge that we are forever held in God's unfailing love.

Reflect: *How does knowing God's love never fails, impact your relationship with Him? What about others?*

Pray: Heavenly Father, we thank You for the immeasurable love You have lavished upon us through Christ Jesus. In times when we feel isolated, unworthy, or disconnected, remind us of the truth that nothing can separate us from Your love. Help us to grasp the depth and breadth of Your affection for us. Let this knowledge transform our hearts and minds, freeing us from fear and filling us with hope. Teach us to rest in Your presence, trusting that You are always with us. As we continue through this Advent season, may Your unfailing love be the foundation upon which we build our lives. Empower us to share this love with others, becoming instruments of Your grace in a world that so desperately needs it. We praise You, Lord, for Your unchanging love and for the gift of Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

DECEMBER 12TH

HOPE

THAT DOESN'T DISAPPOINT

"Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." (Romans 5:3-5 ESV)

Suffering is an unwelcome visitor in our lives. It arrives unannounced, disrupting our plans, challenging our faith, and testing our resilience. Whether it's personal suffering like illness, loss, and broken relationships, or global suffering that affect entire communities, suffering can leave us feeling vulnerable, disoriented, and discouraged. In such moments, it's easy to wonder if there's any purpose to our pain or if hope is merely an illusion.

The Apostle Paul offers a transforming perspective on suffering in his letter to the Romans. He encourages believers not just to endure suffering but to "glory" in it. This isn't a call to celebrate pain for its own sake but an invitation to recognize the profound work God can accomplish through our trials. Paul outlines a spiritual progression: suffering produces perseverance; perseverance builds character; and character fosters hope.

This hope is not wishful thinking or a naive, blind optimism. It's a confident expectation rooted in the unchanging nature of God. Paul assures us that this hope "does not put us to shame," it doesn't disappoint or fail us, because it is anchored in God's love, which has been abundantly poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

We are often told to avoid suffering at all costs. Society promotes comfort, convenience, and instant gratification. Social media amplifies this by showcasing

highlight reels of others' seemingly perfect lives, making our own struggles feel isolating or even shameful. We might ask ourselves why we're the ones facing hardship when everyone else appears to be thriving.

Yet, it's precisely through enduring difficulties that we develop perseverance, the ability to remain steadfast under pressure. This perseverance shapes our character, refining us to be more like Christ. As our character matures, our hope strengthens, not because our circumstances have improved, but because we've experienced God's faithfulness firsthand. We learn that He is present in our pain, working all things together for our good (Romans 8:28).

This hope is unshakeable because it's grounded in the reality of God's love, a love so profound that He gave His only Son for us. The Holy Spirit continually reminds us of this love, reassuring us in our darkest moments. This divine love fuels our hope, enabling us to face the future without fear.

This Advent season, we remember that Jesus Himself was acquainted with suffering. He entered into our broken world, experienced human pain, and ultimately laid down His life for our redemption. His resurrection is the ultimate testament to a hope that does not disappoint, a hope that conquers even death.

As we walk through our own valleys of sufferings, we can take comfort in knowing that they are not meaningless. God is at work within us, cultivating perseverance, shaping our character, and deepening our hope. This hope will never disappoint us because it is secured by His enduring love.

Reflect: *Think of a disappointment you've recently experienced. How does God's love offer you lasting hope?*

Pray: Heavenly Father, we come to You acknowledging the struggles and sufferings we face. Sometimes the weight of our trials feels unbearable, and we wonder about the purpose behind our pain. Thank You for the assurance that You are with us in every circumstance, working within us to produce perseverance, character, and a hope that does not disappoint. Pour Your love into our hearts anew through the Holy Spirit. Help us to embrace the process, trusting that You are refining us and drawing us closer to You. Strengthen our faith so that we may rejoice even in our sufferings, knowing that they serve a greater purpose. As we reflect on the Advent of Jesus, let

His victory over suffering and death fill us with unshakeable hope. Use our experiences to empathize with others who are hurting, and empower us to be bearers of hope in their lives. We rest in the confidence that our hope in You will never disappoint us. Thank You for Your unfailing love and faithfulness. In the precious name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

DECEMBER 13TH

HOPE

FOR RESTORATION

*"I will restore to you the years
that the swarming locust has eaten,
the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,
my great army, which I sent among you.*

*"You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
and praise the name of the LORD your God,
who has dealt wondrously with you.
And my people shall never again be put to shame."
(Joel 2:25-26 ESV)*

Life often brings seasons that feel wasted or lost, times when our efforts seem fruitless, our dreams shattered, or our paths derailed by unforeseen circumstances. Perhaps it's a prolonged illness, a broken relationship, missed opportunities, or years spent wandering without clear direction. These seasons can leave us feeling discouraged, questioning whether anything good can come from the time we've "lost".

The prophet Joel spoke to the people of Israel during a time of great trial. A plague of locusts had destroyed the land, consuming crops, stripping away the key resources of the nation. This crisis symbolizes not only physical loss but also spiritual dryness due to the people's turning from God. In the midst of this bleak situation, God delivers a profound promise: "I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten."

This declaration is overflowing with hope. God doesn't merely offer to stop the

damage, He promises to restore what was lost. The years ravaged by hardship and despair are not beyond His redeeming power. His restoration goes beyond replacing what was taken, it brings a renewal that can surpass what was originally there.

