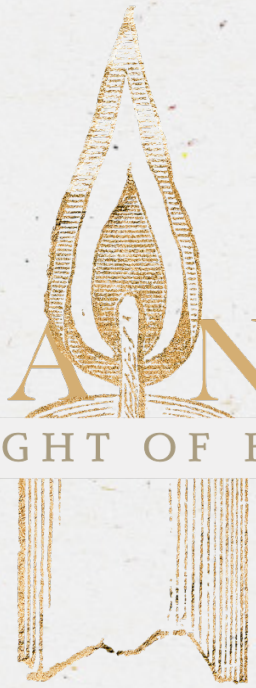
ADVENT 2026



IMMANUEL

LIVING IN LIGHT OF HIS PRESENCE

CROSS POINTE CHURCH



The Advent season centers on the arrival of Jesus into our world—the Son of God leaving the glory of heaven to enter His creation.

We remember the baby boy, lying in a manger and greeted by shepherds and wise men. We rejoice at the gift of this Child, God with us, Immanuel. But the celebration of His arrival only grows when we move beyond the manger and consider the magnificence of Jesus' life in full.

As we celebrate God approaching us as a baby, we need to remember Jesus' lifelong example of approaching others and our call to go and do likewise. In a season that can be filled with busyness, anxiety, grief, and confusion, we are invited to step in when others would step back.

This devotional includes reflections written by members of our Cross Pointe family, each describing a moment in which Jesus engaged with the people around Him. They follow along with our Advent videos to provide another perspective on each day's passage.

Our aim is to appreciate the beauty of Jesus' ministry while also recognizing our opportunity to follow His example in the Christmas season and beyond. As we reflect on Jesus' presence with others, may we all grow to *live in light of His presence*. And through approaching those around us, our prayer is that many would come to experience Jesus personally.

December 1: God left heaven to save us.
Luke 2:25-38

Do you remember that gift? The one you waited for every Christmas, the first on your wish list. For a while, I dreamed of getting a horse for Christmas—somewhat unrealistic for a girl living in suburbia, but that's what Christmas wishes are for, right?

Embedded in the history of our world is a wish for something far more grand—redemption.

Of all people, the Israelites knew this best. The thread of anticipated redemption was woven throughout Israel's history, beginning at the Fall and resurfacing through the voices of prophets and kings.

The dream of redemption took a variety of forms for the people of Israel, someone wrapped in the makings of kings and warriors. Yet regardless of the paper their dream was wrapped in, the box seemed to remain empty, a dream unrealized, a promise not kept.

Like my annual disappointment at the horse-free Christmas, the passing of years without a Messiah left many Israelites fearing that they were waiting for nothing. Still, some remained hopeful. In spite of the long-endured waiting, Simeon and Anna devoted themselves to God, confident that redemption was coming.

Year after year, their list never changed. They were waiting for the Messiah to arrive until finally, Simeon and Anna witnessed what many would one day come to realize—God delivered redemption to the world unexpectedly in the form of a baby.

As Simeon held this baby in his arms and Anna proclaimed His arrival to all who were waiting, they saw their dream realized and God's story of redemption unfold in the most unexpected way imaginable. The God through whom all things were made submitted Himself to human need, pain, and struggle. The God we ignore in our sin, reject in our pride, and dismiss in our busyness did not hesitate to approach us in our deepest needs. He came willingly.

I'm still waiting for my horse to arrive, but we're no longer waiting for redemption from our sins. Jesus left heaven and came near so that through His sacrifice we could draw near to God.

In this season of remembering our God who came to us as a baby, let's remember that as Jesus approached us, we are called to approach the world around us. Let's not get so comfortable where we are that we forget that we are called to be like Christ by approaching those who are far away from Him.

Our God, thank You for approaching us in our greatest need. Allow our eyes to see You clearly as Simeon saw You. Stir our hearts to worship You as Anna worshipped faithfully in the temple. Finally, let our gratitude for You approaching us inspire us to step into the world and share the gift of Your gospel throughout this season. Amen.

Written by Meagan Leikvoll
Children's & Next Steps Director

December 2: Jesus shared the gospel. John 3:1-21

Nicodemus, a Pharisee and respected Jewish leader, came to Jesus at night seeking answers. He recognized that Jesus had come from God because of the signs He performed.

Jesus told Nicodemus that no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. Nicodemus struggled to understand how someone could be born again, so Jesus explained that a person must be born of water and the Spirit. Physical birth is not enough; spiritual life comes through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus revealed the heart of God's plan: *God loved the world so deeply that He gave His one and only Son, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.*

So often we enter the Advent season caught up in the commercial aspect of Christmas giving. Christmas gift-giving has become a staple of December activities, causing us to lose sight of the season's true meaning. And even if we're able to center ourselves on the celebration of Christ's birth, have we fully embraced and understood the significance of a Savior for the world?

Although Jesus walked the earth as a man, His thoughts, actions, and teachings were spiritually based. Even though He lived in the world, His priority was spiritual transformation and growth. He warned us that the things of this world were going to fade away and tarnish, but the Spirit lives on inside those who believe. He advised us to live for eternity, not for temporary worldly happiness. Jesus taught us the way to the truth through our individual repentance and acceptance of Him into our hearts.

Have we been reluctant to share this good news with our family and friends thus far? Are we concerned about what they may think of us? Jesus told us to go out into the world and tell everyone the good news: news that is truly life-changing and eternal. It is the greatest gift you can give someone. Jesus is the greatest gift of life.

Heavenly Father, in this Advent season I ask for Your strength to share my faith with those individuals whose names You've placed on my heart. Help me to live my life as an example of Jesus' influence, to guide others to this greatest gift we can receive, and to meet each person with dignity and respect. Help me to plant the seeds which You will nurture and grow. I ask all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Written by Steve Hurst
Small Group Leader

December 3: Jesus crossed barriers. John 4:1-26

Written between AD 80-90, John's gospel account emphasizes that Jesus is the Son of God. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the author's intent is evangelistic—John desires to bring readers to salvation in Jesus Christ by highlighting His deity (John 20:30-31).

Today's passage is John 4:1-26, which tells the story about Jesus' evangelism to an outcast woman leading to her repentant faith. And from her testimony, many Samaritans believe in Christ as the Messiah! By examining Jesus' character in this remarkable exchange, we see how to fulfill the Great Commission in everyday moments.

