



PREPARING FOR A SEASON OF

HOPE, PEACE, JOY AND LOVE



INTERNATIONAL
MISSION BOARD

THE SEASON OF HOPE AND JOY IS HERE!

*“And the angel said to them,
‘Fear not, for behold, I bring
you good news of great joy
that will be for all the people.
For unto you is born this day
in the city of David a Savior,
who is Christ the Lord.’”*

LUKE 2:10-11

Our family loves to celebrate the birth of our Savior. We sing Christmas carols, spend time together, decorate the house and attend our Christmas Eve service. On Christmas morning, we read the Christmas story and open presents. Join me this year in remembering

that the greatest present ever is the gift of Jesus.

The greatest problem in the world is lostness. The only solution to this problem is the gospel. Together, Southern Baptists send International Mission Board missionaries to be steadfastly present among people and places where Jesus is not named or known.

The good news of Jesus Christ is truly the one thing that can bring hope, peace, joy and love to the world.

It is a joy for us to provide these Advent devotions to you again this year. I am grateful to Bill Langley and Jamie Work for their hard work and pray this resource will bless you during the Advent season. May this also be a reminder and encour-

agement to each of us to go and share the good news across the street – and around the world.

Terry Sharp
Director, Convention Relations
& Diaspora Mobilization





HOPE, PEACE, LOVE & JOY

WEEK ONE



Pause to Pray

HOPE

Lord, You are the world's HOPE! As we celebrate Your birth and anticipate Your second coming, we thank You for coming to earth as the Savior for all people. We pray for the 7,327 unreached people groups who do not know Your hope, who have not believed in You because they have not heard, and who cannot hear unless someone tells them. We pray our IMB missionaries will have opportunities to share Your everlasting hope with their lost friends and neighbors this advent season. Amen.

HOPE'S FOUNDATION

“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:19

In 1999 my wife and I and our two children were living in southern France. One Saturday, we took a day trip to northern Italy to see the Leaning Tower of Pisa. This tower is one of the most well-known structures in the world, not because of its columns, arches or white marble construction, but because of its legendary tilt. Construction began in 1173. Before the first three levels could be completed, the tower began to shift on its foundation ever so slightly. Gradually leaning further and further over the

centuries, it is now famous (or infamous) for being the most lopsided structure in the world. The word "pisa" comes from the Greek and means "marshy land." You would think the architects would have considered that before they chose the site. The sandy soil on which the city of Pisa was built was not stable enough to support a monument of this size. The tower didn't have a proper foundation.

Foundations are important, not just in building a structure but also in building a life. Foundations are what Jesus referred to in His Sermon on the Mount. He said, "The wise man built his house upon the rock" (Matthew 7:24). The storms of life are certain to beat down upon you, but if your foundation is sure, you will pass the test.

You'll do more than simply survive;
you'll thrive.

Hope is vitally important in our daily lives. We live in a hostile and brutal world. Every week we are inundated with news and events that could easily shatter us, except for one thing — we have hope! We have hope for a better life, a better world and better circumstances. We know the evil around us isn't going to last forever. Ultimately, good is going to triumph over evil. We don't just wish it would be so — we know it will be so! The hope we have is rooted in nothing less than the resurrection of Christ! That's the point the Apostle Paul is making in 1 Corinthians 15.

Everybody needs this kind of hope,

but billions of people all over the world don't have it. On every continent, millions and millions of people are plagued by hopelessness. You and I can change that. We must change that! Through our prayers, our giving, our sending and our going, we can be powerfully used by God to take the good news of the gospel to those who have not yet heard it. Do something today to share the hope you have in Christ with someone else who needs hope.



HOPE FOR SOMETHING BETTER

“We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 THESSALONIANS 1:3

Daniel is one of my favorite books in the Bible. There are so many times when Daniel and his friends displayed unshakable faith and hope. We all hope we would do as well under similar terrifying circumstances. The sixth chapter is a great example that not only demonstrates Daniel's faith in God but also vindicates it. Daniel trusted God in the lions' den, and God honored his faith by protecting

him through the night. But you know what? It doesn't always happen that way, does it? Paul believed in God, and he was martyred for his faith. Peter believed in God, and he was crucified upside down.