We may feel the sting of wasted years. The rapid pace of society can make us very much aware of time slipping away. Regrets over past decisions, the impact of global events like pandemics or economic downturns, and personal struggles can lead us to believe that certain opportunities are gone forever.

Yet, God's promise through Joel assures us that He is capable of redeeming those lost years. Our hope looks forward to His ability to bring beauty from ashes, to turn mourning into dancing, and to use our experiences, both good and bad, for His glory and our growth.

Restoration doesn't always mean a return to how things used to be, but often points to transformation that brings us closer to God's intended purpose for our lives. It may involve healing, renewed purpose, reconciled relationships, or newfound strength and character developed through suffering.

As we journey through this Advent season, anticipating the coming of Jesus, we're reminded of God's ultimate act of restoration. Through Christ's life, death, and resurrection, He restores our broken relationship with Him, offering us new life and eternal hope. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to restore and renew all things.

Let us hold firmly to this hope, trusting that no matter what we've lost or how much time has passed, God is able to redeem and renew. He is faithful to fulfill His promises, and His restorative power knows no bounds.

Reflect: *What “wasted” years or losses in your life do you long to see restored? Pray for God’s healing and renewal.*

Pray: Gracious Father, we come before You acknowledging the seasons of our lives that feel wasted or lost. We carry regrets, pains, and the weight of missed opportunities. Thank You for Your promise to restore the years that have been “wasted” in our eyes, and for Your power to redeem even the most broken parts of our lives. Help us to trust in Your ability to renew and restore. Turn our eyes away from past disappointments and toward the future You have prepared for us. Fill our

hearts with hope, knowing that You are at work even now to bring about restoration. As we reflect on the coming of Jesus this Advent season, may we be reminded of Your great plan of redemption. Let His presence bring healing to our hearts and renewal to our souls. Use our experiences to draw us closer to You and to mold us into vessels that reflect Your love and grace. We praise You for dealing wondrously with us and for the assurance that we will never again be put to shame in Your presence. In the restorative name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

DECEMBER 14TH

HOPE

FOR ETERNAL LIFE

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16 ESV)

In this life filled with uncertainties, trials, and fleeting moments, we often search for something lasting and meaningful. The challenges we face can make life feel overwhelming and transient. Our hearts long for a hope that transcends the temporary, a foundation that remains unshaken despite the storms of life.

John 3:16 is perhaps the most well-known verse in the Bible, summarizing the heart of the Gospel: the good news of God's immense love and the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son" speaks to the depth and breadth of God's love for humanity. This love is not abstract or distant, it is personal and sacrificial.

The promise that "whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" offers us the ultimate hope. Eternal life is not just an unending existence after death, it begins the moment we place our faith in Jesus. It is a quality of life characterized by a restored relationship with God, filled with purpose, peace, and joy that surpasses understanding.

This eternal perspective releases the weight of our temporary troubles. While our struggles are real and often painful, they are not the final word. The Apostle Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen." Knowing that we have an eternal inheritance with Christ changes how we endure present difficulties.

During this Advent season, reflecting on the coming of Jesus, we are reminded that His birth was the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan. Jesus came to bridge the gap between a holy God and sinful humanity. Through His life, death, and resurrection, He conquered sin and death, securing eternal life for all who believe in Him.

This hope is steadfast and unshakable. It is a safehouse for our souls when the world around us is on fire. It assures us that no matter what we face, whether loss, disappointment, or uncertainty, we have a future secured by God's unchanging promise.

Let us hold firmly to this ultimate hope, allowing it to transform our lives and perspectives. May the assurance of eternal life through Jesus fill us with courage, comfort, and a renewed sense of purpose as we navigate the complexities of this life.

Reflect: *How does the promise of eternal life shape your perspective on daily struggles?*

Pray: Heavenly Father, we thank You for the immeasurable love You have shown us by giving Your only Son so that we might have eternal life. We confess that we often become overwhelmed by the temporary troubles we face, losing sight of the eternal hope we have in You. Help us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Remind us daily of the promise of eternal life, and let this truth release the weight of our present challenges. Fill our hearts with joy and peace as we trust in Your unfailing promises. As we continue through this Advent season, deepen our understanding of Your love and the significance of Jesus' coming. Empower us to share this hope with others, shining Your light in a world that desperately needs it. We pray this in the precious name of Jesus, our Savior and eternal hope. Amen.

DECEMBER 15TH

HOPE

IN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

"Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand." (Proverbs 19:21 ESV)

We are all aiming for something. It's common for us to map out detailed plans for our lives. We set goals, create timelines, and strive to control as many aspects of our future as possible. We often believe that our happiness and security depend on carrying out these plans. Yet, life has a way of reminding us that we are not in control. Unexpected events can disrupt even our most carefully laid plans.

Proverbs 19:21 offers us a truth that brings both humility and comfort: "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand." This verse reminds us that while it's natural and even wise to make plans, we must recognize that God's sovereign purpose ultimately prevails. His plans are unshakable, eternal, and rooted in His perfect wisdom and love.

Understanding God's sovereignty means acknowledging that He is in complete control over all things. He orchestrates the events of history and the details of our personal lives in ways that are beyond our comprehension. This doesn't negate our responsibility to act wisely and make decisions, but it does shift our confidence from our abilities to His all powerful, unchanging nature.

