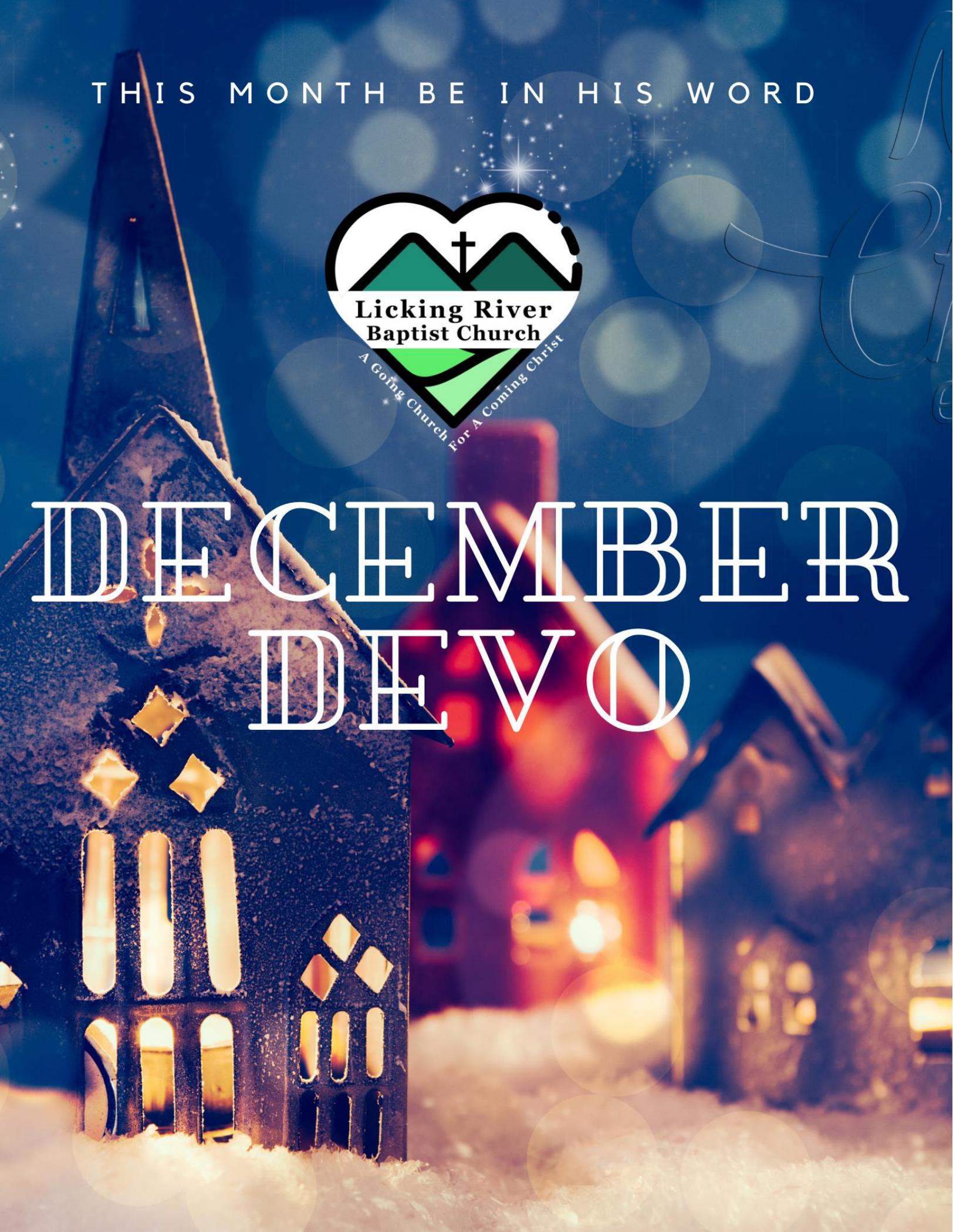


THIS MONTH BE IN HIS WORD



DECEMBER DEVO



December 1st

Psalm 147:7-11 ESV

- 7** *Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;
make melody to our God on the lyre!*
- 8** *He covers the heavens with clouds;
he prepares rain for the earth;
he makes grass grow on the hills.*
- 9** *He gives to the beasts their food,
and to the young ravens that cry.*
- 10** *His delight is not in the strength of the horse,
nor his pleasure in the legs of a man,*
- 11** *but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,
in those who hope in his steadfast love.*

How was your Thanksgiving? Do you remember anything special? What were you thankful for? Thankfulness is a word that is thrown around a lot this time of year. As we begin to look at hope, look at verse 11. In this scripture, the Hebrew word for fear is yare, which translates to standing in awe. Basically, God smiles when we are amazed by his relentless love, when we put our hope in His goodness. Hope is important. It helps us through the tough times of life. What are your hopes and dreams? How can a focus on God help you to get there?