On His journey from Judea to Galilee, Jesus takes the one route that passes through Samaria, the epicenter of Israel's northern kingdom until the Assyrian invasion in 722 BC. After this conquest, remnant Israelites intermarried with pagan tribes and lost their distinctly Israelite identity (2 Kings 17:24-41). As a result, Jews held contempt for Samaritans even though many worshipped Yahweh and considered themselves Israelites as descendants of Jacob.

When Jesus arrives in the town of Sychar, He is weary from His journey, so He sits by the well. This encounter takes place around noon when the sun is at its zenith. Although it was customary to draw water at dusk when the day was cooler, as a social outcast, the Samaritan woman likely came hoping to be alone. Yet she encounters Jesus, who asks her for water. The request surprises her because of their opposing ethnicities, her immoral lifestyle, and the appearance of impropriety that Jewish men (especially rabbis like Jesus) faced in conversing with women.

Jesus' reply of providing living water is a beautiful metaphor for eternal life (see also John 7:38 and Jeremiah 2:13; 17:13); however, the woman repeatedly misunderstood the offer as an idiom for spring or fresh water. Only when Jesus mercifully exposes her adulterous relationships does the woman realize He is a prophet. Jesus reveals His initiating and continuing work in redemptive history accompanied by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (John 4:23-24). The woman acknowledges she is waiting for the all-knowing Messiah, and so He affirms, "I who speak to you am He."

Jesus' mercy and grace to the Samaritan woman remind us that God does not show partiality (see also Acts 10:34; Romans 2:9-11), and salvation is for all who believe (Acts 11:17-18; Romans 1:16; Galatians 3:28). One day a multitude from every nation will worship before God's throne (Revelation 7:9)!

Like Jesus, we must take initiative to share the gospel everywhere and in everyday moments without reservation towards any worldly differences such as immorality, ignorance, culture, religion, or politics.

God, thank You for Your love shown through Christ dying for us while we were yet sinners. I confess that I have been reluctant or resentful in sharing the gospel and ask that You would transform me by the power of the Spirit and Your example of sharing the good news with all. Amen.

Written by Kathleen Adams
Small Group Member

December 4: Jesus modeled peace in turmoil. Mark 4:35-41

In these verses, we see Jesus and the disciples in a boat crossing a lake. While they cross to the other side, a bad storm comes up. The boat starts to fill up with water, causing the disciples to panic, thinking they are going to drown. While all this is happening, Jesus is asleep in the back of the boat, and not just sleeping, but sleeping comfortably!

In this moment of a fierce storm, with huge waves almost sinking the boat, we have a picture of two reactions: (1) a group of people on the boat panicking and freaking out, and (2) a person on the boat sleeping peacefully.

If we were in this same situation, which picture would we show? If I am being honest, I used to be much like the picture of the disciples; however, I've learned that in the midst of a "terrible storm" or great panic, as long as Jesus is there with me (and He always is), I have nothing to freak out about. Just as Jesus calmed the storm in the passage, He is able to bring peace to our lives today.

We can experience Jesus' peace when the storms are looking rough by remembering Who is in control in this situation. We can address those storms with the words of God by writing down a comforting verse to carry around or tape to the bathroom mirror, or by simply praying, inviting God into challenging situations. As Jesus approached the disciples in their fears, He is ready to approach us in ours.

During this time of year, when things seem out of control, when our schedules are full and our to-do list never ends, let's remember to keep our eyes on Jesus. He is our peace in the busyness and chaos of life.

And let's invite those around us into that same peace. When we see others fixated on the storms around them, let's direct their attention to the God who calms the storms and is able to provide true peace.

Father God, thank You so much for this day that You've given us. Thank You for being the calm in the storms of our lives! Remind us of all that You've done for us and all You continue to do. Cover us, O God, with Your peace and love during this season. Direct our eyes to You and draw us near to You when we start to drift away. Help us to invite others into Your peace. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

Written by Vicky Davis
Middle School Leader

December 5: Jesus spent time with the lost. Matthew 9:9-13

Christmas celebrates one of the greatest expressions of God's mercy: Jesus entered a sinful world to save people who could never earn His favor. Yet as Christians, how often do we hesitate to enter the lives of those with different beliefs or values?

In Matthew 9, Jesus demonstrates that genuine righteousness requires more than avoiding sin ourselves; it requires extending God's mercy to those who need Him.

Matthew was an unlikely disciple. As a tax collector, he worked in an occupation associated with corruption and service to unpopular rulers. Viewed with contempt or suspicion by his fellow Jews, Matthew was one of the last people anyone would have expected a respected religious teacher to seek out as a student. Nevertheless, Jesus called Matthew to leave his livelihood and follow Him, and Matthew left everything behind (Luke 5:28).

However, Jesus didn't stop there. He shared a meal in Matthew's home with other tax collectors and sinners. For a religious teacher, eating in the home of a tax collector would have provoked criticism. When the Pharisees questioned His conduct, Jesus explained that He was not simply being tolerant or accepting. He wasn't overlooking their sins. Using the analogy of a physician, He explained that He was intentionally seeking the spiritually sick so that He might heal them.

He then rebuked the Pharisees. Pointing out a flaw in their understanding of Scripture, He cited Hosea 6:6, where God rebuked Israel and Judah for continuing religious practices while failing to love Him faithfully and show mercy to others. Similarly, the Pharisees were so concerned with outward religious observance that they neglected the mercy God's Law called them to show.

In this passage, we see Jesus act out the gospel in the life of one unlikely man in a way that mirrors His work in our own lives. We are reminded of how Jesus humbled Himself, came as a baby, and gave His life on our behalf. However, just as Jesus' mercy to Matthew mirrors His mercy to us, His rebuke of the Pharisees may be equally applicable.

Do we ever let our concern for religious respectability keep us from extending that mercy to others? Maybe we hesitate to befriend someone whose lifestyle differs from our own, avoid relationships that might invite criticism from other Christians, or become so comfortable within our Christian communities that we rarely develop meaningful friendships with unbelievers. However, Jesus demonstrates that genuine holiness does not mean avoiding people merely because they are sinners. Instead, it leads us to seek them out and point them to Him.

This Christmas season, we have opportunities to do that. We may have friends, coworkers, or neighbors who are alone and away from God. We can reach out to them, invite them into our homes, share a meal, and build genuine relationships with them.

Lord Jesus, thank You for humbling Yourself and seeking me out. Help me to reach out in love to those who don't know You, so that they too might come to know You. Amen.

Written by Anthony Ellis
High School Leader

December 6: Jesus allowed interruptions. Matthew 9:18-22

It's the beginning of December, and the countdown is on until Christmas Day. The to-do list is a mile long, and you still have to purchase gifts, carry on the family traditions to make the season feel special, serve at the food bank, attend all the kids' activities, and prepare food for the parties. While all this is going on, any interruption can feel extremely inconvenient and cause us to get frustrated or ignore that person inconveniencing us. In Matthew 9:18-22, Jesus shows us a different way to respond.