Our hope is secure because it rests in God's sovereign control. When our plans fail or circumstances change, we can find peace in knowing that God's purposes are still unfolding. He is not surprised by the twists and turns of our lives. In fact, He weaves them into His greater plan for our good and His glory.

This perspective releases our anxiety over the unknown and frees us from the burden

of having to figure everything out. It invites us to trust in God's character, His promises, and His perfect timing. Instead of clinging tightly to our own agendas, we can hold our plans loosely in our open hands, submitting them to God's will.

As we meditate on Christ's Advent, we're reminded of how God's sovereign plan brought forth the birth of Jesus. The long-awaited Messiah came at the appointed time, fulfilling prophecies and bringing salvation to the world. Mary and Joseph's lives were drastically altered by God's purpose, yet their obedience led to joy beyond measure.

In the same way, when we align our hearts with God's purposes, we position ourselves to experience His peace and fulfillment. Our hope is not dependent on our circumstances but on the One who holds all things together.

Let us, therefore, find rest in God's sovereignty. Though we may have many plans, it's His purpose that will stand. And that is a foundation we can securely build our lives upon.

Reflect: *What plans in your life have not gone as expected? How can you trust God's purpose in those areas?*

Pray: Sovereign Lord, we acknowledge that while we make many plans, it is Your purpose that prevails. Forgive us for the times we've relied solely on our understanding and failed to trust in Your perfect will. Help us to surrender our plans to You, aligning our desires with Your greater purpose. Give us the faith to trust in Your sovereignty, especially when life doesn't go as we expect. Remind us that Your ways are higher than our ways, and Your thoughts higher than our thoughts. As we journey through this Advent season, deepen our trust in Your control over all things. Fill us with hope and peace, knowing that our lives are held securely in Your hands. May we rest in the assurance that Your purpose will stand, and it is good. We pray this in the name of Jesus, our Savior and King. Amen.

DECEMBER 16TH

HOPE

IN THE FACE OF SUFFERING

"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." (1 Peter 5:10 ESV)

Suffering is an inescapable part of our lives. Whether it's physical illness, emotional pain, loss, or unexpected hardships, we all encounter trials that test our faith and resilience. These painful seasons can leave us feeling weary, battered and worn, and questioning God's presence and purpose in our lives.

In 1 Peter 5:10, the Apostle Peter offers a message of unshakable hope to believers facing suffering. He acknowledges the reality of their afflictions but points them to a greater truth: *"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."*

This verse reminds us that our suffering is temporary when viewed within the perspective of eternity. The phrase "after you have suffered a little while" may not diminish the intensity of our pain in the moment, but it offers perspective that our hardships are not the end of the story. God is actively at work, even in our struggles, orchestrating a future where restoration and strength await us.

Consider the titles Peter uses for God: "the God of all grace." This emphasizes His abundant kindness and unmerited favor toward us. He has "called you to his eternal glory in Christ," assuring us that our destiny is secure and glorious because of Jesus. Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us.

The promise that God "will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you" is deeply personal and comforting. God doesn't delegate this work, He personally attends to our healing and strengthening. To "restore" means He will mend what is broken. To "confirm" and "strengthen" means he is making us firm and resilient. To "establish" us means He is setting a solid foundation beneath our feet.

Our hope endures beyond present pain because it is anchored in God's unchanging nature and His eternal promises. We may not understand why we suffer, but we can trust that God is sovereign and compassionate. He uses our trials to refine our faith, develop perseverance, and draw us closer to Him.

This Advent season, we reflect on Jesus, who is intimately acquainted with suffering. He endured the cross, despising its shame, for the joy set before Him. His suffering brought about our salvation, demonstrating that pain can have a redemptive purpose in God's hands.

Let us, therefore, hold tightly to the hope that after we have suffered a little while, God Himself will restore and strengthen us. Our present afflictions are light and momentary compared to the eternal glory that awaits us. We are not alone in our suffering, God is with us, and His grace is sufficient.

Reflect: *When have you seen God's strength in your weakness? How does that encourage you during difficult times?*

Pray: Gracious Father, we come to You acknowledging the pain and suffering we sometimes endure. It can be hard to see beyond our present struggles, and we confess that we often feel overwhelmed and discouraged. Thank You for the assurance that You are the God of all grace, who has called us to eternal glory in Christ. Help us to trust in Your promises, knowing that after we have suffered a little while, You will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us. Give us the endurance to persevere, the faith to believe in Your goodness, and the hope that looks beyond our current circumstances. As we reflect on the Advent of Jesus, remind us that He understands our suffering and is with us in every trial. May His example lead us to remain steadfast, and may His presence bring us comfort and peace. Use our experiences to deepen our reliance on You and to be a testimony of Your faithfulness to others. We place our hope in You, confident that You are working all things

together for our good and Your glory. In the comforting name of Jesus, we pray.
Amen.

DECEMBER 17TH

HOPE

FOR RECONCILIATION

"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." (2 Corinthians 5:18-19 ESV)

We live in a day in age that is marked and defined by division and discord.

Conflicts arise between nations, communities, families, and even within our own hearts. Social media magnifies these divisions, creating echo chambers that deepen misunderstandings and foster hostility. In such an environment, reconciliation can seem like an unattainable dream, and hope for unity may feel distant.