Believing in God doesn't mean that the lions will be foiled. History is full of martyrs. They believed in God, but they died. As Christians, we do more than believe in God. We accept His will. If it's to live, then we live. If it is to die, we die. But either way, we're never defeated.

If Daniel had lost his life to the lions, he would have been in the presence of God. He couldn't lose. If he had been torn to shreds, the angel that came would have carried him into the presence of the Lord. The

truth of Paul's words remains firm.
"To live is Christ and to die is gain!"
(Philippians 1:21). We never lose.
Adrian Rogers, a former Southern
Baptist Convention president, used
to say, "Heads, I win. Tails, I win. If it
lands on its side, I still win!"

"Because Your lovingkindness is
better than life, My lips shall praise
You." (Psalm 63:3)



HOPE BRINGS SECURITY

*“Why, my soul, are you
downcast? Why so
disturbed within me? Put
your hope in God...”*

PSALM 42:5

There's a Peanuts cartoon where Peppermint Patty asks Charlie Brown to describe security. Charlie Brown answers by comparing security to sleeping in the back seat of the car as a little kid. As a kid, he tells her, you don't have to worry about anything, your mom and dad are in the front seat, and they do all the worrying. They take care of everything.

A worried look comes over Charlie Brown's face. "But it doesn't last!

Suddenly, you're grown up, and it can never be that way again!"

Charlie Brown came to the realization that you don't get to stay in the back seat forever. You grow up. After a while, you must get in the front seat and make all the decisions because you're an adult. You might have children of your own. In the comic, Charlie Brown feared never feeling secure again.

For many people, security is a fleeting thing. You might find yourself saying, "There was a time in my life when I felt secure, but I don't anymore." There might have been a time when you felt financially secure. However, unforeseen circumstances pulled the rug out from under your savings and retirement.

Or maybe there was a time when you were very active and physically strong. You could not have imagined then that you would ever have any problems with your health. The past few years, however, may have shown you how temporary a healthy body can be. Some people look back and say there was never a time when they doubted their marriage would ever be anything but secure. Then, they learned how painfully fragile a marriage can be. How are you and I ever going to get to the place in our lives where we really feel secure? Will we ever get to the place in life where we don't have anything to worry about? Where can we find hope? It's not as difficult as we may think. According

to Jesus, it's pretty simple. He said, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33). Do what the psalmist said, "Put your hope in God" (Psalm 42:5).



A FUTURE AND A HOPE

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.”

HEBREWS 10:23

There's a great verse in Jeremiah that we all love to quote. It's one of those "coffee mug" verses. We like to use the Bible verse when we're writing a letter of encouragement to somebody who is going through a difficult time. The verse is Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

Do you know what was happening to the Israelites when God used Jeremiah to pen these words? God's people were living in exile in Babylon, and the

encouragement came several years into their captivity. Little did they know they would be there for 70 years. Their homeland was a smoldering heap of ashes. They were carried into captivity as prisoners of war. They lost their houses, their businesses and their farms. They were snatched away from their relatives and families. And, worst of all, to make it all seem so final and so futile — the protective walls around Jerusalem were broken down and the temple of God lay in ruins. It seemed like God himself abandoned them.

Have you ever been to a place where things looked hopeless? Have you ever been at a point in your life where things looked so bad, and there was no way you could imagine they would ever get any better? Maybe that's

where you are right now.

It was at a time like that when God said through His prophet Jeremiah, "I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." That's what we're longing for, and hope is available to everyone who knows Christ. Let's spread that message to the multitudes! Let these days preparing for Christmas be a season of hope.



HOPE AND PERSEVERANCE

“But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”

ROMANS 8:25

My wife and I recently bought a new washer and dryer. After installing them, I ran errands. While I was gone, my wife threw in a load of clothes. When I got home, she had an exasperated look and told me that when the washing machine went into the spin cycle, it sounded like a helicopter was landing in our house! Whatever happened was so violent that the heavy washing machine had worked its way into the middle of the laundry room. I was upset that we had just spent a lot of money on a brand-new appli-

ance, and it didn't even accomplish its maiden voyage!

It's frustrating when things don't work how they're supposed to — especially new things. On a spiritual level, we also get frustrated. More than that, we get disheartened. Far too often, things don't go the way we wish they would. Something happens that pulls the rug out from under us, and we suffer the heartbreak that comes with living in a broken world. We wonder if things will ever get better.