Jesus was approached by the leader of the synagogue because his daughter had just died. The leader knew that Jesus could bring her back to life again if He would just come to lay His hand on her. Jesus and the disciples agreed and were on their way to urgently visit the girl. As they were walking, they passed a woman who had been suffering for twelve years with constant bleeding. This woman thought, "If I only touch his garment, I will be made well." As she touched the edge of His cloak, Jesus immediately knew what she had done and turned around to speak to her. He could have kept walking and ignored her, but Jesus chose to stop and speak life over her. He said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well," and the woman was healed!

Jesus modeled what can be difficult for us to do: to allow for interruptions. He is never too busy to show compassion to someone who may need it. During Advent, we are reminded that Jesus entered our messy, sinful world because He loved us and we needed Him. Throughout Jesus' ministry, we see Him continuing to draw near to people who need Him.

Following His example may mean changing how we view interruptions each day: using our free time to serve others who may need help, spending our hard-earned money to help a family out, listening to our child while we are trying to finish something, or listening to a friend who is going through a tough time. Sometimes the interruption is an opportunity God placed before us for the purpose of blessing others, showing compassion, and sharing God's love.

This Christmas season, instead of only thinking about what needs to get done, take time to pause and ask Jesus who needs to be noticed today or how you can show compassion to someone who may need it.

God, help me to see people the way You do. Give me the patience to slow down and notice the needs of others. Help me to embrace interruptions as You give me the opportunity to love someone well. Amen.

Written by Kim Broda
Small Group Member

December 7: Jesus cared for the lonely. John 5:1-16

At some point in life, we all experience loneliness. Maybe you were the student who sat alone during lunch. Or maybe you moved to a brand-new city with no family or friends. No matter the scenario, there is good news. We are never truly alone. Deuteronomy 31:8 promises us that God will never leave us or forsake us. As followers of Jesus, we are always cared for.

In John 5:1-16, we see Jesus' care on full display. Jesus traveled to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. He had just been in Galilee, where He healed a young boy from the point of death. His miraculous healing did not stop there. When Jesus came to Jerusalem, He visited a pool called Bethesda. Many people at the pool were sick. They clung to the hope that the pool would make them whole.

One of the people at the pool was a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. The man was unable to walk and unnoticed by the world around him. The man described his circumstances as helpless with no relief in sight. I can imagine that as the years passed, the man felt more and more alone in his suffering. However, the passage tells us that Jesus "saw" and "knew" him. The Savior of the world had this specific man in mind. Jesus intentionally sought him out and gave him healing. Not only did Jesus meet the man's physical needs, but most importantly, He met his spiritual needs.

In the same way that Jesus cared for the man at the pool, He cares for us. This Advent season, there are two ways that we can follow Jesus' example from this passage. First, remember that you are not alone. If this is a time of year that may bring you feelings of desolation, find comfort in knowing that God is near. Second, share God's care with others who may be lonely. Connect with those around you, whether by inviting people into your home or by letting them know that you are praying for them.

The meaning of Immanuel is "God with us." Pause today and dwell on the meaning of Immanuel. Take hope in the fact that the Lord cares for us.

Dear God, thank You for Your constant presence. In times when I feel alone, help me to remember Your promise that You are always with me. Lead me in showing Your love to those who are lonely. Amen.

Written by Ellie Garvin
High School Leader

December 8: Jesus had compassion on the crowds. Matthew 9:35-38

As we near Christmas, we see it as a time of celebration. We surround ourselves with joyful music, family, great food, decorations, and various traditions. It is a time when people seem great on the outside, but there are many who are struggling on the inside. Some are "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

When Jesus looked on the crowd, that is what He saw. People were being healed, and the good news was being preached, so everyone should have seemed happy, but Jesus always sees more than what is on the outside of someone. Jesus had compassion on these people because He knew what nobody else did. They were heartbroken, feeling lost with nobody to guide them home. They had no shepherd.

Not only did they have no shepherd, but there also weren't many people to lead them to the Good Shepherd, Jesus. Jesus conveyed this by saying, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." The harvest Jesus is speaking of is the lost people in this world, and the workers are those who go out and preach the gospel.

Jesus has compassion on those who are lost, and He wants people to go out and gather them to bring them back home. Most of us have compassion on people close to us, people that we love, but what about the people we have never met before? Jesus has compassion toward them and desires to see them become part of the family!

This Christmas, let's make a difference by showing others the compassion that Jesus has for people. Let us not just enjoy Christmas but enjoy loving others as Jesus Himself did. As the time for celebrating Jesus' arrival on Christmas nears, think about the person who has no family to celebrate it with and whether you can give that person something special. Give them the good news and let them know there is a God who loves them and wants to bring them into His family.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the compassion that You showed us when Your grace saved us. As Christmas approaches, we ask You to send workers into the harvest but also give us the courage and ability to help. Guide us to the broken so that we may lead them to the Good Shepherd. Amen.

Written by Jason Story
Small Group Co-Teacher

December 9: Jesus met practical needs. Matthew 14:13-21

It's 8:00 in the evening, and you've just sat down in your favorite chair for a quiet moment with your spouse to catch up on the day and admire your Christmas lights and decorations. Then your elementary-age child comes running in and springs on you that she is supposed to bring "sugar plum" cookies to school tomorrow for "Nutcracker Day." "How inconvenient," you think. "How am I going to accomplish this when I'm so tired?"

In Matthew 14, Jesus and His disciples retreated from the crowds to mourn the death of their friend, John the Baptist. He was looking for some solitary time in prayer with His Father, but a large crowd of people followed Him. How inconvenient. Yet Jesus did not hesitate to show them compassion and healing.

When evening came, His disciples urged Jesus to send the crowd away to find food and provision, for they only had five loaves and two fish—not nearly enough for the crowd. Yet Jesus charged the disciples to feed the people, and the disciples were left thinking, "How are we going to accomplish this?" But Jesus knew He could provide.

He took the food, gave thanks to God, and it was distributed to well over 5,000 people. He took what little His disciples had and turned it into food and leftovers to feed the 5,000. Jesus not only met their spiritual needs, but their physical needs as well. Surely, the people who were healed from sickness went home proclaiming these miracles first, but it was this miracle of practical provision that is mentioned in all four Gospels. The crowd did not come looking for food, but Jesus met that need as well.

