

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE VERSE?

“A “life verse” is a powerful, clarifying tool. It can serve as a rallying cry to guide and focus the current season in your life. Carefully chosen after prayerful consideration, a life verse resonates with you in a personal way and serves as a lighthouse that continually guides you back to God’s mission and vision for your life.” – *Simplify page 207.*

It is our prayer that this simple daily practice will help us to engage and experience scripture together. We hope these devotions will be a blessing to you.

Each day, we invite you to read scripture, reflect on it and pray with us as we experience the Hope of God’s word.

Pastor Jerry Webb
Pastor Luke Mitchell

December 1st

By: Jerry Webb

READ: Proverbs 3: 5 – 6

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

REFLECT:

This Christmas season our church will be focused on the theme of HOPE. We are using the famous line from the French Christmas carol “O Holy Night” to center ourselves with this hope. The first verse ends with these words, “A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices. For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.”

If you Google the definition for “HOPE,” you will find the following: “a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.” I find this definition a bit challenging in that hope is described as both expectation and desire. Which is it? Is hope a desire or an expectation? Maybe these two words allow a broader use of the word.

A desire is something I would REALLY LIKE to have happen. Expectation is something I KNOW WILL happen. Do we as Christ followers desire God to come again and fulfill our longing hope? Or, do we expect God to come again and fulfill our hope? Is your thrill of hope this Christmas simply a wishful desire or are you firmly expecting the Risen Savior to bring you His presence, comfort and love?

My life verse is found in Proverbs 3: 5-6. Trust God with all I have and stop trusting myself. Let Him have control

instead of my human reasoning and convoluted thought. I need to lean into His ways and lean away from mine!

My thrill of hope everlasting is for Him to make all of my paths straight and bring me to the home which He has ultimately promised. And, I need to start leaning NOW so that He can give me this direction. Wow, now that's a bit of a paraphrase, but that's how I read Proverbs 3: 5-6.

I love you God! And I give myself to you with all that I am, all that I have, and all that I will ever be!

PRAY: From the words of Charles Wesley

“Come thou long-expected Jesus,
come to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel’s strength and consolation,
HOPE of all the earth thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.”
(Charles Wesley, 1744)

December 2nd

By: Noah Elliott

READ: Matthew 6: 33-34

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough troubles of its own."

REFLECT:

Often we feel as though we are holding onto our daily lives by just our fingertips. We get so caught up in the worries and the "To Do Lists" of our lives, that we miss the very point in our existence: to thrive daily, not just survive daily. The belief that we can live an independent and self-controlled life is an illusion in itself, for, in reality, all things were created in Him. What does it mean that we were created in the image of our Heavenly Father? For one thing, it proves that we are able to live a life free from worry and fear. Jesus, who is the Master of peace, tells us in Matthew 6:33 exactly how to live a life of peace. The more you seek after God, the closer you will get to Him. The closer you get to God, the more His peace will overflow into your life.

Find time to sit in a quiet place and be open with the Lord today. Seek His face and you will find peace. Pray this prayer:

PRAY: Father, I'm sorry for allowing myself to get so caught up in the worries and busyness of life, losing sight of You and Your Kingdom. Will You come into this room and fill me up with the peace of Your presence? Listen for His response.

December 3rd

By: Angela Perdue

READ: Jeremiah 29:11

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

REFLECT:

I often come back to this verse because it comforts me when things are not going well. It calls me to trust that God is in control and working to “prosper” me. I fully believe the truth declared in this verse, but believing it is not enough. I struggle to live out the message by trusting the promise and acting accordingly. I must choose to follow God’s path at every fork in the road and never my own. I must fully embrace and continuously pray, “Your will be done!”

It is so easy for me to question what is happening in the world around me. If I fully trust that God has a plan for me and is working to give me “hope and a future,” then I do not need to waste time questioning. I can know that when I am walking in God’s plan, even when it seems like the harder path, I am on the right path to a prosperous, hope-filled life and a future with Him. I want to be on God’s path, working with God’s plans because it will ultimately bring me to the hope and future that God has promised me. The one that I know will be the very best eternally because it is God’s plan.

PRAY: Father, help me to follow You in all I do.