Pray together as a family that as you start this study you will see hope in this time. With COVID-19 we all feel a little hopeless but with God there is always hope.

Frank Laubach, founder of the World Literacy Crusade, desired to live every moment in tune with God. In the winter of 1930, he began an experiment where he dedicated one second of every minute to turning his mind to Christ. "I feel simply carried along each hour, doing my part in a plan which is far beyond myself," he wrote. Laubach later became a statesman, and despite having no political appointment, he was influential in foreign policy in the years following World War II.

December 2nd

Psalm 121: 5-8

- 5** *The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade on your right hand.*
- 6** *The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.*
- 7** *The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.*
- 8** *The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore.*

If life has taught us anything, it is that we are often overwhelmed by things. Whether it is tests, classes, work - you name it. Several things have come into our lives to fight for attention for it. If there is one



solace, it is that God is our keeper. Christ is our source of hope. A wise person once said, "Pain is real, but so is hope." The Bible says faith, hope and love will last forever. When we hold onto hope, we maintain a perspective on things. Hope is a gateway, where, on one side we stand with waiting, and on the other is God, ready to embrace us.

Pray today that God might reveal to you His source of strength.

Talk together about hope. Is there anything that your family is struggling with and needs hope to get through?

December 3rd

Job 17:15

15 where then is my hope?

Who will see my hope?

Job is a fascinating account because it shows us two things: God allows us to be tested, but God is in control of the parameters of the test. So, to say that, God will never allow us to be tested beyond what we can handle without His strength seeing us through it. That can be hard to reconcile sometime because we feel alone in our struggles. However, I can assure you that God didn't leave you alone. Look at job. Within a time span of 12 hours, Job discovered that 10,000 animals from his livestock, most of his servants, and ten of his beloved children had died. Job had the hardest day of his life. Still, he kept faith in God's goodness. Keeping faith in God's goodness doesn't mean you can't have doubts or ask questions. Job certainly did. He was sad, he asked God, why was I born? If there is hope to be found it is that God is always in control. He isn't surprised by anything. If you are going through a hardship today, know that it is still within the limits that God has set for it. He is still in control.

Pray today that God can help you to understand his Limits. Know that there is hope in God's hand in all things.

December 4th

Psalm 130:5-6

5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,

and in his word I hope;

6 my soul waits for the Lord

more than watchmen for the morning,

more than watchmen for the morning.

Have you ever had to wait for something for a really long time? When I was about 10 or 11, I remember ordering something "online" (The Internet was nothing of what it is now). You go through checkout and you would be notified your item will ship in 7-10 weeks. Now we read that today and think that is



horrible. If Amazon does not get it to us in 2 days we are upset. What about having to wait for something else. It makes us go crazy. The longer we have to wait, the more uncertain we become. If God promised something and we have to wait for it, we become uncertain. We often do not know our own thoughts, nor our mind, but God is never uncertain. Sometimes we might fear that God's plans are against us. But this isn't the case. When God first called me into ministry in 2009 he told me I was going to pastor. Fast forward to 2017 when God called my wife and I to step away from a full time youth pastorate. We didn't understand but God promised us a church. Three years my wife and I waited, praying desperately that we didn't make a mistake. Until Licking River called us as pastor back in March, answering a three-year promise from God. Sometimes God makes us wait, but it is not because He wants to torture us. He wants us to be ready in His timing.

Pray today that God will reveal His timing to you and your family.

December 5th

Psalm 33:20-22

20 Our soul waits for the Lord;
he is our help and our shield.

21 For our heart is glad in him,
because we trust in his holy name.

22 Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us,
even as we hope in you.

We love reading inspirational success stories don't we? Take the KFC Colonel, Charles Spurgeon, and Beethoven for instance. Each of these men overcame great odds to be successful. We can find hope in the word of God. We can also find it in the example of those who endure suffering, yet hold onto truth and righteousness. "Without the word of God, we can't go on," says Olga. She lives with her 72-year-old husband in Cajamarca, Peru. Each morning she wakes, lights the fire, cooks and then starts work in the fields, trying to tease crops from tired soil. For Olga and her husband, time is running out. A lifetime of hard work has left her husband ill, weakened, and frustrated. In her old age, Olga fears losing the battle to support herself. So, when she speaks of needing God to sustain her, she means it. Olga worries about being alone. Sometimes she asks God, when will you take me? But she is not giving up, and her faith remains strong and defiant. Despite these difficulties, she is a woman characterized by hope. Jesus calls his followers to have the same disposition. All our actions should give glory to God.

Pray today that God would show you that persevering hope that splits through all adversity. There are many in the world today that are oppressed. Pray for them and that they may experience freedom that only comes from God.