So how do you respond to your child's last-minute request? Do you get out of your comfortable spot and gather the ingredients to make the cookies together, or do you tuck her into bed with a retelling of the sugar plum fairy and get the store-bought cookies from the blessed Publix bakery on the way to school? Either way, Jesus has provided you with the example of compassion despite your weariness and the strength to carry on so you can make the "sugar plum" cookies happen.

Father, thank You that You stand willing and ready to meet our needs, both known and unknown, spiritual and practical, in all situations. Help us to be attentive and responsive to the physical needs of those around us. Amen.

Written by Amy Duncan
Small Group Leader

December 10: Jesus redirected focus. Matthew 14:22-33

Have you ever found that all the things that make this "the most wonderful time of the year" can also be the things that make us feel like we're drowning? Shopping lists, Christmas parties, and all the other noise of the season compete for our attention, but Jesus calls us to something better.

In today's passage, the disciples are on a boat in the middle of the night. Jesus had sent them away while He went to the mountain to pray. Unexpectedly, the disciples see a figure approaching. Unsurprisingly, it's Jesus!

While the disciples panic at this unexpected sight of a man walking on water, Peter presses in, saying, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

In the scene that follows, Peter steps out in faith, eyes locked on Jesus. That is, until fear creeps in and distracts Peter. Fight or flight kicks in, and Peter finds himself flailing around and trying to stay afloat. All the while, Jesus stays right there next to Peter, hand extended and ready to pull Peter to safety.

"Why did you doubt?" Jesus asks.

As we sink into the season of busyness, Jesus stands with hand extended, ready to pull us into a better way of celebrating. Jesus did not come to save us so that we'd find ourselves burdened by everything going on around us and overlooking the real meaning of the season. He came so that we could be saved from sin and invited into a better way of living.

In this season, don't settle for sinking. Stand with Jesus in the peace and joy that He has purchased for us. As you see others burdened with busyness, point them to Jesus so that they too can find rest in Him.

Determine today to savor the splendor of a season dedicated to celebrating our Savior.

Lord, we are inclined to distraction, but You invite us to direct our attention to You. Help us to set our eyes on You regardless of what's going on around us. Help us to find peace and joy as we celebrate Your arrival on earth. You alone are our Sustainer. Help us to rest in You. Amen.

Written by Meagan Leikvoll
Children's & Next Steps Director

December 11: Jesus valued faith over works. Luke 10:38-42

The Christmas season has a way of filling our calendars before we even realize it. Between decorating, shopping, gatherings, and traditions, we can become so busy preparing for Christmas that we forget to spend time with the One reason for the season.

In Luke 10:38-42, we meet two sisters, Martha and Mary, who welcomed Jesus into their home. Both loved their friend Jesus, but their responses to His presence looked very different. Martha was busy serving, preparing, and ensuring everything was taken care of. Mary, however, chose to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to His teaching. Frustrated that her sister wasn't helping, Martha asked Jesus to intervene. But His response wasn't what she expected.

"But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.'" (Luke 10:41-42)

Jesus wasn't condemning Martha for serving. Her hospitality was a good thing! But somewhere along the way, her attention had shifted from the One she was serving to the work she was doing. Mary recognized what mattered most: being with Jesus and receiving His Word.

How often do we find ourselves in Martha's shoes? We fill our days with responsibilities, commitments, and even good things like serving in ministry. Yet if we're not careful, we can become so consumed with doing things for Jesus that we neglect time with Jesus.

The truth is, Jesus values our faith more than our works. We cannot earn His love or salvation through our efforts. That's the beauty of the gospel and the reason we celebrate Advent! Jesus came to dwell among us, to save us from our sins, and to make a relationship with God possible through faith in Him.

And while good works are a natural response to genuine faith, they were never intended to replace our relationship with Christ. Our service should be an overflow of our love for Him, rooted in time spent in His Word, prayer, and worship.

Jesus modeled this same intentional presence throughout His earthly ministry. He made time for people, meeting them where they were and pointing them toward the Father. As we grow closer to Him, we learn to reflect that same love and presence to those around us.

This Advent season, remember that Immanuel means "God with us." What a gift that the Savior of the world desires a personal relationship with us! Don't become so busy doing things for Jesus that you miss the opportunity to simply be with Him.

Lord, thank You for coming to dwell among us and making a relationship with You possible through faith. Forgive me when I place more value on what I do for You than on spending time with You. Help me to prioritize Your presence and reflect Your love to those around me. Amen.

Written by Hannah Benson
Communications Director

December 12: Jesus emphasized the importance of one. Luke 15

Luke 15 is a passage of mercy, forgiveness, and joy that tells the story of why Jesus came into the world. He came to save all of us, especially those who seem hopelessly lost.

That is really the message we see in Luke 15. Jesus tells three stories about things that are lost: a sheep, a coin, and a son. In each story, the focus is on the one that is missing. The shepherd has ninety-nine sheep, but he goes looking for the one. The woman has nine coins, but she searches for the one that is lost. The father has two sons, but when one goes away, he continues to watch and wait for his son to return. Each time the lost is found, there is great rejoicing.

In this three-part parable, Jesus is showing us something important about the heart of God: the one matters.

Jesus was surrounded by crowds during His time on earth, but He never seemed to lose sight of the individual. He had mercy on those whom others overlooked. He stopped for people whom others passed by, listened to people whom others had written off, and wasn't just interested in reaching a crowd. He was interested in reaching the one who was lost: the one who had not been saved, the one He would joyfully welcome into His kingdom.

This parable is a challenge to us because it is easy to focus on the big picture of the Christmas season and overlook the one person that God has put right in front of us. Maybe it's a neighbor you haven't talked to in a while, a friend who has drifted away from church, or even someone in your own family who simply needs to know that they are loved by a Savior who is searching for them every day.

At Cross Pointe, a common question that relates back to this parable is this: Who is my one? Who is someone I can intentionally move toward and share the gospel with? Who can I welcome into my home for a meal with the purpose of introducing them to the Word? Who can I invite to church this Christmas season?

Jesus came near to us. He taught us mercy and forgiveness for those who were lost. He showed us that people are worth pursuing, and that no one is too insignificant to notice. And when the lost are found, oh how we should rejoice!

Jesus, help me show mercy to people in the same way that You do. Show me who the "one" is in my life right now so that I can bring them closer to You. Give me the willingness to slow down, open my heart, and share Your love with them. Thank You for the salvation that we are promised through You and the forgiveness that You promise with repentance. Amen.