December 4th

By: Luke Mitchell

READ: 1st Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

REFLECT:

I have believed in God for as long as I can remember. Some of my earliest memories revolve around church functions and activities. My parents and Sunday school teachers taught me the scriptures and what it means to live a Godly life. As a boy, I saw the world in black and white, and I always wanted to do what was right. Yet as I grew older, this became a struggle for me. In my teenage years I began to be aware of repetitive sins in my life. Patterns that I repeated over and over caused a dilemma in my soul. I KNEW right from wrong, yet I was beginning to think some sins would just follow me my whole life.

In middle school, our youth group read the above verse and a light bulb went off in my head. God ALLOWS me to be tempted only with what HE has prepared me to endure. I began to stop thinking about my sin as an insurmountable obstacle. Instead, when I realized I was being tempted, I would thank God for preparing me to overcome this temptation through His strength.

PRAY: Lord, help me to realize when I am being tempted and to trust in You to endure it in a Godly way.

December 5th

By: Terry Hoyle

READ: Isaiah 40: 1-11, 31

“but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

REFLECT:

"Comfort Ye." Every Christmas I hear these words as they begin Handel's oratorio *Messiah*. What a wonderful time to remind us of God's comfort in sending His son to redeem mankind. Isaiah reminds us of our frailty and God's strength and compassion. God loves us "like a shepherd . . . who gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart." (Verse 11).

What a wonderful way to honor Jesus on His birthday by comforting others with a kind word, a hug, a cheerful thought, or a welcoming smile. Let us lead the weary in spirit to Jesus so that they can rest and find relief. As Christians, we must comfort others. Today with racial tension, terrorism, natural disasters, school violence, and international hostility, we all need comfort. Some around us are grieving a loss, lonely, struggling financially, crippled by disease, or hopeless and fearful. Speak a word of hope and cheer, make a phone call, mail a card or a note. Let us be God's voice to those who need His comfort and hope. Our only cost is time.

PRAY: Help us to remember, Lord, that whatever we do for one of our brothers or sisters, we do for You. May we, during the advent season, comfort someone who needs the hope and joy of Jesus Christ. Amen.

December 6th

By: Stanley Barnett

READ: Psalm 23

REFLECT:

I first heard the 23rd Psalm in Sunday school when I was four or five years old. It floored me. I was overwhelmed to learn that I belonged to the Lord, and God would look after me. My parents' divorce was tumultuous, and the psalmist's words were comforting.

As I grew, I continued to take comfort from this psalm, until in 2003, it became even more meaningful. That was a bad year. I was diagnosed with a brain tumor, had surgery for that, and then developed post-surgical meningitis and a blood clot that became a pulmonary embolism. Through all of this, I felt calm, with a supreme confidence that everything would turn out well. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."

After that roller-coaster year, I felt even closer to the 23rd Psalm. Although I had learned it in the supreme poetry of the King James' version, over the years I sought more modern words in *The Message*. Finally I paraphrased it in my own words -- "I belong to the Lord. The Lord cares for me and provides all I need physically and spiritually. He makes me do right. Even in the face of death, I will have no fear. God is with me with all His resources. You taunt my enemies and give me comfort. I am God's forever."

PRAY: Lord, thank You for being my good shepherd.

December 7th

By: Jon Welborn

READ: Romans 8:28

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”

REFLECT:

This verse is above my computer at my office. When I was growing up, my dad was my best friend. I remember riding in his red and white Ford F-150, standing up behind his shoulder. I felt like Leonardo Di Caprio and was “King of the World,” standing there behind his shoulder. We hunted, fished, tossed the ball, and “loafed” together. My dad was supportive; he came to my school events and functions. I don’t recall a single football or baseball game that my dad missed. He was someone I could talk to about anything in my life (even though at that time in my life, I rarely wanted to hear what he had to say .)

I could go on and on about how great my dad was.... My dad was 49 when he died of a sudden and unexpected heart attack on Father’s Day 1999. Loss of a loved one is devastating.

Many have experienced bad things – a bad medical diagnosis, the loss of a job, being an innocent victim to a violent crime....

Romans 8:28 is a promise for each of us that if we love God, all things will work together for our good. It was years before I realized what “good” came from my dad’s death. His death strengthened my relationship with my mother and brother as we supported each other in our time of loss. His death taught me to make the most out of every minute, to be a better man, to respect my own mortality, and to be the best dad I can be today.

PRAY: God, thank you for working in my life in all things. Help me to love and worship You, even when times are hard. I trust that You can redeem even the worst of circumstances.