Hope does not bring us to a shameful end, but brings us to a glorious end. Hope includes testing and uncertainty. The person who endures and overcomes their trials does so because of hope.



Joy.

December 6th

Psalm 16: 8-11

*8 I have set the Lord always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.*

*9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.*

*10 For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.*

*11 You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

What makes you happy? Is it new video games? New clothes? New things often make us happy for a while right? I remember when I was a kid and we finally got the brand new Nintendo system with super Mario Brothers. Man those graphics were mind blowing back then. Understand we upgraded from Pong. And it was awesome for a while. Eventually you could only step on goomba's so much before it got boring. Then you have to buy a new game right? What about that brand new outfit, how long until it loses its sheen. We think in terms of worldly things but God has a desire to establish joy at the foundation of following him. The strength that comes from the joy of a restored relationship with our heavenly Father is unlike any other strength we can find in ourselves. The joy of the Lord is unceasing, unwavering, and powerful. God wants to be your strength today. He wants to be the source of your Joy. Have you made him that source? Because unlike the newest video game, His joy doesn't cease. It is never ending.

Pray today that your mind might be reset on the Kingdom today. If you have never made a profession of faith before, understand that joy comes from the Lord, for He is the maker of all things.

December 7th

Zephaniah 3:17

*17 The Lord your God is in your midst,
a mighty one who will save;
he will rejoice over you with gladness;
he will quiet you by his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing.*

Have you ever had something bad happen to you? Like have you ever been having a great day and suddenly all of that is taken from you and you are stuck in the worst day ever? When I was 17 I was a driving fool but my parents thought that they could take my car away from me when they felt like it (I know right). Well one time I was grounded from my car so while my parents were at work, I found my keys and took my car. I picked up some friends and we all went to taco bell. It felt great. The freedom of



the road, the rebellion. I was on top of the world... until we went to leave. I could not find my keys anywhere. I walked out to my car to find it running, but not just running locked and running. I had locked my keys in my car with it running. Well guess who had to eat crow and call his dad to unlock his car? This guy. It went from being the best day ever to the worst day ever. Luckily God has us we are in His midst. He is present with us. He is a mighty one who will save. We can have joy because He can and will save us. In fact, in your sorrow you can have joy that He allowed Christ to die on the cross for your sins. You can have joy because your God rejoices over you. You are not a failure in His eyes. He loves who you are. He is wholeheartedly glad you are His. You can have joy because your God will shepherd you to the still waters.

Pray today that you will soon find those still waters and enjoy the presence of God today.

December 8th

John 10:7-10

7 So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Has anyone ever been able to steal your joy? Maybe a bully or someone who was not in your corner during an argument. It can be hard sometimes to not allow others to steal your joy. Christ came so that we can have joy. By the grace of God, we have a beautiful inheritance of an eternal and tangible relationship with our heavenly Father. Heavenly joy is an essential element to the Christian life. Joy isn't something we are created to live without. But so often we try hard to ignore our need for joy in our lives. Christmas is one of the most joyful times of the year. I remember it fondly because it seemed like the one time of year where my family got along the best. In his book *In Our Joy*, John Piper writes, "But when God gives the radical change of new birth and repentance, Jesus himself becomes our supreme treasure." Choose the better part of today spending time encountering the fullness of joy that can only be found in the presence of God. Allow God to bring a radical change of new birth and repentance that positions Christ as your supreme treasure.

Pray today that you do not allow anyone to steal your joy. Instead, let God fill you up with it and share it with others during this Christmas season.

December 9th

James 1: 2-4

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Ever wanted to do something only to discover that you were unable to? Maybe it was go to the store to get the newest game only to discover it was closed. Maybe it was to ride your bike only to discover the tire was flat. James writes about us going through trials in life. He said count it all as joy. The Greek word



here means to have an overwhelming abundance of happiness. Think about the happiest you have ever been. Maybe you got a new puppy, maybe you scored the highest on a test you have ever scored, maybe you just woke up to a blanket of white outside. Yay - snow day! James tells us that we should have that joy when we face trials. Now we think that is impossible. There is no way that we can be that happy in adversity. But, truth is, God is the source of our happiness, not our circumstances. If we can apply this to our lives and the way we act, others around us will begin to notice. I had a friend who served in the military and over time his peers began to notice that he would never swear or cuss. Finally, they confronted him about it. What a powerful testimony to talk to his fellow soldiers on why he was different. When we respond to trials, not with anger, but patience and calm, people will notice. Pray today that you can be a difference maker. Pray that God would take away your anxiety and give you calm.