Yet, in the midst of this fractured reality, the Apostle Paul brings a message of hope. In 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, he reminds us that God, through Christ, has reconciled us to Himself and entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation. This reconciliation is not merely a truce or a superficial peace, it's a complete restoration of a broken relationship between humanity and God, initiated by His grace.

The root of our divisions stems from the brokenness caused by sin and our offense against God and one another. But Paul emphasizes that in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, "not counting their trespasses against them." This radical forgiveness lays the foundation for true reconciliation. It begins with God's initiative to mend the severed relationship between Himself and humanity, offering us peace through the sacrifice of Jesus.

Having been reconciled to God, we are now called to be ambassadors of this reconciliation. We carry the "message of reconciliation" into a world desperately in need of healing. This ministry is both a privilege and a responsibility. It involves actively seeking to repair relationships, promote understanding, and extend the

same grace we've received from God to others.

What might this look like for us in our lives? It may mean reaching out to someone we've had a conflict with, or listening empathetically to those with different perspectives, or standing against injustice that has caused division. It requires humility, patience, and a reliance on the Holy Spirit to guide our actions and words.

Our hope for reconciliation is found in the power of Christ's work on the cross. Because He overcame the ultimate division caused by sin and death, we can trust that He is able to heal the fractures in our relationships and societies. This hope empowers us to persist in the face of hostility, knowing that God's love has the power to transform hearts and bring unity.

As we continue to anticipate the celebration of Jesus' birth, we are reminded that His coming was the ultimate act of reconciliation. Emmanuel, God with us, entered into our divided world to restore peace between God and humanity. His life models for us how to live as ambassadors of reconciliation, embodying love, compassion, and truth.

Let us embrace this calling, confident that through Christ, reconciliation is possible. In a world yearning for peace, we carry a message of hope that has the power to bridge divides, tear down walls, and heal wounds.

Reflect: *Is there someone in your life with whom you need reconciliation? Pray for healing and the courage to take a first step.*

Pray: Gracious Father, we thank You for reconciling us to Yourself through Jesus Christ. We lift up the divisions and conflicts that plague our world and even our own lives. Forgive us for the ways we've contributed to discord through our actions or lack of actions. Empower us by Your Holy Spirit to be ambassadors of reconciliation. Fill us with Your love and compassion so that we may extend grace to others just as You have extended it to us. Give us the courage to seek healing in broken relationships and to promote unity in our communities. As we reflect on the coming of our Lord Jesus, may His example inspire us to live out the ministry of reconciliation You've entrusted to us. Let our lives be a testimony of Your transformative power, bringing hope to a world in need of peace. We place our hope in You, confident that You are able to restore and unite what has been divided. Use us, Lord, as instruments of Your peace. In the reconciling name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

DECEMBER 18TH

HOPE

THAT ANCHORS THE SOUL

"We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain." (Hebrews 6:19 ESV)

This life is filled with storms that violently toss us to and fro and can shake us to our core. These storms may come as health issues, financial hardships, relationship struggles, or even spiritual doubts. During these turbulent times, we might feel like we're floating at the mercy of the ocean we're in, tossed by the waves of uncertainty and fear, desperately seeking something stable to hold onto.

The author of Hebrews offers us an anchoring comfort: "We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain." This hope is not wishful thinking or a fleeting feeling, it is a secure and reliable anchor for our souls. But what is this hope? It is the unchanging promise of God, fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The "inner place behind the curtain" refers to the Holy of Holies in the temple, the most sacred space where God's presence dwelled. In the Old Testament under the old covenant, only the high priest could enter this place, and only once a year. But through Jesus' sacrifice, the curtain has been torn open, granting us direct access to God. Our hope is anchored not in earthly things but in the very presence of God Himself.

We often anchor our hope in unstable things: careers, relationships, finances, or personal achievements. While these may provide temporary security, they are susceptible to change and failure at any moment. When life's storms hit, these anchors lose their hold, leaving us vulnerable and fearful.

But anchoring our hope in Christ provides unwavering stability. God's promises are sure because they are rooted in His unchanging character. He is faithful, trustworthy, and sovereign over all circumstances. This doesn't mean we won't face storms, but it assures us that we won't be overcome by them. Our souls are securely held by the One who has conquered sin and death.

As we think about Christ's coming this Advent, we remember that His birth is the fulfillment of God's promise, a tangible expression of His commitment to us. Emmanuel, "God with us," signifies that we are not alone in the storms we face. He is present with us, providing peace in the chaos and hope amidst despair.

Let us anchor our souls in the steadfast hope of Christ. When we feel overwhelmed, we can trust that He holds us firm. His presence is our refuge, His promises our assurance, and His love our comfort.

Reflect: *What "anchors" do you rely on in times of trouble? How can you refocus on Jesus as your ultimate anchor?*

Pray: Heavenly Father, we thank You for the sure and steadfast hope we have in Jesus Christ. In the midst of life's storms, help us to anchor our souls in Him, trusting in Your unchanging promises. Forgive us for the times we've placed our hope in things that cannot sustain us. Strengthen our faith to hold onto You when we feel adrift. Remind us that Jesus has entered into Your presence on our behalf, granting us access to You. Fill us with peace, knowing that we are securely held by Your grace. As we reflect on the coming of Jesus this Advent season, deepen our understanding of what it means to have our hope anchored in Him. Use us to bring comfort to others who are facing storms, pointing them to the hope that does not fail. We pray this in the steadfast name of Jesus, our Anchor and our Hope. Amen.