Written by Chris Conway
Buddy Team Leader

December 13: Jesus engaged the next generation. Matthew 19:13-15

In today's passage, we see Jesus teaching, and some parents have brought their children to Jesus. This action frustrates the disciples, and they rebuke the parents. It's almost like they're saying, "Do you not know who this is? He doesn't have time for this." Jesus, however, opens His arms and says, "Whoa, wait a minute. Don't run them off. Bring them here; the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

Children possess a faith that is so trusting. They aren't jaded by things of this world because they're just getting started. They embody humility, completely dependent on others for survival. In Matthew 18:2-6, Jesus points to a child and says you must become like one of these to enter the kingdom, illustrating the importance of a humble heart.

Children teach us something about what our relationship with God should look like. We should run to God in humility, taking Him at His Word, and resting entirely on Him because we know we can't do anything without Him.

As adults walking alongside the next generation, we need to take advantage of the opportunity we have to invite children into Jesus' presence. We need to show them as clearly as possible who Jesus is and what He has done for us.

How do we engage the next generation and bring them to Jesus? Jesus welcomes children into His presence so that they can know the truth, and we can do the same. I think of the ways that we rush through things because we have so much to do. Especially at Christmas, the to-do list is extra long. In my family, it's not Christmas until the chocolate cookies are baked. Involving my niece and nephew in that tradition has become something I look forward to each year. And in the end, it's not the cookies that matter; it's the quality time we've spent together when no one is distracted by their device or what's on TV. It's the time we get to talk about whatever is on their minds, and I can show them that I'm there to listen.

Maybe for your family, that time is decorating the tree, shopping for someone special, or just sitting together and enjoying a cup of hot chocolate. Maybe this year you start a new tradition. It doesn't have to be Pinterest- or Instagram-worthy. The important thing is letting the little ones in your life know you see them, you care, and you want them involved. Be available, be present. Because if we aren't, the world is.

God, I thank You so much that You saw fit to be born into this world to save a wretch like me. I pray that as we move through this Christmas season and into the New Year, we work to engage the children in our lives in spiritual conversations. Remind us, Lord, that we too were once children in need of support from someone older than us. Teach us to appreciate and pursue a humble faith. Amen.

Written by Megan McDaniel
Middle School Leader

December 14: Jesus condemned self-righteousness. Luke 18:9-14

The Scripture in Luke 18:9-14, Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector, gives us an illustration of an outward faith seen only by the people of this world and an inward faith that reflects an intimate relationship with our Lord and Savior. Sadly, the Pharisee counts himself as righteous by his boastful works and does not humble himself before God; he only cares about what people hear and see of him.

On the other hand, the Tax Collector, who is despised by men, enters into the throne room of the Father and the Son with an inward faith. This sinner bows down in reverence to a holy God, knowing he is not worthy and is in need of a Savior to be forgiven. As the Scriptures say that the humble will be honored, this Tax Collector surely will be honored for his faith.

Jesus responds to these two prayers, rejecting the self-righteous monologue of the Pharisee and commending the humble cry of the Tax Collector. Whereas we are prone to self-promotion, Jesus honors the heart that remembers only God is righteous.

We should live out our daily lives as the Tax Collector is portrayed here. We are all sinners in every walk of life, and we need to rely on the forgiveness of Jesus to transform us into His righteous family. What an awesome assurance and blessing it is to be called a "saint." When Christ dwells in us, we can be the light of the world with a humble spirit, without boasting or bragging among men, and ultimately be a vehicle for God's purpose and plan.

To display Christ clearly, we must reject any notion of self-righteousness. We can't hold up our good works while claiming salvation "in Christ alone." As Jesus rejected the Pharisee's self-righteousness, we need to crush our own self-righteousness. And as we share the gospel with those around us, we need to help them see the folly of faith in good works. Only God is good. Only Jesus saves.

As we celebrate Christmas, let's remember the little baby born in a humble setting, with the Star of Bethlehem above, sent here as the ultimate free gift to all mankind.

Heavenly Father, we are grateful that You loved us first and sent Your Son as an atoning sacrifice for a sinful world. As we reflect upon this Christmas season, may we humble ourselves before You as our holy God and risen Savior. Help us to remember the humility of Your Son, sent to us in the form of a baby. Thank You, Jesus. It's in Your holy name we pray. Amen.

Written by Mark Scott
CarePointe Volunteer

December 15: Jesus wept with the hurting. John 11:1-44

At Christmas, we celebrate Immanuel, "God with us." The aspect of being "with us" is a quality that demonstrates His amazing love and compassion. Rather than simply reigning over us, Jesus came into a world where people experience sickness, loss, and grief. In John 11, we see how personally He enters that pain.

Lazarus had died, and his sisters, Mary and Martha, were heartbroken. When Jesus arrived, Martha told Him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Mary later said the same thing. Jesus listened to them. He saw Mary weeping and the people around her grieving. Then Scripture tells us, "Jesus wept."

Jesus knew He was about to call Lazarus out of the tomb. He knew joy was coming. Yet He did not hurry past the sisters' sorrow. He stood with them in it. Their tears mattered to Him.

That tender moment shows us something about the Savior whose birth we celebrate: He is with us through our sorrows and trials. It also shows us how to care for one another. Especially at Christmas, someone near to us may be missing a loved one, facing illness, or feeling alone while everyone else seems joyful. Sometimes we show up with a casserole, a hug, and absolutely no idea what to say. The casserole may not win any prizes, but the gift of fellowship can mean more than a perfect speech.

We cannot take away someone's pain. However, we can sit with them, listen to their story, pray with them, and remind them they do not have to grieve alone. Romans 12:15 tells us to "weep with those who weep."

The baby in the manger grew up to stand beside a grieving family. Then He called Lazarus from the grave, giving them a glimpse of His power over death. This Advent, let us remember both His compassion and His hope. Because Jesus came near to us, we can come near to someone who is hurting.

Lord Jesus, thank You for seeing our tears and caring about our sorrow. Open our eyes to those who are hurting this Christmas. Help us listen, pray, and love them with the compassion You showed Mary and Martha. In Jesus' precious and powerful name we pray. Amen.

Written by Lynn Brown
Small Group Leader

December 16: Jesus valued sacrifice.
Mark 12:41-44

In this small passage, Jesus and His disciples were at the temple treasury where the offerings were given. When people made offerings, they would drop their coins in these objects shaped like a ram's horn (*shofarot*). Imagine a wide opening that narrowed almost like a funnel. When someone put their coin offerings into this, depending on how much they put, it would make noise. People would clearly hear if someone made a large offering.