December 10th

Galatians 5: 22-24

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Our relationship with God is what empowers us to live a lifestyle of consistent joy. It is only by the filling of the Spirit that we have access to the deep reservoirs of joy found in the heart of our heavenly Father. When you read the fruits of the spirit we can be confused because these seem to just be fruits of good people. That's because we have made being good in the same league as being holy. Truth is without the spirit of God we can never produce any of these authentically by ourselves. We can produce cheap imitations, but without God they will never be as pure and strong as He intended them to be. We are not designed to have joy in ourselves. Rather, joy comes by the dwelling of the Holy Spirit within us. As the disciples began to be filled with the Holy Spirit, their lives changed dramatically. They went from fearful, fair-weathered followers of Jesus to joy-filled, sacrificial, and empowered world changers. They had joy in the midst of some rough situations because they had the Holy Spirit filling them with the fruits of his Spirit.

Pray today that God will allow you to be filled with His spirit. Pray that it allows you to see past people's imperfections and focus on the quality that they were created by God.

December 11th

Proverbs 25:2-5

- 2 It is the glory of God to conceal things,
but the glory of kings is to search things out.*
- 3 As the heavens for height, and the earth for depth,
so the heart of kings is unsearchable.*
- 4 Take away the dross from the silver,
and the smith has material for a vessel;*
- 5 take away the wicked from the presence of the king,*



and his throne will be established in righteousness.

When I was young, one thing my mom always would get on to me for was snacking before dinner. Well that would always work for about five seconds before I would be into the chips and other snacks. If I am honest, I fall into this as an adult too. Well, as you sat eating dinner, not able to eat it because of the 500 tortilla chips you just inhaled, you hear those dreaded words - I told you so. We don't like to hear those words, do we? This Psalm shows us wisdom so that we can avoid those "I told you so" moments with joy. God has already laid the foundation of our joy. Sometimes we are just not looking in the right places. We just celebrated meeting our Operation Christmas Child goal as a church. While one of the moms was shopping with her daughter, her daughter was so excited to be picking out shoebox things and began a conversation with an older gentleman who was curious what she was doing. Awed, that man appeared at checkout and paid for the shoe box things, telling her that it was always better to give to others. What a powerful illustration. It does feel good to give to others. But so often we look at things that we want to make us happy. Maybe today your focus just needs to be adjusted a little. Pray today that God would show you the joy that can be found in helping others. Maybe it's helping your neighbor pick up trash or grabbing a case of water for an older lady at the store. Pray that God will open your eyes to opportunities to show our community the love of Christ that flows through us.

December 12th

Isaiah 55:12-13

*12 "For you shall go out in joy
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall break forth into singing,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall make a name for the Lord,
an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."*

There is a lot about joy that we experience, but, as we learned yesterday, God uses us to point people to the source of joy in others sometimes. As disciples of Jesus, we are to carry the joy of our salvation everywhere we go. You and I have the power to change others on earth with the joy of the Spirit. We have the power to brighten people's days, break off their burdens, and lead people to a deeper understanding of the goodness of our Lord when we reflect his joy to others. It has taken me a long time to learn, and an even longer time to realize the truth that my circumstances, people, trials, work, and worldly stress do not have the ability to steal my joy. It is when I open my heart to outside influences that I allow stresses to come in like robbers and take what is rightfully mine in the Lord. Think about it this way - you would not let the people you dislike steal your Xbox without a fight? Why would you let them ruin your day? There is an old saying - "Sticks and stones can break my bones but words can never hurt me". The person who said that must never have had a bully. But there is some truth to it. If we do not let others steal our joy, we do not give them power over us.



Pray today for the strength to be the joy to others. Pray that God would show you the strength you have in Him to overcome those who would steal your joy.



Peace.

December 13th

Psalm 23:1-3

1 *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

2 *He makes me lie down in green pastures.*

He leads me beside still waters.

3 *He restores my soul.*

*He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.*

Have you ever had a busy day? Before COVID we used to pack our days full, didn't we. We would have soccer practice on Saturday morning, only to rush to a football game that afternoon. We would schedule our day in 30 minute increments. Have you ever been running late? Your adrenaline kicks in and you try your hardest to get where you are going as fast as you can. When I was in college there used to be this very small coy pond in the middle of the quad. I was the type of kid who, if a paper was due at 11pm, I was still working on it at 10:59, but it would be turned in by 11. I had some innate super ability to always manage to finish. I was a big procrastinator. And even into my adult life I schedule things days in advance to give me time to be a procrastinator. If I have to do something by Wednesday, I tell myself it has to be done by Monday, which adds more stress into my life. So, about my junior year of college I discovered this pond, and it was small I had walked by it for years without noticing it. I found that I could spend hours here just in silence. When it was late and I would be working on homework and be stuck, it would not have been uncommon to find me here at 2 or 3 in the morning because it calmed me and forced me to remember God's plan and purpose. He is our shepherd. He provides all our needs. We have a lot of wants, but He does provide for us. What has always been hard for me is the "I shall not want". I find myself wanting a lot. But it always just adds more stress that wasn't needed. How can I afford a new car? How can I afford a bass boat? If I buy a bass boat, I have to buy a truck to pull it. It always adds up and means more. However, when we purposefully seek to conquer our stress, Biblical principles and truth, we begin to experience peace that is steady, and that endures long days and stormy nights.