HOPE

FOR A NEW CREATION

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'

And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'" (Revelation 21:1-5 ESV)

In the midst of life's hardships and the brokenness we experience on what seems to be a daily basis, it's natural to yearn and long for a place where suffering is absent, where justice prevails, and where peace is everlasting. The world, as we know it, is scared by pain, sorrow, and death. Natural disasters, illnesses, wars, and personal tragedies remind us that things are not as they should be. Our hearts long for restoration and the fulfillment of all that is good.

In Revelation 21:1-5, the Apostle John shares a breathtaking vision of the future, a new heaven and a new earth. The old order of things has passed away, and God is bringing about a complete renewal of creation. This passage paints a picture of hope that completely transcends our perception of reality. It's a promise that God is actively working to redeem and restore all things.

The "holy city, new Jerusalem," symbolizes the perfected community of God's people, beautifully prepared like a bride for her husband. This imagery conveys intimacy, joy,

and the fulfillment of God's covenant relationship with humanity. The loud voice from the throne declares God's desire: to dwell among His people. "He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."

One of the most comforting things from this vision is the promise that God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Imagine a world where there is no more death, mourning, crying, or pain. The former things, the sorrows and struggles of our day, will have passed away. This is not just the absence of suffering, it is also the presence of complete joy and peace in the presence of God.

God Himself declares, "Behold, I am making all things new." This is a powerful assurance that the brokenness we experience is not permanent. God's redemptive plan culminates in a renewed creation where His perfect will is complete. The words are emphasized as "trustworthy and true," reinforcing that we can have absolute confidence in this hope.

We may feel weighed down by personal trials or overwhelmed by the state of the world. However, this passage invites us to lift our eyes beyond the present and fix our hope on God's promised future. This hope is not an escape but a source of strength and perseverance. Knowing that God will ultimately obliterate all evil and suffering empowers us to endure hardships and to work towards justice and healing in the here and now.

As we continue through this Advent season, we remember that Jesus' first coming was the establishment of this redemptive plan. His birth, life, death, and resurrection set in motion the defeat of sin and death. We now live in the "already but not yet," awaiting the fulfillment of God's promises. Our hope is anchored in the certainty that He who began a good work will carry it on to completion.

Let us hold fast to this hope for a new creation. It reminds us that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us. God's ultimate victory assures us that pain and sorrow will not have the final word.

Reflect: *What part of the promise of a new heaven and earth brings you the most comfort? How does it impact your daily life?*

Pray: Almighty God, we thank You for the glorious promise of a new heaven and a new earth. In a world filled with pain, sorrow, and uncertainty, we find comfort in Your

assurance that You are making all things new. Help us to fix our eyes on this hope, allowing it to strengthen us in our daily struggles. We long for the day when You will wipe away every tear and death will be no more. Until then, empower us by Your Spirit to carry Your love, mercy, and justice to the world around us. Let the hope of Your coming kingdom inspire us to live faithfully and to share this hope with others. As we reflect on the Advent of Jesus, may we be filled with joy and anticipation for the fulfillment of all Your promises. We trust in Your faithfulness and rest in the certainty that Your words are trustworthy and true. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Coming King, we pray. Amen.

DECEMBER 20TH

HOPE

IN THE RESURRECTION

"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." (1 Corinthians 15:20-22 ESV)

The reality of death is one of the hardest challenges we face in life. It brings grief, fear, and a sense of finality that can overshadow our feeling of being alive. Throughout history, humanity has grappled with the certainty of death, often viewing it as the ultimate defeat. In a world where the fragility of life is all around us, we need a hope that extends beyond mortality.

In 1 Corinthians 15:20-22, the Apostle Paul gives a triumphant statement: "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." The term "firstfruits" refers to the first portion of a harvest, indicating that more is to come. Christ's resurrection is not an isolated event, it is the guarantee of a future resurrection for all who belong to Him.

Paul then goes on to contrast the actions of two men: Adam and Christ. Through Adam's disobedience, sin entered the world, and with sin came death, a universal reality for all humanity. "For as by a man came death..." However, through Christ's obedience and His victory over death, the resurrection becomes a reality for us. "By a man has come also the resurrection of the dead."

This passage assures us that "as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." Our union with Christ means that His resurrection is a foretaste of what awaits us in Glory. Death no longer has the final say, it has been swallowed up in victory. This transforms our understanding

and completely shifts our perspective of life and death, providing a hope that endures beyond the grave.

For us today, in the here and now, where the fear of death can be intensified by global pandemics, natural disasters, terminal illness, and personal loss, this is the message of hope we need. The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith, a historical event that validates all of His teachings and promises. Because He lives, we have the assurance that we too will live, even if we die physically.

This hope impacts how we live today. It frees us from the paralyzing fear of death and empowers us to live boldly and purposefully for God's glory. It comforts us in our grief, knowing that death is not the end for those who are in Christ. It also motivates us to share this hope with others who are searching for answers in a world filled with uncertainty.

This Advent season we celebrate not only the birth of Jesus but also the entirety of His redemptive work, including His death and resurrection. His humble entrance into the world set in motion the plan that would ultimately defeat sin and death. Advent invites us to look back on His first coming and forward to His return when the fullness of resurrection life will be realized.

Let us hold firmly to this hope in the resurrection. It is a hope that stabilizes our souls, sustains us in trials, and assures us of eternal life with our Savior.