While Jesus and His disciples were sitting and watching people put their offerings in, verse 41 says, "Many rich people put in large sums." You can imagine the acoustics that were going on with the amount of coin they were throwing in!

But then this widow, who had two small copper coins, dropped in her offering. There was probably zero noise coming from this gift. It was all she had, and she gave it willingly to God.

Her quiet gift gained little attention compared to the volume of the other offerings, yet Jesus praised her for her sacrifice. He saw the magnitude of what this widow had done.

Jesus pointed out to His disciples the importance of true sacrifice and pointed to the widow as an example of what it looks like. There was a different heart posture and sacrifice behind the widow's giving than that of the other donors of the day.

We are not given any background information on the widow, but we can make a reasonable assumption that by giving those two coins, she likely sacrificed her next meal and any payment for shelter. She gave out of obedience and surrendered her trust to God that He would provide both of those for her.

On the outside, it looked like the rich people were giving more, but their giving came from their excess and from obligation. The widow, though her offering was small in worldly value, gave everything she had.

In a season that honors lights and grand gifts, let's remember that God is not impressed by flashiness. God cares about a heart bent toward sacrificial love. This season is an opportunity to care in ways that go beyond the superficial and make an impact that lasts for eternity.

Father God, I thank You for who You are and for Jesus, who made the ultimate sacrifice on our behalf. Thank You for His example of obedience through sacrifice. I ask that You would examine our hearts and point out the areas where we need to be more obedient and trust in Your Word. I pray that in this season of giving we give out of love and not obligation. Give us the confidence to love others as Jesus did and bring those around us closer to You. Amen.

Written by Stephanie Stapleton
Kidz Leader

December 17: Jesus encouraged worship. Matthew 26:6-16

When I read Matthew 26:6-16, the first image that came to mind was the striking contrast between the woman who poured out an expensive alabaster flask of perfume on Jesus, and Judas, who accepted thirty pieces of silver to betray Him. One response was extravagant. The other was calculated. The woman recognized the worth of Jesus and responded by giving something valuable without hesitation. Judas, however, placed a measured price on Jesus. One poured out; the other counted the cost. That contrast challenges the way I think about worship.

When I consider my own worship, I often find myself turning to God because of a particular situation. I worship when I have a major decision to make or a problem I need Him to solve. I worship when I feel desperate and recognize that He is my only answer. And, of course, I worship alongside other believers in a corporate setting. But this passage challenges me to consider something deeper: Do I worship Jesus because of what I need from Him, or because of who He is?

The woman with the alabaster jar didn't seem concerned with whether her act made sense to anyone else. Her worship was costly, extravagant, and, in the eyes of the disciples, wasteful. Yet Jesus called it "a beautiful thing." She recognized the significance of the moment. Jesus was physically present, and she responded as though this opportunity to honor Him was precious and could not be taken for granted.

That challenges me. How often do I wait for the right circumstances to worship? How often do I need to feel desperate, inspired, or emotionally moved before I give Jesus my wholehearted attention?

Advent reminds us that we are people of anticipation. We celebrate the arrival of Jesus into the world as a baby, while simultaneously looking forward to His return when He will complete His work of redemption. We live between what has already happened and what is still to come. And perhaps that anticipation should change the way we worship.

The woman with the alabaster jar teaches me not to hold back what is valuable when it comes to Jesus. Worship isn't simply something I do when circumstances demand it. It is a response to recognizing who He is.

So this Advent, I want to ask myself: Am I measuring out my worship, or am I pouring it out? Am I giving Jesus whatever is convenient, or am I offering Him my time, attention, resources, obedience, and heart because He is worthy?

Dear Jesus, as we move through this Advent season, teach us to live with anticipation of Your coming. Help us worship You not simply when we need something, but because You are worthy. Give us hearts like the woman with the alabaster jar—willing to pour ourselves out for You without counting the cost. As we celebrate Your first coming, help us eagerly anticipate the day You return and complete Your work of redemption. In Your name. Amen.

Written by Ariel Shin
Small Group Member

December 18: Jesus prayed.
Matthew 26:42

Throughout His time on earth, Jesus modeled a rich prayer life. In the Gospels, Jesus is recorded to have prayed thirty-four times. Prayer wasn't simply something to do before a meal or to provide a confidence boost. It was woven into the fibers of His life.

From moments of solitude to those of preparation, Jesus drew power, comfort, and clarity from God the Father through prayer. Even in His final moments on the cross, Jesus prayed for the people who were actively persecuting Him, praying that the Father would show them forgiveness for their ignorance. Jesus leaves us a beautiful blueprint on how to pray.

Knowing He was walking toward His death the next day, Jesus gathered His closest companions in the Garden of Gethsemane and fell to His knees to petition the Father. He prayed fervently that this cup of wrath would pass from Him but also submitted Himself to the Father's will.

Jesus depicted perfectly how our prayers should be mapped out. We should ask God with reverence, honesty, and humility, accepting God's perfect plan for us. Jesus shows us that prayer doesn't focus entirely on the need or lack that we present to God but moves our eyes and hearts off the world and rightly back onto our Father.

Looking at Jesus' life, we can see how prayer is the fuel that our souls run on. Without prayer, we are running on fumes that will eventually burn out. Jesus' prayers hovered around similar topics: He prayed for Himself that God's will would be done through His life, for His disciples and future believers, before meals, and for seemingly impossible circumstances.

Unfortunately, we often run to prayer when in crisis, but we shouldn't only turn to prayer before scary hospital visits or during life-altering events. We should pray when we brush our hair or while folding laundry. We should give thanks when our car starts or our plane lands safely. We should send up a prayer for that tired mom at the grocery store or the lonely widower next door. We should sing praises to God for the very breath in our lungs and movement in our bodies.

And just as Jesus invited His disciples to pray, we should invite those around us to seek God with us through prayer. Whether praying together over a challenging situation or expressing gratitude, we can model a life of dependence on God.

Like Jesus, let's incorporate prayer and praise in every part of our lives, whether alone in silence or in a full room praying in unity. If prayer was Jesus' lifeline to God, how much more do we need it?

Jesus, teach us to pray like You. Help us find pockets of time to bring our worries and joys to You and to lay them at Your feet. Through prayer, help us to see You clearly. Show us moments each day when we can invite those around us to pray with us. Amen.

Written by Olana Prophete
Small Group Member

December 19: Jesus served others.
John 13:1-17

Like all parents, I've done some pretty dirty jobs in service to my children. I've changed numerous diapers, cleaned floors after attempted potty training, washed load after load of laundry after the dreaded stomach bug, and scraped caked-on mud from soccer cleats. For any parent, these tasks are done out of a deep, unconditional love for their children, willingly stepping into the messiness on their behalf.