December 8th

By: Casey Hough

READ: Philippians 4:4-9

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again, Rejoice!”

REFLECT:

When I look at the *Bible*, I always look at the verse in context and am curious about where the writer was and what he was doing at that time. This passage was written by Paul, a man who was sitting in jail. Likely ridiculed by those who had imprisoned him and much like Jesus, he was probably feeling very alone. He was persecuted relentlessly for his belief that Jesus was the Son of God, and he could have been bitter and angry with all that had happened to him. Instead, he was relentless in his joy for sharing the gospel and his BELIEF.

All that we have is God’s – period. I think of all the blessings and gifts I have received in my life, and I’m thankful beyond words. As you are reading this, find things to be thankful for at this very moment. Is it your husband, wife, children, a place to sleep, a church to worship at, a car to drive, water to drink, air conditioning? We all face challenges every day in our walk on this earth. Know that God is with you every step of the way and that our lives are in His hands. Abiding in the joy of the Lord should be the aim of every Christian.

PRAY: Lord, I have so many things to thank You for in life, and I lift those to You now. May Your praise always flow from my words.

December 9th

By: Nicole Slabach

READ: Jeremiah 29:11-13

REFLECT:

We must read past the famous 29:11 because what follows is what's most important.....

As a young child I grew up in a very loving, "normal" household, if there is any such thing. I came from a good Christian family -- Mom, Dad, me and my brother. I went to college, nailed down the job of a lifetime, married my first love at a young age, and proceeded to have three amazing children. My life was what everyone I knew was working hard to achieve, and I thought it was what I wanted. From the outside looking in, I would imagine that my life seemed close to "perfect" to others. Yet, there was so much missing. The foundation that I needed was absent. HE wasn't first. ***"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord.....***

Throughout my life, I have always been in God's word. Whether I am reading the *Bible* or studying through devotions, I am absorbing as much of Him as I can. There has been one constant acknowledgment in my life. GOD IS IN CONTROL! I just needed to learn how to relinquish that control, to give it over, and trust Him. This one passage in Jeremiah marched me through life. God is in the business of mending brokenness. Through this brokenness, I hit rock bottom and finally had to throw away the control I thought I had and allow Him to create a new me. A better me. The me that God intended.

Before I was 34, my world was turned upside down. I was suddenly a single mom, with young children to raise. I doubted everything that I had thought and believed to be true. I no longer wanted to exist. I had become isolated and alone. Suddenly my "perfect" world that people saw as normal was now ugly and abnormal. They didn't know how to love me through it. Looking back I now know, they weren't equipped to do so. I was broken and bruised. People couldn't recognize my pain and my loss. I drifted farther from my faith feeling so alone and betrayed.***"plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."***

God recognized my pain. He used it, but more importantly, I allowed Him to. My prayers were ones of repentance and acceptance.....***"Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you."***

Today I am a mother, wife, "extra mom," and even more solidly grounded in a faith that is unwavering. I am glad I kept these verses in Jeremiah close. I now believe them more than ever before in my life. I am exactly where God intended me to be. ***"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."***

Our lives are never perfect, but they are perfectly orchestrated by God. He uses the pain and the suffering, the mistakes and victories to make us who He wants and needs us to be in order to glorify His name. I am living proof that in the midst of pain, God can do the most useful crafting of our lives. He has used me in many ways over the years, including giving testimony about what I have been through and how my faith has brought me to the other side. He is my rock and my salvation.

PRAY: Father, I seek You with all my heart. Help me to trust in Your plans for my life.

December 10th

By: Kari Mitchell

READ: Hebrews 12:1-2

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

REFLECT:

Whether I’m impassioned, discouraged, or defeated, I’m not alone because the great “cloud of witnesses” of the preceding chapter is filled with people who were in the same boat and are still honored as “faithful.” We can search this crowd watching with joyous anticipation and find a pair of eyes full of love cheering us on and lock our sights on Him, on Jesus.

The writer tells us to let everything else fade away and to drop anything that slows us down. Keep running towards Jesus, focusing on Him alone because our faith begins in Him, and He will bring it to perfect fulfillment. We tend to get distracted by the obstacles around us, the baggage of our past, or the distance ahead, but all of that just inhibits us from finishing the race. It is Jesus who empowers us through the obstacle, releases us from our past, and motivates us to press on to the finish line.