Reflect: *How does Jesus' resurrection change the way you view death and eternal life?*

Pray: Heavenly Father, we thank You for the incredible hope we have in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In a world overshadowed by the reality of death, we are grateful that death has been defeated through Your Son. Help us to grasp the significance of this truth and to let it work its way into every aspect of our lives. Strengthen our faith so that we may live without fear, confident in the victory that Christ has secured for us. Comfort us when we face loss, reminding us that in Christ, death is not the end but the doorway to eternal life. Empower us to share this hope with others who are searching for meaning and assurance. As we continue through this Advent season, deepen our appreciation for the gift of Jesus, His birth, His sacrifice, and His resurrection. May our lives be a testament to the living hope we

have in Him. In the victorious name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

DECEMBER 21ST

HOPE

FOR THE OPPRESSED

*"The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble."
(Psalm 9:9 ESV)*

Living in a world where injustice and oppression seem pervasive, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of suffering. News outlets report daily on human rights violations, systemic inequalities, and the dilemma of the marginalized. Whether it's individuals facing personal hardships or entire communities struggling under the weight of injustice, the cry of the oppressed echoes loudly in our time.

Psalm 9:9 brings hope and assurance: "The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble." A stronghold is a place of refuge and protection, a safe haven where one can find security within danger. This verse reminds us that God is not distant or indifferent to the suffering of the oppressed. He is actively present, providing shelter and strength to those in need.

The biblical narrative consistently portrays God as a defender of the vulnerable. He hears the cries of the afflicted, sees the injustices done against them, and promises to act on their behalf. Throughout Scripture, we see His heart for widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor, those who were most vulnerable in society. Jesus Himself embodied this compassion, reaching out to the most vulnerable and offering himself to them, offering them true and everlasting hope.

Today, oppression takes many forms: poverty, discrimination, abuse, exploitation, and more. It's important to recognize that God's concern extends to all who are burdened by such injustices. Our hope lies in the truth that He not only sees and cares but is also committed to bringing justice and restoration.

As followers of Christ, we are called to reflect God's heart for the oppressed. Proverbs 31:8-9 urges us to "speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves... defend the rights of the poor and needy." This involves both prayer and action, interceding on behalf of those who suffer and taking tangible steps to help relieve their burdens.

The scale of oppression in the world can make our efforts seem insignificant. However, we must remember that God sovereignly uses our seemingly small acts of obedience and uses them to accomplish His purposes. Our hope is anchored in His sovereignty and His promise to ultimately right every wrong.

As we continue to walk through this Advent season, reflecting on the coming of Jesus, we are reminded that He entered a world wrought with injustice. Born into humble circumstances, He experienced oppression firsthand and ultimately overcame it through His death and resurrection. His life gives us both a model and a mandate to stand with the oppressed.

Let us hold fast to the hope that God is a refuge for the oppressed. He sees, He cares, and He will act on behalf of those in need. And let us be instruments of His peace and justice in a world longing for hope.

Reflect: *Think of those in your community who are oppressed or marginalized. How can you be a source of hope for them?*

Pray: Gracious Father, we come before You overwhelmed by the suffering and injustice that is in our world. Our hearts ache for those who are oppressed, marginalized, and in desperate need of relief. Thank You for being a stronghold and refuge for the oppressed, a safe haven in times of trouble. We trust in Your promise that You see and care deeply for those who suffer. Strengthen our faith to believe that You are at work, even when circumstances seem overwhelming. Empower us by Your Holy Spirit to be advocates for justice, to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, and to extend Your compassion to those in need. As we reflect on the Advent of Jesus, inspire us to follow His example of love and service to the least of these. Use us as instruments of Your grace, bringing hope and healing to a hurting world. We place our hope in You, O Lord, confident that You will act on behalf of the oppressed and that Your justice will ultimately prevail. In the mighty name of Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer, we pray. Amen.

DECEMBER 22ND

HOPE

IN GOD'S PROVISION

"And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19 ESV)

In times of financial strain, it's natural to feel anxious and uncertain about the future. The pressures of bills, debts, and unmet needs can build, leading us to question how we will make it through. The world often tells us to rely on our own strength and resources, but this just leaves us feeling depleted.

Philippians 4:19 offers us an incredible promise in the midst of this: "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." This statement comes from the Apostle Paul, who himself experienced seasons of both abundance and need. Writing from prison, Paul understood hardship firsthand, yet he confidently trusted in God's provision.

It's important to note that this promise is rooted in God's character and His "riches in glory in Christ Jesus." God's resources are limitless, and His generosity flows from His immense love for us. He knows our needs intimately, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual, and is faithful to provide for us in His perfect timing and way.

This doesn't mean that God will fulfill every want or desire we have. Instead, He promises to meet our genuine needs, often in ways that surpass our understanding. Sometimes His provision comes through unexpected means or teaches us reliance and contentment in Him rather than in material possessions.

For us today this often looks like financial strain and can be made even worse by economic uncertainties, job instability, or unexpected expenses. The pressure to maintain a certain standard of living can intensify our worries. However, this verse

invites us to shift our focus from our limitations to God's abundant provision.

Trusting in God's promise requires faith and a willingness to release control. It involves seeking His kingdom first, knowing that He will take care of our needs. It also encourages us to be generous with what we have, recognizing that we are stewards of His blessings meant to be shared with others.