Jesus did something remarkably similar on an infinitely greater scale. Just as a parent stoops down to clean up after their child, Jesus willingly knelt before His disciples—knowing all that was ahead of Him—to wash their feet and cleanse them, setting the ultimate example of humble love for us to follow.

In John 13, Jesus was nearing the end of His earthly ministry. He knew Judas Iscariot would soon betray Him and deliver Him over to the chief priests and religious authorities in Jerusalem. While enjoying a meal together, Jesus insisted on washing the disciples' feet. Now, during this time in history, the washing of feet was a task reserved for the lowliest of servants. We might call it the "dirtiest job" someone might do. In the passage, it is apparent that Peter knew just how seemingly inappropriate it was for Jesus—the Messiah the world had been anticipating—to lower Himself to the position of foot washer. When Peter initially protested, Jesus explained that washing was necessary for partaking in fellowship with Him.

Similar to all parents, Jesus "stepped into the messiness" on our behalf. For Peter and for the other disciples, Jesus' act of service provided immediate refreshment and hospitality after walking dusty roads, but more importantly, it represented deep spiritual cleansing and fellowship with Him. Although these were His final days on earth, Jesus displayed the ultimate example of humility and servanthood.

Following Jesus' example from John 13:1-17 involves translating His radical act of humble service into our daily lives and relationships. As believers, we are called to embrace humble service without regard for status, willingly performing unglamorous or unseen tasks to help others in our families, workplaces, and communities. We should recognize that no task is beneath a follower of Christ and that we are called to care for one another's physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Furthermore, we are commanded to humble ourselves in service by extending grace and forgiveness, reflecting the heart of Jesus, who washed the feet of the very disciples who would abandon, deny, and betray Him.

Jesus, thank You for willingly stepping into the messiness of our sin and brokenness to offer us spiritual cleansing and eternal fellowship. Search my heart for areas where pride, a desire for recognition, or a reluctance to perform "unglamorous" tasks hinders me from serving others as You did. Help me to be attentive and responsive to the needs of those around me. Transform my attitude toward everyday, mundane tasks and interactions so that I see them as opportunities to love others deeply. Amen.

Written by Rachel Smith
Preschool Leader

December 20: Jesus pointed to eternity. John 14:1-7

Every single December I find my home filled with the scent of fresh candles while my whole family has the joyful anticipation of greeting loved ones. There is so much work that goes into preparing guest rooms, setting up extra places at the dinner table, and even putting up all the Christmas decorations. Advent is a season of holy preparation, marked by anticipation and reflection, which is a physical reminder that love makes room for others.

In this passage of John 14:1-7, Jesus is speaking during the Last Supper to His disciples, comforting them even though they're afraid that He will imminently depart from them. Even when facing a brutal crucifixion, Jesus offers profound comfort to His disciples saying, "Believe in God; believe also in me." This statement creates such a strong sense of peace in the midst of so much agony. Even though Jesus is faced with the reality of death on the hill of Calvary, His ultimate priority is to minister to the fears of the disciples.

Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples, actually expresses one of the fears of man by asking how they are supposed to know the path of righteousness. Jesus boldly states one of the most comforting verses in all the Bible: He is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one may know God the Father unless they first have a personal relationship with Christ Jesus. This one verse sums up the gospel as a whole. Jesus takes the punishment for our sin so that we may go free and that we may reign with Him in heaven eternally. Not only that, but He has promised to prepare a room for us in the Father's house.

If, by the grace of God, you have a personal relationship with Jesus, you should find your purpose in what He has already done for you on Calvary. Though facing the cross, He does not back down into His own distress. Instead, He actively comforts His fearful disciples and serves as the bridge between humanity and God. He shows us that true selfless love seeks to bring others into a deep, secure relationship with the Father. No matter what we may be facing, we must step into the grieving doubt of others around us with reassurance for what Christ did for us.

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your grace and Your steadfast love even with the brutality of the cross ahead of You. We praise You as the way, the truth, and the life, and thank you for preparing an eternal place in Your Father's home. Please provide us with comfort for our troubled hearts. Help us to embody Your peace as we welcome those around us who are seeking hope into Your family. We thank You and give You all the praise; it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Written by Colton Sumpter
High School Student

December 21: Jesus revealed the story of Scripture. Luke 24:13-35

In Luke 24:13-35, Jesus gives us an excellent example of how to help those who truly want to find peace with God.

After Jesus' crucifixion, many of those who had followed Him were dejected and headed home. They had questions about what had just happened. Two men who had followed Jesus were walking back home, trying to make sense of how the Messiah could have been crucified. Suddenly, a man appeared next to them and asked what was wrong (Spoiler Alert: It was Jesus!). They went on to explain who Jesus was and what happened to Him. They even mentioned the empty tomb, yet they were "looking sad."

These two men knew all of the details. They had all of the answers, but the dots just weren't connecting spiritually. They were so close! So what did Jesus do? Jesus appeared. He listened. Then He helped.

Verse 27 says that Jesus "interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." Jesus explained to these men the whole picture. He didn't just explain the factual evidence of what happened, but why it happened.

There are a few lessons we can learn from Jesus' approach to helping these men.

Jesus sought these men out. None of this happened without Jesus being there with those men. He went out to the people who needed Him. This Christmas season, we need to be looking around us for those who are searching for answers: people checking out at the grocery store, sitting next to you at a Christmas Eve service, or even in your living room on Christmas Day. They may have some questions that God has equipped you to answer.

Jesus listened to them. Jesus had all the answers before the men started talking to Him. But He started by asking them a question, then listening to their answers. He then guided them to the truth by patiently explaining what actually happened. Evangelism is not simply talking long enough until you persuade someone to follow Jesus. Evangelism is a conversation.

Jesus spent time with them. We won't be able to help people understand the gospel if we don't make an effort to be with people.

That's it! Three easy steps: Be there for someone, listen to them, spend time with them as you help them understand who Jesus is. Through these simple steps, we can share the story of Scripture with others this Christmas season.

God, You are so good. Thank You for sending Your Son to be a sacrifice for us. Thank You for making a way for us to get back to You. As we celebrate Christmas, put people in our paths who need You. Please give us the courage to speak with these people and the words to say. You are a great God! It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Written by Taylor Wade
Kidz Leader

December 22: Jesus helped the doubting.
Luke 24:36-49

Have you ever doubted something you knew was true? The disciples did. They were huddled behind locked doors, afraid of the Jewish leaders, talking about the men on the road to Emmaus who claimed to have seen Jesus alive. Then Jesus appeared among them, and they thought He was a ghost!