Being a Christian in first-century Rome was no picnic. They weren't worried about household appliances. They were worried about staying alive. To have a king other than Caesar was a crime punishable by death. To these struggling believers, Paul wrote, "Yet

what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay" (Romans 8:18–21).

Hope gives us the ability to endure hardship and persevere in adverse circumstances. That's why hope is indispensable for Christ's followers. He told us that in this world, we would have trouble, but He promised us He has overcome the world. Hope, like so many things, flourishes when we have the right mindset. That's why

the Apostle Paul tells us to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16). Paul also wrote, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things ... and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:8–9).



THE BLESSED HOPE

“...waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

TITUS 2:13

J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings series is truly a masterpiece. I enjoyed all three books, but *The Return of the King* is my favorite. I love a victorious ending. Tolkien's use of biblical imagery is captivating, and a powerful example occurs at the "Battle of Helm's Deep." When it looks like the evil armies of Saruman are going to destroy the army of Rohan, Aragorn remembers the words of Gandalf: "Look to my coming at first light on the third day. At dawn, look to the east." Just as the sun has fully risen,

Gandalf, in blazing glory, arrives riding on a white stallion and leading a massive army. In stunning fashion, the tide turned, and the battle is won!

Those of us who know Christ will witness an even more glorious event. With the aid of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle John looked into the future and wrote, "Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And he who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed him on white horses" (Revelation 19:11-14).

Things around us seem to be spinning out of control. Evil is no longer lurking in the shadows — it's out in the streets in broad daylight. Without hope, we would be undone. However, for the well-studied believer, we know evil will be amped up just before the second coming of Christ.

Andrew Peterson's song, "The Dark Before the Dawn," is an amazing testimony to the power of hope. Every verse is fantastic, but for the sake of brevity, let me share just the third verse.

*So I'm waiting for the King
To come galloping out of the clouds
while the angel armies sing
He's gonna gather His people
in the shadow of His wings
And I'm gonna raise my voice
with the song of the redeemed*

*'Cause all this darkness is a
small and passing thing*

What are you hoping for? A raise? Good health? A strong marriage? Respectful kids? Those are all desirable things, but you can set your sights so much higher than that. Put your hope in Jesus Christ. Long to see the consummation of His kingdom! Look with expectation for the return of the King! Join the Apostle John in praying, "Even so, come Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20)





HOPE, PEACE, LOVE & JOY

WEEK TWO



Pause to Pray

PEACE

Lord, You are the world's PEACE!
You came and proclaimed the good news of peace to those far away and peace to those who were near (Ephesians 2:17). As the gospel is shared around the world this Advent season, please use the words of eternal life to bring eternal peace to families and households. Amen.

CHILD OF PEACE

“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”

ISAIAH 9:6

Charlotte “Lottie” Diggs Moon was born December 12, 1840, in Albemarle County, Virginia. She stepped into eternity on December 24, 1912, in the harbor of Kobe, Japan. It’s a long way from Virginia to Japan, but no distance is too great for those who carry the good news of peace found in God.

Every year Southern Baptists sacrificially and generously give to our annual offering for international missions – an offering named in honor of the lady from Albemarle County. Who was this lady? How did our annual international missions offering get named in her honor? What was she doing in Japan on Christmas Eve in 1912?

You can read her complete story [here](#), but here's a summary.

Lottie Moon was not a perfect person. She resisted becoming a follower of Jesus until after her 18th birthday in 1858. She was also born in the pre-Civil War South to a wealthy farming family. The culture of her day was immersed in the tragedy of human slavery.

Lottie did not rush from her conversion to the international mission field. Fifteen years after her profession of faith, she established and taught in an academy for girls in Cartersville, Georgia.

It was there, in Cartersville Baptist Church, that Lottie Moon heard and surrendered to God's call to the mission field. Lottie was appointed to serve in northern China. She left for the mission field in September 1872. She would spend the rest of her life there, serving the poor and sharing the good news of peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Our annual offering for international missions is named in her honor because she was the first to suggest, among her many appeals for workers

and funding, that Southern Baptists receive an annual Christmas offering for international missions. It was also named in her honor because she devoted the last 40 years of her life to missions.