Besides, He knows our struggles and endured them and more with the same power: hope in the joy of conquering it all in the future—the evil, the oppressive government, the pain, the sin, the disbelief and fear, the death, and all sickness of every kind. Not only that, but He is CURRENTLY on the throne!

PRAY: Almighty God, it is my joy to follow You. I cherish that no matter what I face in life, I am not alone. You know my heart, my struggles and my fears. Help me to run this race called life with perseverance as I continually depend on You.

December 11th

By: Darrell Hoots

READ: Matthew 28: 19-20

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

REFLECT:

Have you ever wondered your purpose as a Christian? Ok...so now I've accepted Jesus into my life; I'm working on my relationship with Him. Now what? What's the next step? In these last few verses of Matthew, Jesus gives us instructions. These are His very last words to us before leaving his disciples and ascending into heaven to be with the Father. Jesus commands His disciples to "Go" into all nations and make disciples. Where are some areas that you could go? It doesn't have to be across the world. There is work to be done in our own communities. Making disciples in faith starts with relationships. Jesus hung out with 12 on a day to day basis. He got to know them. He knew their likes, their dislikes, what made each of them special. Then He taught them and showed them the love of the Father. I challenge you to reflect on the words of Jesus. Go out into this world; build relationships with people who need them; show them the love of Jesus. Remember making disciples is about relationships with individuals. There's no quota. We need to remember that the greatest disciple maker had only 12.

PRAY: Jesus, build in my heart a desire to be a disciple maker.

December 12th

By: Lynn Moore

READ: Philippians 2: 3 – 4

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, rather in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of others.”

REFLECT:

Because I grew up having low self-esteem and confidence, I never thought of myself as being egotistical or prideful. As I started getting promoted at work, my confidence in my work abilities grew. There were many times that I thought it was okay to “throw people under the bus” or argue my points to the detriment of others, justifying that it was for the good of the company. That changed as our company went through layoffs, and I was lowered in position. Through this experience, God taught me what pride and humility really are.

I have a *Stormie Omartian* daily prayer/Bible verse on my desk at work, and one day this verse appeared with part of the prayer, “Lord, help me to achieve that great goal of always esteeming others above myself. Show me how to value each relationship and teach me how to demonstrate godly love for every person with whom I come in contact.”

God hates pride. I don’t think I’ve ever thought about God hating anything. But He hates pride. We need to look seriously inside ourselves to uncover anything God hates! See Proverbs 8:13, 16:18, 18:12, and 29:23. (You can google Bible verses about pride and being proud for many,

many more examples.) Satan was thrown out of heaven because of his pride; he thought he was better than God. In one of my favorite books, *Imagine Heaven*, John Burke says, “Lucifer (lightbearer) was created good. He’s not God’s equal opposite, nor the only source of evil. Created by God with a free will, Lucifer’s downfall was his pride....He wanted to be God, and as Ezekiel 28 indicates, this evil angel’s most powerful lie is to persuade us to play god in our little universe (my will be done) instead of allowing God to be in control (God’s will be done).” God hates pride because it is disobedience, and ultimately it separates us from Him. If you ask the Holy Spirit to show you when you are being prideful, you will be surprised at how many little (and big!) things are found. Often it is not obvious on the outside, but you see it from your heart and in your motives.

I’ve realized that God doesn’t really care how much I accomplish at work each day. He cares that I work hard and do my best, as if I’m working for Him. He wants me to care more about being like Jesus to people in Corporate America by showing others kindness, compassion, patience, and self-control. He wants me to be humble and not worry about being promoted, seen, or heard. He wants the only approval I seek to be His. I say this verse every workday in my car before I go into work. I encourage you to try it and see how the Lord enriches your relationship with Him and others.

PRAY: Lord, I repent for the things I have done out of selfishness recently, and I lift those up to You now. Help me to love and value others more and more through Your grace.

December 13th

By: Kathy Chaffin

READ: Matthew 14:28-32

“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.

REFLECT:

For weeks now, I have been diving into the sea of my soul. Actually, I have not had the energy to dive, so I’ve just let go and sunk straight to the bottom.

There, I am able to remember that my life is about much more than me and what I want. Separated from earthly distractions, I renew my commitment to writing and speaking my truth and doing what I can to help the suffering, the seeds of which God planted in my heart in the graveyard of James Baptist Church after my father’s funeral in 2001.