Pray today that God will just allow you to lie still for just a little while and see the green pastures. I know in times of COVID online school it can be hard to see positives. But pray today that God will allow you to see one positive and let that restore your joy and peace.

December 14th

Psalm 118: 5-9

5 *Out of my distress I called on the Lord;
the Lord answered me and set me free.*

6 *The Lord is on my side; I will not fear.
What can man do to me?*

7 *The Lord is on my side as my helper;
I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.*



*8 It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to trust in man.*

*9 It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to trust in princes.*

Have you ever stayed up really late and watched infomercials? I have never been so convinced in my life that I need a knife that cuts a pineapple in midair, but after watching those commercials we feel like our lives are not complete without them. Life can offer us several things that claim to cause peace in our lives. In reality, most of them add stress into our lives trying to keep up. Some of the most common stressors are overuse of technology, over-commitment, work, school, social media, seeking approval, rejection, the fear of not having enough, minor conflict, failing to please, failing to control, deadlines, health issues, politics, news events, financial issues, wanting more, chronic multitasking - the list can go on and on. The question is, why do we allow these stressors to take root in our lives? We have to first identify what stresses us in life before we can start to block them. Fortunately, God is more powerful than all stressors and past experiences. His presence and wisdom are with you and will provide perfect direction as you navigate this path.

Pray today that God will allow you to see what it is that makes you stressed in life. Once you understand what stresses you, pray that God will allow you to work through giving you lasting peace with His understanding.

December 15th

Luke 10:38-42

38 Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." 41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, 42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Have you ever had company over and experienced that "speed clean"? My family was notorious for it. If we knew that company was coming over, we would quickly speed clean. Meaning it was my job to clean my room and vacuum the floors. Here is the problem: when I was younger, I was easily distracted. While picking my toys up I would find a toy that I have been missing and well, you can't just pick that toy up, it needs to be played with, haven't you seen Toy Story? So often speed cleaning ended with speed groundings for Clay. Sometimes we stress the little things. We try to present the image that we have our lives together when, in reality, we don't. Like when you clean your room but really you just throw everything in your closet hoping that your parents don't open that door. Martha was frantically cleaning and rushing around trying to make the house presentable to Jesus. However, Jesus didn't even care. She was angry that her sister wasn't helping her and just sitting with Jesus while Martha cleaned and Jesus said to her you are all worked up for the wrong thing. Jesus wanted Martha not to worry about the state of her house, but that state of her temple. We are the living temples of God. God wants us to make sure



we have a relationship with Him. Great news is, the temple comes with its own cleaner. We don't have to make ourselves clean, the Holy Spirit does that.

Pray today that our focus can be on what truly matters. Not keeping up with the Jones's but keeping up our temple.

December 16th

Matthew 6:25-34

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Trusting God is not natural to us. We want to always fix things. There is a show that is before your time called The Andy Griffith Show. In the show Andy's aunt buys a ton of cheap meat and stores it in her freezer that breaks down. She refuses to call a repair man and keeps trying to fix it and even has a car mechanic try to fix it. In the end Andy breaks down and challenges her "call the man". Sometimes we cannot fix our anxieties because we focus so heavily on them. We must remember that God is in Control and will take care of our anxieties. Christ shares that burden with us. We are to cast our anxieties on Him. If we seek after Him we will discover that our anxieties are often of our own creation. We put stress on ourselves to be perfect. But through Christ, we are made perfect in God's eyes.

December 17th

Matthew 11: 28-30

28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Have you ever been so tired that you could literally fall asleep right where you are? Maybe it was after a sleepover, maybe after a hard day of work. In Matthew 11:28 Jesus said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." That always sounded very appealing. I was weary and burdened, but what did Jesus mean? What is God's rest and how could I get there? Would it last? We can experience God's rest when we understand where it comes from. God's rest is a place where we



experience the reality that we are firmly in His hands and content in His presence. What happened yesterday or what may happen tomorrow does not change the outcome. God's rest is a peace that cannot be taken from us by circumstances. It can be challenged but never taken away. Pray today that you can experience God's true peace in your lives, put aside the distractions, put aside the hardships and focus on God and His peace.