Having celebrated her 72nd birthday in China, her co-laborers convinced Lottie to return to the U.S. because of her failing health. She had given her life to the people of China, sharing her faith, food and money until her health broke. Reluctantly, she boarded a ship for the U.S., only to die onboard in the harbor of Kobe. Hers was a life well-lived and sacrificed for the glory and fame of Isaiah's "Prince of Peace."



NO PEACE

“There is no peace for the wicked,” says the Lord.”

ISAIAH 48:22

The numbers tell the story. Every second of every day, three people out of our world's population of 7.7 billion people step into a Christless eternity. They might be your neighbor, or they might live in a distant land. They have not trusted Christ. They don't know true peace.

The IMB provides an Annual Statistical Report (ASR) that reveals what God has accomplished through the work and ministry of your missionaries scattered across the globe. The most recent ASR can be found [here](#). While we celebrate the goodness and faith-

fulness of God, we also grieve the millions who have yet to hear the good news. The numbers in the 2021 ASR highlight more than 176,000 professions of faith, and more than 107,000 of those people have already followed the Lord in believer's baptism. Isn't God good?

Yet the church's work, our work — not just IMB's work but the collective work of the body of Christ — is not complete! Today, there are more than 3,000 unreached people groups around the world who are completely unengaged with the gospel. A total of 4.5 billion people live among a people, a tribe, a language group or a nation whose Christian population is 2% or less. For these lost, unreached people, there is "no peace," says the Lord of hosts.

What can those of us who know peace do?

- a.** We can pray for the outpouring of God's Spirit and the proclamation of the gospel among every unreached and unengaged people group. IMB has free resources available for you. "**Loving the Lost**" helps you begin a more specific prayer journey for the unreached.
- b.** We can help lead our churches to adopt an unreached or unengaged people group, begin praying for them and see what doors God opens. You can start this process by working through an online study called "**A Voice for the Nations: A Course on Prayer**".
- c.** We can encourage our pastors to include a call to missionary service in their regular appeals to

their respective congregations to hear and heed God's calling to the international harvest fields.

d. We can surrender our plans for our future and get involved today in carrying the gospel to the nations by contacting the IMB and beginning the process of international service. Start the process [here](#).



PERFECT PEACE

*“The steadfast of mind you
will keep in perfect peace
because he trusts in you.”*

ISAIAH 26:3

Our ability to maintain focus is often challenged by multiple distractions surrounding us. The “Orlando Sentinel” published an article in July 2021 stating that researchers had determined that the average human attention span had fallen from 12 seconds in 2000 to just eight seconds in 2021. The human attention span is now shorter than that of a goldfish, which reportedly has an attention span of nine seconds.

So, let’s get to the point since I have your attention for the next eight sec-

onds. The peace that “surpasses all comprehension” (Philippians 4:7) is a peace that enables followers of Jesus to exceed the tragically short average human attention span. Take, for example, the work of Andrew Bryan, a former slave who organized “a small group for preaching and worship in Savannah, Georgia, in the early 1780’s.”^[1] Andrew’s attention to the spread of the gospel far exceeded today’s mere seconds.

“By 1790 Bryan’s congregation had grown to a membership of 225 communicants and about 350 converts not yet admitted to full membership. The congregation became the First African Baptist Church of Savannah. In 1803, a Second African Church was orga-

nized from members of the First, and a few years later a Third African Church was formed, both led by black pastors."^[2]

As Southern Baptists, we celebrate this "steadfastness of mind" among all our pastors, missionaries and gospel ministry workers, past and present. On February 22, 2022, Southern Baptists celebrated George Liele Day. Liele was a slave in Georgia who was set free and became the first ordained black Baptist preacher in the U.S. He went on to carry the gospel internationally to Jamaica — 10 years before William Carey, often called the father of modern missions. You can read Liele's story [here](#).

There are now thousands of missionaries who have gone out from

Southern Baptist churches over the past 177 years to preach the gospel to the nations. All have proven with their obedience to God's call that our attentiveness to Christ can and must last more than eight seconds. Please pause right now and download the IMB Pray App (available for free in the [Google Play Store](#) or [Apple App Store](#)) and pray for the ongoing work of your missionaries.