Perhaps most importantly, it is in this spiritual haven that I renew my commitment to put God first or, put another way, “to let go and let God.” As you may have experienced, it’s easy to get distracted by earthly worries and our own desires and dreams and forget that.

When I let my eyes wander from God, which happens more than I want to admit, my connection to Him weakens and I begin to sink. Time after time, He meets me at the bottom – in the stillness of peace that can only come from Him – and lifts me up.

PRAY: Jesus, thank You for calling me out of my comfort zone to follow You. Help me to follow your voice and trust that You have prepared me for all You are calling me to.

December 14th

By: David Gledhil

READ: Micah 6:8

“What, Oh Man, does the Lord require of you? Do Justly, Love Mercy, and Walk Humbly before your God.”

REFLECT:

I was first made aware of this verse listening to a Christian song by Steven Curtis Chapman entitled “The Walk.” I was impressed by the simplicity of Micah 6:8. What a great life guide! I have had it written inside my Franklin Day Planner and various notebooks ever since. Let’s take a moment together to examine what this verse means.

Do Justly. “Do” is the most basic action verb that I know. It is an imperative that requires action. We are not simply to be just and fair as circumstances come our way but get involved and intentionally engage in what is just. Get involved! Serving in something important!

Love Mercy. Mercy is defined as compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm. Mercy is compassion, grace, or charity. These are good things that we should support wherever possible. To love these things and hold them up as ideals is what God expects of us as Christians.

Finally, *walk humbly before your God*. Be not proud! Not just before people but before God who sees our true intentions. Be meek and unassuming and not concerned about our own importance as we move through this life. How different this world would be if we could all follow these simple instructions.

PRAY: Lord, I desire to be one who loves justice, mercy and humility. I repent for the times I have strayed from these descriptions of a Godly life. Mold me into person You are calling me to be.

December 15th

By: Emory Crawford

READ: John 1: 1-5

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

REFLECT: You ever doubted?

Having a “farm-born- and-raised” background, I’d forever been in awe of nature’s magnificent beauty -- of nature’s endless bounty, of nature’s turbulent unpredictability, of the magnitude of nature’s intricacies.

From the first childhood encounters with Sunday school lessons in the late 1930’s, to my youth group, and onto junior college, military flight school, and finally a B.A. in philosophy and religion, I drifted in and out of doubt, ever hungry for answers... chained always to that physical image of Christ programmed into my psyche.

Christ, the man, was my ultimate philosopher. He gave credence to the fullness, the totality of spiritual truths that give humanity harmonious guidelines for interactions. Still, He was simply an awe-inspiring man to me. Watching His truths applied to life by others, I never doubted their credibility. I just couldn’t bring myself to accept Luke’s

version of Christ's introduction to this earthly existence, nor Matthew's recounting of Jesus' departure from earth, or Mark's primer for fledging new Christian communities as having been God come to earth.

That changed on 9/25/2003. While undergoing a lengthy bypass surgery, a defining moment solidified my "belief" during a near death experience. At some point during the deep surgical sleep, there appeared to me a manifestly brilliant, almost indescribable, beautiful, warm, beaoning light. Not even the sun could compare to its brilliance. It was sourced across the horizon of a vast mountain range. A dark, gray, primordial mass lay in the valley between my position and the beckoning light's magnetic source. Much as I wanted to, I just couldn't make it there. Abruptly, I awakened.

The Apostle John taught that the life of Christ is the light for all mankind. Light was the essence of His love, shared on the cross through that excruciating death, which illuminated and called to me before the accumulation of all truths. I've come to know light – thus, Jesus, for the fullness of spiritual truth.

During the recuperative period, I could only conclude and firmly believe that a communication of a spiritual nature had occurred. I could not go because there was something yet for my earthly form to complete. I felt I had to find that missing component of my life and would not be permitted to join that unfathomable, comforting light until I did.

The missing component was faith in something other than myself. Faith was needed to walk through that dark valley to reach the goal of eternal light. Graciously, another opportunity had been given for me to find Faith -- a gift from

the one who had been with and in the most secret inner being of my soul.

I am now a continual work in progress – an internal struggle to shed myself away from that valley to become illuminated with the light of love. My spiritual Christ is leading me into an eternity of Agape to that beckoning light. He came. He lives. He is truth. He is God.

PRAY: Father, help me with my unbelief, with all my doubts. Teach me how to trust and follow Your teachings that I might show the light of Christ to all I encounter.