As we continue to reflect on Christ's coming, we're reminded of the greatest provision God has given us: His Son, Jesus Christ. The birth of Jesus is the ultimate demonstration of God's love and commitment to meet our deepest need, the need for salvation and reconciliation with Him. In providing His Son, God has already met our most significant need and we can trust Him with the rest.

Let us hold onto this hope in God's provision, finding peace in His promise to supply our needs. May this assurance free us from anxiety and empower us to live generously and gratefully.

Reflect: *Where in your life do you need God's provision? Pray and trust that He will meet your needs.*

Pray: Gracious Father, we thank You for the promise that You will supply every need of ours according to Your riches in glory in Christ Jesus. In times when we face scarcity or financial hardship, help us to trust in Your faithful provision. Forgive us for the times we've doubted or tried to rely solely on our own strength. Teach us to seek Your kingdom first and to rest in the assurance that You know our needs better than we do. Open our eyes to recognize the ways You provide for us each day, and cultivate in us hearts of gratitude and contentment. As we reflect on the Advent of Jesus, may we be reminded of the greatest gift You've given us. Let His presence in our lives be the source of our hope and the foundation of our trust in Your provision. Empower us to be generous with what we have, sharing Your blessings with those in need and reflecting Your love to the world around us. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Provider and Sustainer. Amen.

DECEMBER 23RD

HOPE

FOR UNITY

"Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (Ephesians 4:3-6 ESV)

In a world increasingly obsessed with division, the longing for unity calls out from deep within us. We witness deep fractures in our societies, families, and even within the church. Political polarization, social tensions, and cultural conflicts can make us feel isolated and can make us lose heart. The pervasive "us versus them" mentality threatens to erode the very foundation of true communal living that we so desperately need.

The Apostle Paul, writing to believers in Ephesus, urges them to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." This call is not merely about peaceful coexistence or cohabitation, but about an active pursuit of unity grounded in the Holy Spirit. Paul emphasizes the oneness that defines our faith: "There is one body and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." This repetition of "one" emphasizes the importance of the interconnectedness we need and we share as followers of Christ.

Our unity is rooted in the "one hope" we have been called to, the hope found in Jesus Christ. This hope destroys all earthly divisions, whether cultural, racial, political, or socioeconomic. It is a unifying force that binds us together in common purpose and keeps our eyes focused on Christ's eternal glory. Despite our differences, we are part of one body, serving one Lord.

Maintaining this unity requires the mercy of the Spirit of Jesus alive within us. The bonds of peace are strained by misunderstandings, prejudices, and the tendency to

prioritize our personal agendas over others. Social media and constant connectivity can amplify divisions rather than bridge them, creating self-gratifying soapboxes that reinforce our biases.

Yet, the Holy Spirit empowers us to overcome these barriers. The "unity of the Spirit" is not something we manufacture, it is a gift we are called to steward. By surrendering to the Spirit's work in our hearts, we can cultivate humility, patience, and love, the very qualities Paul mentions earlier in Ephesians 4:2. These virtues enable us to bear with one another and to prioritize unity over personal preference.

This Advent season, as we reflect on the coming of Jesus, we remember that He is the Prince of Peace. His mission was one of reconciliation, bringing together God and humanity, as well as uniting people from all walks of life. Jesus prayed fervently for our unity, saying, "That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you" (John 17:21).

Our hope for unity is not based on human effort, but on the transformative power of the Gospel. As we embrace our identity in Christ, we become messengers and carriers of this reconciliation, showcasing to the world the unifying love of God. Our unity serves as a powerful testimony to the reality of Jesus and His work in us.

Let us, therefore, be eager to maintain this unity, allowing the Holy Spirit to bind us together in peace. In doing so, we become beacons of hope in a fractured world, pointing others to the one true source of unity and peace.

Reflect: *In what relationships do you need God's help to bring unity? How might He be calling you to pursue peace?*

Pray: Heavenly Father, we acknowledge the divisions that exist in our world and even within our own hearts. Forgive us for the times we have contributed to disunity through our actions, words, or indifference. We thank You for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who binds us together in the bond of peace. Help us to be eager in maintaining the unity of the Spirit. Cultivate in us humility, gentleness, and patience. Teach us to bear with one another in love, celebrating our differences while holding firmly to the one hope we share in Christ. As we reflect on the Advent of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, may His example inspire us to pursue unity relentlessly. Let our lives be a testimony of Your reconciling love. Use us as instruments of peace in our

families, communities, and churches. Unite us, Lord, under one faith and one baptism, serving one God and Father of all. May our unity glorify You and draw others to the hope we have in Jesus. In His precious name, we pray. Amen.

DECEMBER 24TH

HOPE

THAT GIVES PERSEVERANCE

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV)

Life is often compared to a race, an exhausting race filled with challenges, obstacles, and moments that test our endurance. At times, the path may seem steep and the finish line distant. We may feel weighed down by struggles, doubts, or the persistent pressures of a world that often seems at odds with our faith. In these moments, where do we find the strength to persevere?

Hebrews 12:1-2 offers us a powerful and enduring source of hope. The passage begins by reminding us that we are "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses." This cloud refers to the faithful men and women mentioned in Hebrews 11, heroes of the faith who have gone before us, exemplifying trust in God amid trials. Their lives testify to God's faithfulness and serve as encouragement that we are not alone in our sojourning.