[1] *Thabiti Anyabwile. Reviving the Black Church. (Broadman & Holman: Nashville, TN), 2015. p. 230.*

[2] *Ibid.*



ANNOUNCING PEACE

*“How lovely on the mountains
are the feet of him who brings
good news, who announces
peace and brings good news
of happiness, who announces
salvation, and says to
Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”*

ISAIAH 52:7

On March 11, 2020, the director of the World Health Organization (WHO) made an announcement that shocked the world. “In the past two weeks, the number of cases of COVID-19 outside China has increased 13-fold, and the number of affected countries has tripled. There are now more than 118,000 cases in 114 countries, and 4,291

people have lost their lives. WHO has been assessing this outbreak around the clock and we are deeply concerned both by the alarming levels of spread and severity, and by the alarming levels of inaction. We have therefore made the assessment that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic."

This startling announcement of a pandemic gripped the entire globe and led to lockdowns. But not every person in every country heeded or even believed the WHO's characterization of COVID-19. This parallels Paul's description of believers who are "the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an

aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life..." (2 Corinthians 2:15-16).

Some who hear about the pandemic of sin embrace the gospel, and some who hear this news reject it. Our assignment as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ does not depend on either of those responses. Success, or lack thereof, does not determine whether we continue to "make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19). We are assigned the task of announcing, and we have an announcement. We announce to the world the "good news" of peace with God. It is possible. It is available. It is salvation.

Paul wrote, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us, we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:19–20). To whom does God want to make His appeal through you? Write the name of a neighbor and a nation / people group for whom you can pray and to whom you can announce the good news.



ESTABLISHED PEACE

“Lord, You will establish peace for us, since You have also performed for us all our works.”

ISAIAH 26:12

A few months ago, the Yadkin Baptist Association of Yadkinville, North Carolina, published a monthly newsletter that included some sobering mental health statistics relating to pastors. Here are a few of those listed:

- 33% feel burned out within their first five years of ministry.
- 40% of pastors and 47% of spouses are suffering from burnout.
- 45% of pastors have experienced emotional distress that necessitated a leave of

absence from ministry.

- 50% feel unable to meet the needs of the job.
- 57% would leave the ministry if they had somewhere else to go or some other vocational option.
- 70% do not have any close friends.
- 75% report severe stress causing anguish, worry, bewilderment, anger, depression, fear and alienation.

For those of us in vocational ministry, whether full-time, part-time, bi or tri-vocational, we understand these statistics even though we might not currently fit into any of the categories listed above. Interestingly, the people Isaiah ministered to were keenly aware of similar life challenges. God

spoke prophetically to the people of Isaiah's day as well as to us today that "the Lord will establish peace for us" (Isaiah 26:12a). He is our peacemaker with God and our peacemaker in relationships and circumstances. After all, "You have also performed for us all our works" (Isaiah 26:12b).

Peace amid turmoil, trouble, heartache, tragedy and all the seemingly unassailable difficulties of life is available to us ONLY in Christ Jesus. He is our peace. He is "God with us!" (Matthew 1:23). Perhaps at the core of at least some of our burnout, emotional distress, ineffectiveness, loneliness, worry, anguish, depression, bewilderment, anger and fear is too much self-dependence and not enough abiding in Christ's provision of strength, comfort, wisdom and peace.

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful" (John 14:27). As He gave further comfort and instructions to His disciples, He said, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Let's start abiding in Him today by turning to His Word with renewed confidence and by surrendering our plagues of despair to His providential grace. Pause and read John 14 and 15 and then give every desperate circumstance to Him in prayer.



A RIVER OF PEACE

“For thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream.’”

ISAIAH 66:12A

Many of your IMB missionaries live and serve in places where clean water is scarce and highly treasured. Water is consumed carefully and used as sparingly as possible. When we realize just how valuable clean water is we understand more deeply the significance of Isaiah’s words that describe a river of peace and “the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream” (Isaiah 66:12a).

The barren deserts of the Middle East demonstrate the fact that rivers and

overflowing streams are an abundance that is not readily available to large portions of the population. The same is true for large regions on other continents. One local U.S. utility provider said in a recent monthly newsletter that "nearly 97% of the world's water is salty or otherwise undrinkable. Another 2% is located in ice caps and glaciers. That leaves just 1% for all of humanity's needs." This helps us understand the unimaginable value, and blessed abundance, of God's peace when He describes it in Scripture as a river.