December 16th

By: Chris Hazlip

READ: Matthew 5:9

*“Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.”*

REFLECT:

Matthew 5:9 gives us Jesus’ own words, delivered as part of his Sermon on the Mount. The verse first resonated with me during a sermon series on the Beatitudes. As the third of four brothers, I often found myself in the middle child role of peacemaker. So it is not surprising that my chosen career for nearly 30 years has been Human Resources. Being a peacemaker is inherent in the role. As Christine and I raise three children – two boys who are nearly the same age and their little sister who is 7 ½ years younger – it has necessitated me being a different type of peacemaker.

Dr. Steven Covey wrote about 7 key habits for effectiveness, and one of those was “*seek first to understand, then to be understood.*” We live in a world where everyone wants to be right: a place where we try to persuade the other side to our own view – often shutting down the conversation if they refuse to see things our way. Were it not for the peacemakers of the world, there would be even more lingering frustrations, failed pursuits, and broken relationships. The peacemaker helps us open our eyes to a view that may be different from our own and, in doing so,

creates the opportunity for understanding, reconciliation, and progress.

My prayer this Advent Season is for us all to be the peacemakers that Jesus asked us to be, or at least be receptive to the peacemakers whom God has placed in our lives. What greater honor can there be than to be known as a “Child of God,” and what greater legacy can we give those whom we love than to be known as a calming force of peace?

PRAY: Lord, show me the areas in my life You have uniquely prepared me to be a peacemaker. Give me the strength, love and compassion to share Your peace with all.

December 17th

By: Carrie Chapple

READ: Zephaniah 3:17

*“The Lord your God is in your midst,
A mighty warrior who saves.
He will rejoice over you with gladness:
He will quiet you with His Love.
He will exult over you with loud singing.”*

REFLECT:

Please just ponder these words for a minute; read them over one more time, allowing them to permeate all your parched, frazzled, frenzied, inadequate places.

Emmanuel: God with us is in our very midst. Do we even slow down enough to recognize His presence? **A mighty one who saves** us from our very selves through the death and resurrection of Jesus. How long has it been since we stopped to thank Him for so great a salvation? **He will rejoice over us with gladness.** Is there any of us who don't find this to be the absolutely greatest news? He loves us and takes delight in us because of who He is. **He will quiet us by His love.** If we will get still enough to allow Him, He will actually calm our fears with His great love. **He will exult over us with joyful songs.** It's a bit overwhelming to consider that the God of the universe actually rejoices over us, His children. The truth is, God is waiting patiently to nourish us, if we but position ourselves to receive His deep, nourishing love.

PRAY:

Father God, in this advent season, please increase our awareness of Your Presence. Help us to realize that You are

rejoicing over us every moment because You love us. Help us during this busy season to get still long enough to be quieted in Your love and by Your love. In all the hustle and bustle, help us to hear Your songs of Love over us. Give us thankful hearts for You are Emmanuel. Amen

December 18th

By: Bruce Thompson

READ: Romans 8:28

“For all things work together for good for those that love God and are called according to His purpose.”

REFLECT: God Converts Tragedy into Blessings

As a small child growing up on a farm in the mountains of North Carolina, I enjoyed all the team sports that most kids loved. And then, at the age of 9 a terrible accident took away my vision in the left eye, leaving me marked for life - handicapped, wearing glasses, unable to play my favorite sports. As bitterness crept in, I would ask the usual questions like "Why me?" or "Couldn't God have prevented that?" The accident left an already shy, self-conscious, timid little boy even more withdrawn and introverted. The whole town seemed to look at me and point: "There's the boy that got hit in the eye."

Genesis 37 tells the story of how Joseph was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. God used this seemingly tragic event to make something incredibly good for Joseph and his family, possibly saving their lives from the famine that had engulfed the land.

I graduated from high school, right in the middle of the Vietnam War and the draft. Many of my classmates left for the war and never returned or didn't return exactly the same. My blindness in one eye wrought a draft status of 4F – “Ineligible for military service.” God altered the course of

my life by using that accident to prevent me from being exposed to the ugliness of that war, a war from which I may not have survived. Psalms 5:11-12 tells us to rejoice, having placed our trust in God, for He blesses us and defends us as with a shield. I thank God and rejoice in Him for this life of abundant blessings, wonderful family, and great friends.