December 18th

Proverbs 3:13-18

*13 Blessed is the one who finds wisdom,
and the one who gets understanding,
14 for the gain from her is better than gain from silver
and her profit better than gold.
15 She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare with her.
16 Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honor.
17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her paths are peace.
18 She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her;
those who hold her fast are called blessed.*

Who do you trust to be an adviser? When you want to learn something about a new video game, you look at people reviewing it or even playing it to see if you would like it, right? Have you ever thought that you would like it only to discover that when you played it, it really was not fun? You say, "But so-and-so looked like they were having fun with it!". So who do you trust to provide you peace? I choose to trust the one who is the source of wisdom. God is easy to trust in when you have the knowledge and wisdom of Him, but truthfully that is what makes it hard to trust sometimes. We have been hurt before. We have been let down by people before. That makes it hard to trust sometimes. However, God can never let us down. He has an ultimate plan that includes you and me. Sometimes we just do not understand it. But, in reality, God can never let us down if we follow after Him in His plan. Pray today that God would reveal His plan to you and that you might abide in it. Through that you may understand true peace.

December 19th

Colossians 3:12-17

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in



you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

It's Almost Christmas. I love Christmas because in my family it was the one time a year my family seemed to get along better. However, one thing that Christmas also reminds me of is those who have hurt you. Whatever the severity, unresolved wounds fester. Jesus taught us to put on a spirit of forgiveness because hatred festers in our hearts and ruins relationships in our lives. I know you can right now think of at least one person that you do not like. It is easy for us to find the ones we do not like. Today I want you to see that person, not as a burden, but as a child of God, and if you are harboring any hatred in your heart for that person pray today that God will help you to let it go. In his Ph.D. dissertation entitled *The Healing-Discipleship Ministry of Jesus Christ in Matthew* (ProQuest LLC, 2018) 118 - 143, Kyle Howard Miller laid out how The Beatitudes, found in Matthew 5:1-12, serve as a perfectly sequenced Biblical path to healing. We will focus on this path tomorrow. Experiencing healing and forgiveness is life-changing and brings us into a oneness with God that can establish an indescribable peace within.

Pray today that God would show you a path to healing so that you may experience peace.



Trust.

December 20th

Psalm 22:1-5

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

*2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.*

*3 Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.*

*4 In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.*

*5 To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.*

Have you ever felt like God didn't hear your prayers? If we are honest with ourselves, we have all felt like that. Trust is foundational to experiencing the incredible life God offers us in relationship with him. However here is the problem with our understanding of trust. We think that in order for us to trust someone, they have to prove themselves worthy of our trust. Have you ever had anyone betray your trust and hurt your feelings? Maybe it was an old friend, teacher, parent. It hurts and it is hard for us to trust them. Trust, as we understand it, is a condition of the heart, but God doesn't have to earn our trust. What we have to understand is that He has already done that. God sent his son Jesus Christ to die on the cross so that you and I could have forgiveness. He sacrificed much so that we could have much. We serve a God who is perfectly trustworthy. We serve a God who "so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" God has already given us everything. He has done enough to earn our trust. But no matter how trustworthy God is, we still must make the decision to trust him. And no more important decision could be made. Pray today that God will show you his love for you that you might trust Him. He is not a stranger, He has been by your side since you were born, watching over you. He desires a relationship with you. Pray today that God will show you that.

December 21st

Isaiah 1:18-20

18 "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord:

*though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;*

*though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.*

*19 If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land;*

*20 but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be eaten by the sword;*



for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

We are often told to be obedient throughout our lives, right? Whether it is parents, bosses, government - we are told to be obedient in our lives. So we grow up with a sense of obedience in our lives. We often apply our worldly notions of obedience to our relationship with God. We see the commands of Scripture or feel a prompting from the Spirit and sense a similar tone of command. This causes us to feel unworthy, lowly, and worthless. Martin Luther, the monk who began the protestant reformation in 1517, had the hardest time reconciling the loving God he was reading about with the angry vengeful God he had always heard about. It is hard for us to trust in that God, isn't it? We have to understand that God is just and his justice is not evil. The problem with carrying a worldly notion of obedience into our relationship with God is that no one, no matter how loving, can or will fully care for us the way our heavenly Father does. If we are ever going to experience the wealth of glorious inheritance God has for us, we must learn to trust Him and obey. God cannot lead us to still waters and plentiful pastures if we are unwilling to follow Him. He cannot lead us into the depths of His love if we don't trust in His loving-kindness. He cannot lead us into consistent encounters with Him if we don't trust that He is as near as His word promises. And He cannot satisfy the deep desires of our hearts if we don't trust that His purposes for us will truly satiate our longings.

Pray today that God will show you that He has reason to be trusted. He is not going to ever lead you into chaos without being right by your side to assist you.

December 22nd

Proverbs 3:3-6

3 Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you;

bind them around your neck;

write them on the tablet of your heart.