Would you join your IMB leaders, missionaries and stateside staff in confident prayer that God's indescribable and abundant peace will "guard our hearts and minds in Christ

Jesus" (Philippians 4:7)? Petition Him to empower and bless us to reach our five strategic objectives by 2025 – a river of peace to the nations.

Let's pray over these five objectives right now:

- 1.** Send an additional 500 missionaries.
- 2.** Mobilize 500 global missionary partners on IMB teams.
- 3.** Engage 75 global cities with comprehensive strategies.
- 4.** Mobilize 75% of SBC churches to prayerfully and financially support the IMB.
- 5.** Increase giving to the IMB by 6% annually.

For the millions who have not yet heard, for the glory of God, and for the fulfillment of the vision Jesus pro-

vided in Revelation 7:9–10, together we pray, give, go, send and welcome people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation into the everlasting family of faith in Christ Jesus, our Eternal King! A River of peace to the nations!





HOPE, PEACE, LOVE & JOY

WEEK THREE



Pause to pray

JOY

Lord, You are the world's JOY! Thank you, God, that while we were enemies, You reconciled us to Yourself through the death of Jesus, and we are saved by His life (Romans 5:10). We praise You that 592,408 people have heard this truth through Your IMB workers in 2021. We pray that Your joy will take root in each of these hearts and that joy will extend to hard-to-reach places, cities and displaced peoples. Amen.

JOYFUL PRAYER

“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.”

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-5

Earlier this year, the research team at IMB provided the following information about the work of IMB missionaries around the world:

- a.** Since 1992, IMB missionaries have planted more than 374,000 churches among the nations.
- b.** IMB missionaries have engaged more than 2,300 different people groups with the

gospel of Jesus Christ.

c. In the last two years, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, IMB missionaries have trained more than 309,000 church leaders.

Click [here](#) to see the full statistical report for 2021. Links are available to reports from previous years. Even though the world evangelization and disciple-making task remain formidably large — 4.5 billion people in more than 7,000 unreached people groups — we can and should celebrate all that God is doing! Paul has an attitude of celebration toward the church in Philippi. He is painfully aware of the staggering reality of a lost world, but his letter

to the Philippians is filled with joy because of their “participation in the gospel from the first day until now” (Philippians 1:5).

Paul’s joy in the Philippians’ faithful gospel partnership fuels his joyful praying on their behalf. A similar opportunity is available for every Southern Baptist who longs to be in touch with, pray for and joyfully celebrate all that God is doing through our missionaries across the globe. Every month, individuals and churches can receive Prayer Points by email or traditional mail.

Each month, Prayer Points focuses each of the daily prayers on a particular subject, people group, city or region of the world in short one or

two-sentence prayer requests from the field. Visit this [link](#) to explore current or previous editions of Prayer Points or to sign up for your free subscription.

Don't delay, begin today prayerfully rejoicing with your IMB leaders, missionaries and staff in the goodness and faithfulness of God and how He is blessing the work of your missionaries all around the world!



JOYFUL PROCLAMATION

“What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice.”

PHILIPPIANS 1:18

You know the story well. The story of the One, “who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). The One who “emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men ... humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:7–8). The One of Whom it was promised would

be "great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David; and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1:32–33).

His story. The story of the One who has set us free. The story of the One who has purchased our redemption.

Yes. That story. The story that now manifests itself through our faithful proclamation of it among the nations of the earth, confident that the One we proclaim will save some from "every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues..." (Revelation 7:9).

That's what Paul meant in his letter to the Philippians. He wasn't concerned about the motive behind people arguing about the genuine nature of

his ministry. His ambition? "Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice" (Philippians 1:18). This is the driving ambition of your 3,600+ IMB missionaries — to see Christ proclaimed, lives changed, churches planted, leaders raised up and Jesus glorified!

Open your heart and sing.

We have heard the joyful sound:

Jesus saves! Jesus saves!

Spread the tidings all around:

Jesus saves! Jesus saves!

*Bear the news to every land, climb
the steeps and cross the waves;*

Onward! 'tis our Lord's command;

Jesus saves! Jesus saves!

Give the winds a mighty voice:

Jesus saves! Jesus saves!