The author urges us to "lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely." Just as a runner sheds unnecessary burdens to run more efficiently, we are called to discard anything that hinders our spiritual progress. This includes not only sinful behaviors but also distractions and attitudes that get in the way of our relationship with God.

We are encouraged to "run with endurance the race that is set before us." Endurance

implies persistent effort over the long haul, not just short bursts of energy. The race is not a sprint but a marathon requiring steadfast commitment. Each of us has a unique course laid out by God, filled with both joys and challenges providentially designed to grow our faith and give Him glory.

The key to our perseverance lies in "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith." Jesus is both the originator and completer of our walk with Him. He is our ultimate example, having endured the cross and its shame for the joy set before Him. His eyes were fixed on the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan, and His victory assures us of our own.

By fixing our eyes on Jesus, we draw strength from His presence and example. He understands our struggles and intercedes on our behalf at the right hand of God. Our hope is anchored in His triumph over sin and death, empowering us to press on despite difficulties.

For us today distractions are everywhere we look, technology, busyness, societal pressures, all crying out for our attention. The challenges we encounter and the suffering we face can suck our motivation right out of us. Yet, when we focus on Jesus, our perspective shifts. We are reminded of the greater purpose behind our journey and the eternal joy that awaits us.

As we near the celebration of this Advent season, we reflect on Jesus' first coming and anticipate His return. His birth was the embodiment of hope entering the world, a light shining in darkness. This hope inspires us to persevere, knowing that our labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Let us take heart from the great cloud of witnesses, learn from their faith, and be encouraged that others have successfully navigated the race before us. By shedding our burdens and keeping our eyes on Jesus, we find the endurance to continue and the hope that sustains us.

Reflect: *What challenges are you facing that require perseverance? How does focusing on Jesus help you stay the course?*

Pray: Gracious Father, we thank You for the great men and women of faith who have gone before us and who inspire us through their faithfulness. We confess that we often become entangled by sins and distractions that hinder our progress. Help us to

lay aside these weights and to run with endurance the race You have set before us. Fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. May His example and presence empower us to persevere through challenges. Remind us that He endured the cross for the joy set before Him and now sits at Your right hand, interceding for us. As we conclude this Advent season, deepen our hope and strengthen us to live faithfully. Let our lives reflect the light of Christ to those around us, inspiring others to find their hope in Him. We pray this in the steadfast name of Jesus, our source of hope and strength. Amen.

DECEMBER 25TH

HOPE

FULFILLED IN CHRIST'S BIRTH

"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. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.*' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!'" (Luke 2:10-14 ESV)

The culmination of our Advent reflection arrives with the glorious announcement of Jesus' birth, the hope of the world realized in a humble manger. On that night in Bethlehem, the veil between heaven and earth was pulled back as an angel appeared to shepherds tending their flocks. These ordinary men were the first to hear the extraordinary news: "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."

This proclamation wasn't just for the shepherds or even for Israel alone, it was a message for all humanity. The long-awaited Messiah, the Savior, had been born. The angel identified Him with three significant titles: "Savior," "Christ," and "Lord." As Savior, He came to rescue us from sin and death. As Christ the Messiah, He fulfilled the prophecies and promises of God. As Lord, He holds authority over all creation.

The sign given to the shepherds was striking in its simplicity: a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. The King of kings didn't arrive with earthly power or fanfare but in the most unassuming of circumstances. This humble entrance signifies God's approachability and His desire to make Himself known to us intimately. He came not to dwell in palaces but to live among His people, to

experience our struggles, and ultimately to redeem us.

Suddenly, the sky was filled with a multitude of angels praising God and declaring, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" This heavenly chorus underscores the significance of Jesus' birth. It was a cosmic event that brought glory to God and offered peace to humanity, a peace that transcends understanding and reconciles us to the Father.

The birth of Jesus is the fulfillment of hope, the realization and actualization of God's promises and the embodiment of His love. Emmanuel, "God with us," signifies that God didn't remain distant but entered into our world to bring salvation. This good news of great joy continues to resonate today, offering hope to the weary, light to those in darkness, and life to all who believe.

Today, as we celebrate Christmas, take time to reflect on the profound mystery and majesty of Christ's birth. The hope we've been anticipating throughout this Advent season is found in Him. He is the answer to our deepest longings and the source of eternal joy.

May the reality of Emmanuel, God's presence dwelling among us, fill our hearts with wonder and gratitude. Let us carry this good news to others, sharing the hope and joy of Jesus with a world in need.

Reflect: *What does the birth of Jesus mean to you personally? How can you carry this hope into the coming year?*

Pray: Heavenly Father, we thank You for the indescribable gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Today, we celebrate the fulfillment of hope, the moment when You stepped into our world to bring salvation. We stand in awe of the humility and love displayed in Jesus' birth. Thank You for the good news of great joy that is for all people. May this reality take root deep within our hearts, allowing it to transform our hearts and lives. May the peace proclaimed by the angels fill us and overflow to those around us. As we reflect on the significance of Christ's birth, make us lovingly bold to share this hope with others. Empower us by Your Holy Spirit to be messengers of Your love, grace, and truth. We give You all glory and honor, joining with the heavenly host in praising Your holy name. Thank You for dwelling among us and for the promise of Your continual presence. In the precious name of Jesus, our Savior and Lord, we pray.

Amen.