PRAY: Father God, thank You for calling me and loving me. Help me to see the many ways You are showing Your provision and love, even when I am going through difficult seasons of life.

December 19th

By: Mary Ann Hartman

READ: Matthew 7:26

“Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren’t you far more valuable to Him than they are?”

REFLECT:

It was a sunny spring morning in April, 1991. The birds were singing as I was driving my three year old daughter to pre-school. On that day and for many, many days afterwards, I was worried about how I was going to feed, clothe, and shelter my three precious daughters. My husband had died on March 5th. I was scared, lonely, and grieving. My world was in chaos. I remember whispering to myself: Lord, you take care of the birds and I know that you will take care of this little family!

Shortly after uttering those words, I returned home once again to begin to sift through the mountains of paperwork that follows when a loved one dies. I randomly chose to call Yadkin Valley Telephone and change the account into my name. When I explained the reason for my call to the person in the business office, she told me that my husband’s estate would receive a check in the amount of \$1500! Prior to his death and before cell phone use was common, Harry had been a salesman and made most of his long distance calls to customers from our home phone. Since Yadkin Valley Telephone was a co-op, our account received a credit for each long distance phone call that he had made.

Within ten minutes, God had shown me He was watching over me and my children. On that day so many years ago, Matthew 7:26 became my life verse and to this day its promise reminds me that I am valuable to my heavenly Father.

PRAY:

Father God, I praise you for Your goodness. For Your continued provision in my life and for the uncountable blessings You give. Thank You for loving me. Help me to be ever thankful and to place my trust in You.

December 20th

By: Ellen Copley

READ: John 21:17

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him. "Feed my sheep." -

REFLECT: The Heart of the Shepherd

In my own faith story, I find myself relating to Peter. At first, I was zealous and on board - the most well known and active disciple. As times got tough, I began to distance myself from the Lord. In a similar way, I denied Him too. Not unlike Peter, the Lord gave me another chance, and in my own way, I felt Him ask me three times if I loved Him.

The story of Peter is so significant to our understanding of forgiveness and grace. Jesus wanted Peter to see that He knows all things, and that even with that knowledge, He forgives and loves Him unconditionally. Jesus calls us all to do the same things. First, "Pasture My lambs" - a call to provide safety for the small and vulnerable. Second, "Tend My sheep" - a lesson in caring for the pasture and individual well-being. And the third, the one that speaks loudest to me, "Feed My sheep" - a command to share the Holy Word of God with ALL and to nourish those that need it most.

This verse is a calling for life. It is relevant all year but especially relevant in the season of Advent. We are called to repent, to accept His grace, and to go out and feed His sheep.

PRAY:

Thank You Lord, for the opportunities to show You all the ways that we love You, for the sheep that You allow us to nourish and for the thrill of Hope that arrives this season.

December 21st

By: Deb Gustafson

READ: Philippians 4: 4-7

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayers and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

REFLECT:

I find myself revisiting these scripture verses frequently for comfort and guidance. They continue to ground me on a daily basis! Knowing that Paul wrote them while in prison humbles me and helps me put my “problems” in perspective. When life becomes overwhelming, I remind myself to turn my worries into prayers and that God is in control -- NOT me! So, all I have to do is “Let Go” and give it all to HIM! Sounds simple, but it is a daily struggle for me. I had always believed that finding peace meant living an easy, conflict-free life, but through much hard work and meditating on this scripture, I know in my heart that real peace comes only from knowing that God is in control.

PRAY: Jesus, thank You that I can rejoice at all times in Your goodness. Build in me a trust and peace that surpasses all understanding.

December 22nd

By: Carrie Chapple

READ: Psalm 46:10

Be Still and Know that I am God

REFLECT:

On the 17th, I reflected on a favorite verse - what I consider my life verse, and that was Zephaniah 3:17. But following close on the heels of that is this verse from Psalms. It has taken me a long time to learn how to be still. In the foreword of 24/6 by Matthew Sleeth, Eugene Peterson said he reflects on Psalm 46:10 in a new way. I have adopted his practice.

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I AM.

Be still and know that I.

Be still and know that.

Be still and know.

Be still and.

Be still.

Be.

By the time I get through this meditation, I find my soul has quieted down and I feel God's calming presence in my life. If I am not calm, I recite it again until I sense His love and calming presence.

PRAY: Father God, may we know You this season. May we be still and know. Amen.