*Let the nations now rejoice,
Jesus saves! Jesus saves!*

*Shout salvation full and free;
highest hills and deepest caves;*

*This our song of victory: Jesus
saves! Jesus saves! (We Have
Heard the Joyful Song).*

*Joyful! Joyful! We adore Thee!
God of glory! Lord of love!*

Help us today to make a joyful proclamation to our neighbors, co-workers, family members and friends that Christ has come to set us free, to redeem, to save, to love and to embrace. He is Lord of all!



JOYFUL PROGRESS

“Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith.”

PHILIPPIANS 1:25

Paul was speaking to the Philippian church in missionary terms when he said, “I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith” (Philippians 1:25). What God had started with the Macedonian vision in Acts 16, Paul was delighted to be a part of as the Philippians progressed toward full maturity in Christ.

Missionaries go about the missionary task in the same manner Paul did. Their goal is to stay with a people until Christ fully shapes their life. The missionary

task aims to minister from the beginning of the evangelistic entry among the people until the formation of a fully functioning church with its own leaders. Then, there is an exit to partnership in the disciple-making task assigned to us by the Lord Jesus. The missionary task looks like this:

- a.** Entry into a people by whatever means is available.
- b.** Evangelism among the people and clearly sharing the gospel.
- c.** Discipleship of those who profess faith in Jesus.
- d.** Bringing new believers together to form a church family.
- e.** Developing leaders from among the new believers as God calls them forth.
- f.** Exiting to partnership once the

church is biblically established with leaders.

This strategy is on full display in the New Testament and especially in Paul's ministry. It is also a strategy spelled out in the IMB's foundational resource for the missionary enterprise called Foundations. You can access this resource on the IMB website, purchase copies for study or download the PDF file and study on your electronic device. Here's the [link](#) to the free downloadable version, and here's a [link](#) to the free downloadable companion study guide for Foundations.

The IMB is convinced that Paul presents a strong biblical model of staying engaged in the missionary task with people through to "Exit to Partnership." Paul would have been content to

“depart [this life] and be with Christ” (Philippians 1:23) once he had shared the gospel in Philippi. But Paul understood the importance of walking with new believers to maturity. What a joyful privilege it is to be a part of the progress of faith development among new followers of Jesus!

Who are you discipling to full maturity in Christ? If you have one or more such people, pray for those individuals now. If you don't have anyone, ask God to place someone on your heart this Advent season with whom you will walk until they are fully mature in Christ.



JOYFUL PURPOSE

“Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”

PHILIPPIANS 2:2

Purpose. Many people struggle to discover their purpose in life. Paul, however, has no qualms about pinpointing believers' unique, God-orchestrated purpose — to be like Christ. Paul exalts Christ's servant-hearted attitude in the words immediately following the phrase, “intent on one purpose” (Philippians 2:2).

- a.** “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit” (2:3).
- b.** “Regard one another as more important than yourselves” (2:3).

c. "Look out for the interests of others" (2:4).

d. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" (2:5).

The Scripture makes it clear that what we celebrate at this season of Advent (see John 1:1–4; Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 2:1–20) becomes the foundation and pattern for how believers are expected to live their lives for the glory of God. Jesus left the magnificence of heaven, stepped into human clothing, lived a sinless life, was rejected and crucified and rose victoriously from the dead! His willing sacrifice provides our salvation and peace with God and lays a foundational framework for how we live as His followers.

Striving together for the sake of

the gospel, we are called to imitate Christ's total sacrifice of self for our disciple-making assignment (Matthew 28:19-20):

- e.** "Go and make disciples" (28:19).
- f.** "Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (28:19)
- g.** "Teach them to obey everything I commanded you look out for the interests of others" (28:20).

Remarkably, Jesus did what He did "for the joy set before him" (Hebrews 12:2). He "endured the cross, despising the shame... and endured hostility by sinners" (Hebrews 12:2,3). This is an unachievable pattern for us to follow, yet one that we can fulfill through the power of Christ in us. After all, we have been "crucified with Christ and it is no

longer [we] who live, but Christ lives in [us]" (Galatians 2:20). The life we live as His followers is a life of faith (Galatians 2:20) immersed in the Holy Spirit's power (Acts 1:8; Ephesians 2:13–14).