4 So you will find favor and good success

in the sight of God and man.

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart,

and do not lean on your own understanding.

6 In all your ways acknowledge him,

and he will make straight your paths.

Verse 5 is one of those verses you see printed in giftshops all over. Trust in God and lean not on your own understanding. What on earth does that mean? You may be too young to remember this but there was a song that came out 15 years ago by recording artist Carrie Underwood called "Jesus Take the Wheel". Now honestly, I thought that this song was a lot older than that. I remember hearing this song as a kid and all the jokes that were made about this song. It really is one of those songs that seem absolutely crazy to a non-Christian. However true understanding about ourselves, others, and this life only comes through trust in God. God alone has perspective and truth. God alone has understanding about what matters, who we are, and what will happen. We are to acknowledge Him in all ways, and He will make our path straight. We have to trust God in order to trust Him with our path in life. I remember it wasn't until the start of my senior year of College that I even asked God what He wanted for my life.



Turning to Him after years of my own plan was hard. We need to let God take the wheel of our lives and steer us where He wants us to go.

Pray today that God would steer you in the direction that He wants your life. Pray that He removes the obstacles that are blocking you from trusting in Him completely.

December 23rd

James 4:13-17

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Not a one of us knows what tomorrow holds. We are two days from Christmas. If you have ever looked at a Bible you may have noticed that there are two sections in it. One is called the Old Testament and what is called the New Testament. These separate the people of God before Christ and after Christ. However there is an important detail that we often overlook. After the book of Malachi and the beginning of Matthew, there is 400 years of silence. Imagine this: from the time Shakespeare lived and wrote his works there wasn't any speaking or clear direction or plan. Can you even imagine that? 12 of my lifetimes of no communication from God. No prophets, no hint of God, nothing. They took tomorrow for granted because it would always be full of God's word. However, in those 400 years, people had to trust God. We know they did because we can see the Israelites still worshipping and the Pharisees still leading the people to look forward to a coming Messiah. They were assured that a righteous King would come forth and destroy their enemies and take His throne by force ruling with His chosen nation while holding all other nations in bondage. But we know that He did not stay silent. God's silence showed us that God has an ultimate plan. After 400 years of silence a Savior was born. His name shall be "Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Matthew 1:21. God didn't stay silent, He sent forth a savior to save his creation. This is the reason we have to boast in anything. Our boast should be in Christ. Pray today that God would show you a reason to boast in Him. He is constantly at work in your life. Find a reason to boast today and be thankful as we look forward to Christmas remember that Christ was born to be the savior.

December 24th

John 3:16-17

16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Perhaps one of the most known verses in the Bible, John 3:16 assures us of the fruition of a promise that God gave his people. If you have ever watched a Baseball game pre-COVID you have no doubt seen someone holding this sign up in the audience. Mary and her husband Joseph were traveling to



Bethlehem because Joseph was of the tribe of David and he had to be present for the census. There was a lot of trust placed in God since they were trusting the words of an angel in the birth of this child. We serve a God who abundantly provides for us everything we could ever need. There are so many Scriptures about God's promise of provision. There are so many stories of God breaking through when His people needed him and providing exceedingly. We have a good heavenly Father who longs for His children to experience the peace and joy that comes from trusting in His desire to provide. God would provide through this Child. Abundant peace and security is available for you today if you will trust in your heavenly Father's promise to provide everything you need. He is a God of grace who loves you. You will not want in this life or for all of eternity.

Pray today that we look at tomorrow not only as Christmas but as the beginning of hope for the world. A great sacrifice took a great God to pull off. Pray that God shows you His love for you.

December 25th

Merry Christmas

Luke 2:1-20

The Birth of Jesus Christ

2 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The Shepherds and the Angels

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 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. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

*14 "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"*

15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them



in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

It was always a tradition in my wife's family to begin Christmas with the reading of the Christmas account. It puts the reason for Christmas in perspective. I want you to remember today, whether you ended up getting the brand new PlayStation 5 or Xbox Series X, it really is not the true meaning of Christmas. It is nice to get things but today you have been given the greatest gift of all. You have been given a love that surpasses any understanding. You have been given a Savior who even during your worst tantrum, lie, sin, looked dead at you and said, "I love you". Today represents your pardon from sin through a savior who loved you so much He took on suffering and death so that one day, when we face God, we will be judged righteous through a relationship with Christ.

Pray today if you have never made a profession of faith in Christ, that He would show you just how much He loves you. Pray that you could see that as messy as your life is, He loves you just as you are and He wants a relationship with you.