December 23rd

By: Chad Helton

READ: Philippians 4:6-7

“Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

REFLECT:

All right, I admit that I have always been a “worrier.” It started when I was in High school and got worse as I went off to college, then got married, and had kids and still continues to this day.

I remember my mom telling me that “worrying is just negative creativity, Chad.” She would follow that advice with these verses from the apostle Paul. I quickly learned Paul’s words in Philippians and committed them to memory as a way to handle worry. I know that this time of year causes a lot of stress and worry amongst both followers of Christ and non-followers. In addition, can you imagine the stress and anxiety on Jesus’ parents as they prepared for his birth? I bet they wish they would have had these words from Paul.

I look at these verses as great comfort when Paul tells us not to worry or be anxious about anything. He doesn’t say don’t worry about this or that...he says don’t worry about ANYTHING! Then he gives us an action item....advice on what to do next...PRAY.

He says to talk to God and tell Him what we need instead of just worrying about what we need. The great part that comes next is that when we do this, we will feel so much peace that it can only come from our Heavenly Father....it will be beyond what we can understand, but it will comfort us because we are actually going to the source of all comfort and peace...our Father in Heaven.

So this holiday season when you begin to worry or get stressed out about the next family gathering, what to bring to a party, or what to buy for whom, take Paul's advice.

PRAY:

Lord, it seems there are so many things for me to worry about. Teach me to pray to You with all my worries and anxieties.

Decemebr 24th

By: Luke Mitchell

READ: Galatians 4:4-5

“But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children.”

REFLECT:

“Do you have anything left? Am I too late?” It was Christmas Eve, the second busiest shopping day of the year. This sweet woman approached me just before we were to close the store. “What can I help you find?” I asked. Her face said it all. She did not know. All she knew was she needed something --, anything to put under the tree. “Do you have any deals left?” She asked. In other words, do you have anything of value -- something that is better than what I could get elsewhere? She knew she was late. It was bad timing, walking into Radio Shack the night before Christmas. Perhaps she had just gotten off work and received a pay check. Tonight was her last hope to find something to lift her family’s spirits. She might as well have said: “I’m looking for hope. Do you have it?”

Sometimes it feels like we are too late, that there is no chance we could possibly find what we are looking for. Friends, tonight is the night. Hope is on the way. It is not too late. In fact, the timing is perfect. Tomorrow, God sends His Son Jesus: the greatest gift of all.

PRAYER: God, thank You for sending Your Son to earth. Help me to look to You for my Hope in all things.

December 25th

By: James Ownley

READ: Luke 2:7

“And she brought forth her first born Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

REFLECT: No Room For them at the (Holiday) Inn

It was December 22, 1989, when the Ownley family left that afternoon from South Carolina to be with family in warm Miami, Florida, for Christmas. Our plan was to drive until 9 or 10 that night, spend the night at a hotel and get up the next morning and drive into Miami. As we traveled south on I-95, snowflakes began touching the windshield as the temperature dropped below freezing. Instead of driving out of the snow, it became worse as we began to see cars that had slid off the road. We decided to find a hotel, but at our first exit all were full. Exit after exit “There were no rooms in the inn.” With our 2- year old and 3- month old girls we decided to drive through the night until we arrived at Miami the next morning. It turned out we had driven through the worst snowstorm in history through that SC, GA, FL I-95 corridor. As God provided Joseph’s family the barn and the manger for Jesus, God provided us with hot coffee, mental alertness, and good conversation to carry us safely to our destination.

PRAYER: In this advent season let us be thankful for Emmanuel being with us regardless of the storms that surround us. Amen.

Your Turn

By: _____ (insert name here)

What is your life verse?

FINDING YOUR VERSE:

1. What book, chapter, or story in the Bible has been the most helpful for your faith?
2. Out of that, what verse best captures the way this passage has encouraged you?

REFLECTING ON YOUR VERSE:

- How does Your Verse shape your view of God?
- How has Your Verse helped your faith grow into what it is today? How will it help you continue growing?

-How does Your Verse shape the way you see and interact with the world around you?

-Going forward, what is one thing that you will do differently in light of Your Verse?

WRITE YOUR LIFE VERSE:

1. Choose a verse.
2. Answer one or more of the reflection questions.
3. Use the template on the next page.
(You may use more space)

SHARE YOUR LIFE VERSE:

Post it on social media, email it to your family, friends, and pastors! Live it, and let it guide your life.