After three years of watching Jesus work miracles, they still struggled to believe, but Jesus didn't scold them. He met their doubts with patience. He showed them His hands and feet, invited them to touch Him, and ate a piece of fish in front of them. He gave them evidence, and He stayed until they were convinced.

This is the same Jesus who took on flesh at Bethlehem: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). He came close enough to be held by Mary and stayed close to reassure His doubting friends. This Advent, we remember that God did not stay at a distance from our questions. He came near.

Then Jesus went further. He opened the Scriptures and showed that the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms all pointed to His suffering and resurrection. And this time, He "opened their minds" so that they understood. Evidence mattered, but understanding was ultimately a gift from God.

Jesus invites us to support those who are doubting too! We can follow Jesus' example by responding to doubt with patience, not frustration. When a friend or family member raises hard questions about faith, listen first. Don't treat the questions as a threat. Offer truth, not pressure. Share what Scripture says and what you've seen God do, and let people take time with it.

As we engage in these conversations, trust the Holy Spirit with the results. No argument is clear enough and no speaker is charismatic enough to make someone believe. Our job is to be faithful and patient and let the Holy Spirit do the rest. Trusting the Holy Spirit to do His work allows us to be honest about our own doubts too. Even the disciples wrestled. Admitting that makes room for others to be honest.

Lord, I lift up to You those who are doubting. Please give me the opportunity to meet them in their doubts and help point them to You. Help me to be patient and give me wisdom as I walk with them. Remind me to trust Your Spirit to bring new life and understanding. Amen.

Written by Anthony Holevinski
Small Group Leader

December 23: Jesus forgave His friend. John 21:15-19

All of us want to receive forgiveness and restoration. We know that any sin in our lives separates us from God. We were created for fellowship and communion with God.

In our passage for today, we read about Jesus asking Peter if he loved Him—not just once but three times. Why did Jesus ask Peter that question and why three times? For us to understand, we reflect back to Jesus in the garden praying. He was about to be betrayed by Judas. In that passage, we see Peter as a warrior, pulling out his sword and striking the high priest's servant, cutting his ear (John 18:10). Peter had declared he would never deny the Lord (Matthew 26:35). But Jesus had told Peter that he would deny Him—before the rooster crowed. We continue reading in Matthew 26:69-75 how these three denials occurred. Peter had to have been completely crushed. He denied the Lord he had followed for three years. In Matthew 16:17-18, Jesus changed Peter's name from Simon, son of Jonah, to Peter, the rock on which He would build His church. Now Peter, acting in the flesh and afraid for his own life, denied Jesus.

In today's passage, John 21:15-19, Jesus was on the shore of the lake and some of the disciples were fishing. They eventually recognized Jesus was there and had a fire burning, preparing breakfast! When they had finished, Jesus questioned Peter, calling him by his old name. Not only once but three times, a number that was painfully familiar to Peter. Through this questioning and Peter's answering, his three confessions of love for Jesus counteracted his three denials. Jesus was restoring Peter, and indeed, afterward, Peter was the rock and helped spread the gospel.

As we celebrate the Advent season, we remember that Jesus came for all so that we would know and accept Him as our Savior and Lord. And because of His sacrifice of His life and His resurrection, we can be forgiven of all sin, including denial, as Peter was. We daily need to seek forgiveness and also forgive anyone who offends us in any way. And let's not keep count! If we profess to be Christ followers, we pattern our lives after Jesus. That includes forgiveness and receiving restoration.

During this Christmas season, let's search our hearts and ask God to reveal any situation where we need to ask forgiveness or even be the one offering forgiveness for something we may be holding onto. Wouldn't you enjoy this holy season even more with mended relationships?
In closing, let's remember Advent not just as the anticipation of celebrating Jesus' birth, but also as a time of looking forward with wonder and anticipation of His second coming!

Jesus, help us to walk through life remembering the purpose of Your birth. Remind us of Your sacrifice that allows all who accept You as Lord and Savior to spend eternity with You. Help us to pursue restored relationships as You have modeled. Amen.

Written by Carol Abernathy
Small Group Member

December 24: Jesus emphasized living on mission. Matthew 28:16-20

At Christmas, we celebrate that Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He did not stay distant from us. He came near, lived among us, taught us, died for us, and rose again. And before returning to heaven, Jesus made it clear that the good news of what He had done was not meant to remain with just a few people.

In Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus meets with His disciples after His resurrection and gives them what we now call the Great Commission. He tells them to "go and make disciples of all nations," baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything He commanded. This was not simply a suggestion to live good lives and hope that people noticed. Jesus intentionally sent His followers out to tell others about Him and lead them into a life of following Him.

That pattern is seen throughout Jesus' ministry. Jesus constantly moved toward people who needed salvation. He taught crowds, spoke with individuals, ate with sinners, called people to repentance, and invited them to follow Him. He also trained His disciples to do the same. They were not meant to simply receive the truth for themselves; they were being prepared to carry that truth to others.

The same is true for us.

It can be easy to think that sharing the gospel is mainly the responsibility of pastors, missionaries, or people who are especially gifted at evangelism. But the Great Commission was given to all followers of Jesus. If we have received the good news of Christ, then we have also been entrusted with sharing it.

That does not mean every conversation has to become a sermon. It does mean that we should be intentional about looking for opportunities to tell people who Jesus is, what He has done, and why they need Him. We can invite someone to church, share our testimony, explain the gospel to a friend, answer honest questions about faith, or simply begin spiritual conversations with people God has already placed in our lives.

Christmas reminds us that God sent His Son into the world. The Great Commission reminds us that Jesus now sends us into the world with the message of salvation.

And we do not go alone. Jesus ends with this promise: "I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus, thank You for saving me and for allowing me to know the good news of the gospel. Give me the courage to share that good news with others. Help me recognize the people You have placed around me who need to hear about You, and use me to help others come to know and follow You. Amen.

Written by Randy Parker
Small Group Co-Teacher



Merry Christmas! Thank you for following along with these Advent reflections.

As you celebrate the arrival of Jesus with family and friends, continue to remember the life of this child. Jesus never wasted a moment but instead intentionally used His interactions to transform lives.

Every day, we can live in light of God's presence in our lives. With each interaction, we can help others to experience the goodness of our God and the power of His gospel to save.

Even as the Christmas lights come down and the ornaments get stored away, God's presence remains with us and our calling to invite others into His presence stays the same. Let's live each day in light of His presence.

"Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.'"
John 20:21