December 26th

Galatians 2:19-21

19 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

When people think of Christianity they think all it is is a list of rules of what you cannot do. That is not Christianity, that is legalism. Legalism tells a person that they are able to become righteous in themselves by works. If you are muddy, you take a shower and clean yourself. However, God doesn't expect us to be clean before we come to Him, in fact we have a kind of dirt that only He can remove. Many people in history have fallen slave to what is known as the law. The list of don't do's. They find themselves tethered to these lists and feel terrible about themselves when they can't achieve their idea of perfection. Legalism holds you to an unrealistic standard. Christ came so that the law can be fulfilled, but only through Him. That is why the Bible says we are crucified with Him. It is not that we physically die, but that through Christ we are given a new life in Him. This is the ultimate trust for a believer. We trust that through Christ and our faith in Him we are granted grace for our sins, reconciling ourselves to God, so that we may spend eternity with Him.

Pray today that we have that kind of trust in our lives. Pray that all distractions may seem to melt away leaving only trust.



God.

December 27th

Psalm 46:10

10 "Be still, and know that I am God.

I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth!"

Be still. Those words seem foreign to us today. When is the last time that we were just still? We don't live in a still society, we like to go go go go. But this verse wants us to be still, calm, meditate - things we are not used to doing in our lives. But a lot can happen when we follow this advice and stop and be still. First you see things you miss in the hustle and bustle. I can't tell you how many times in my life I have gone past things I wished I would have paid attention to. But sometimes we hustle past God. We run right past Him because we are so focused on other things He quickly gets pushed to the side. Pray today that God would just allow you to slow down and see that He is God and exalt Him in praise today.

December 28th

Jeremiah 29:13-14

13 You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

Have you ever lost something that you know for certain you knew where it was? God longs to be found by us. However, many times we can misplace Him in our lives. Seeking God isn't meant to be a one-time event. We're not meant to run off the fuel of an occasional encounter with our Father's love. It starts with a conscious effort to daily seek after Him. When you seek Him, you will not be met with nothingness. We are met with His Love for us and His affections. The best news we have today is that God is available to us. He's ready and willing to pour out a love so rich, so real, and so powerful that everything changes. He's knocking on the door of our hearts, hoping that we will simply take the time to open up and let Him in. Take time today as we enter into guided prayer to seek a fresh revelation of God's heart. Begin a lifestyle of continually seeking God by giving God all you have right now: yourself.

December 29th

Hebrews 4:11-13

11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13



And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Scripture is one of the best indications we have of God's intense longing to be known by His people. Every time we open up the Bible, we are looking at a miracle. God has revealed Himself to us in a way that is beyond anything we could ask or imagine. Within the pages of Scripture we see countless examples of God's grace, love, presence, power, and unfathomable desire to have a restored relationship with us. It is great to look and see the promises God has for us. Some like to think of the Bible as just an old book, but the reality is each page is still relevant today and living. We can easily take it for granted. Those that have grown up reading the Bible sometimes forget just how powerful that it really is.

Pray today that God will reveal a hunger for His word in your lives. Pray that, as you read, the Holy Spirit may help you understand and apply it to your life.

December 30th

1 Peter 4:10

10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

Have you ever watched sports? I love watching high school football. While you are on the offense you are depending on your line to hold so that you as the quarterback have time to find a way to move the ball down the field. If your line fails, you fail. You rely on your teammates to achieve victory. You rely on the wisdom of the football coach to put together plays that will move the ball down the field. If you want to look at it, God is our coach. God has given us the ability to encourage one another—to literally fill the hearts of fellow believers with courage to pursue fullness of life in the kingdom. He's given us the ability to "stir up one another to love and good works" that we might fill one another with wholehearted devotion to Jesus, both in word and deed. God has chosen to display His power and love, not through perfect carriers, but through us. He's chosen to use we who are common, we who are fragile and easily broken, that others might see His overwhelming grace and unconditional love. While we are imperfect, we can shine Christ's Perfection through us. We can be a source of encouragement to others as well as allow them to be a source of encouragement to us. We live life with a mission of sharing God's love for people. Have you shared that love today?

Pray that God would allow you to identify someone who will encourage and build you up today. Pray also that you would become a source of encouragement for others who may not know the love of Christ in their life.

December 31st

2 Corinthians 5:16-17

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.



Our month has come to an end. But what is great is that while 2020 ends, 2021 begins. So often we look at the new year as a new way to be ourselves. We set resolutions. We start new fads. We begin to try new things. Diets, exercise, body building, homework doing, etc.. There are several things that we try and do, but one thing I want to challenge you is keep reading your Bible. Starting tomorrow you can follow along with us as we read the Bible together daily at Licking River Baptist Church. If you take anything away from this devotional. I want you to know two things: that God loves the mess out of you, and that He wants a relationship with you today. Know that I love you all and God does too. Have a fantastic New Year.

-Clay Herd
Senior Pastor, Licking River Baptist Church.