If the Philippians would heed Paul's directive, not only would his joy be complete, but their joy would be deepened by living out their purpose. The same is true for us. When we embrace the journey of faith in Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God with us, we will experience joyful purpose. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).



JOYFUL PERSPECTIVE

“Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.”

PHILIPPIANS 2:29-30

Paul was right when he asked the Philippians to hold Epaphroditus in high regard and receive him “in the Lord with all joy... because he came close to death for the work of Christ” (Philippians 2:29-30). They needed to give honor to Epaphroditus and to others like him who risked their lives for the sake of the gospel. Epaphroditus had a

joyful perspective on his life.

The IMB takes this example very seriously. So seriously, that every five years the IMB hosts a conference and celebration to honor and hold in "high regard" those men and women who have risked their lives for the sake of the gospel over a long period. We call them emeriti. Emeriti are not just former missionaries who served a term or two with the IMB. They are men and women who have served at least 15 years among the nations, and their number of years of service plus their current age equals 80.

Earlier this year, the every-five-year celebration happened in Orlando, Florida. Nearly 800 former missionaries attended and were celebrated

and honored. You can read about the conference [here](#). These men and women share Epaphroditus's joyful perspective on life.

This amazing group has some unbelievable stories to tell regarding serving Jesus cross-culturally. The article linked above opens with...

"they speak more than 40 languages and numerous local and tribal dialects. Many endured persecution, war, tribal conflict and loss of property. Several had their homes burned. More than one was imprisoned. Grave markers overseas name friends and family, even children, lost while serving for the sake of the gospel."

Still, others that the IMB honors are those who gave their lives shar-

ing Jesus among the nations. This [video](#) captures the importance of these precious martyrs of the faith. Your missionaries take their assignment very seriously and are willing to give their lives for the advance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Would you pause right now and ask the Lord to strengthen, empower and bless their efforts to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations? Would you also consider whether God is calling you to international missions?



JOYFUL POSITION

“Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and my crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:1

As Paul began to close out his letter to the church in Philippi, he referred to the believers there as (1) “my beloved brethren” (Philippians 4:1), and (2) “my joy and my crown” (Philippians 4:1). Those who had come to faith in Jesus in the city of Philippi — like Lydia, a wealthy business owner, an unnamed once-demon-possessed slave girl and a Roman jailkeeper and his family — had become spiritual brothers and

sisters to Paul. They also held the distinction of being Paul's crowning gospel achievement.

Paul uses similar words when writing to yet another Macedonian church – the church in Thessalonica. "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming? For you are our glory and joy" (1 Thessalonians 2:19–20). Paul viewed those individuals who had, through his ministry, received Jesus by faith as his crown. They were the crowning achievement of his life that he would one day gladly present to Jesus in an act of adoration, worship and praise.

Paul told the believers in Corinth that he was "jealous for [them] with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin" (2 Corinthians 11:2). Like Paul, your IMB missionaries believe there is no greater joy or crown than being in the position to present to Christ those whom they have been used by Christ to lead to faith. In the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021), your missionaries have seen God marvelously and miraculously save more than 300,000 individuals who have made professions of faith!

This is at the heart of what Jesus came to do. "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that

which was lost" (Luke 19:10). It is at the heart of our assignment to make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:18–20). Professions of faith. Disciples. Crowning gospel achievement — what a joyful position! This is why Southern Baptists pray, give, go and send. Who are the ones you are asking God to save? Let's plead with Him to save them during this season of Advent through our faithful witness.





HOPE, PEACE, LOVE & JOY

WEEK FOUR



Pause to pray

LOVE

Lord, You are the world's LOVE! God, we know that the "love of Christ compels us" to share the truth that One died for all, and we live for You and not ourselves (2 Corinthians 5:14).

We pray for local believers around the world to know Your love and show Your love even under harsh persecution. Please God, bear much fruit from their sacrifices of love. Amen.

LOVE CAME DOWN

“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.”

JOHN 3:13

One of my favorite Christmas songs was written by Chris Eaton and sung by Point of Grace. It's called "When Love Came Down."

*So close your eyes and
share the dream*

Let everyone on earth believe

*The child was born, the
stars shone bright*

*And love came down at
Christmas time*

*What a fantastic dream that would
be — if everyone on earth believed!*

That is our dream as Christians, isn't it? Our joy, our privilege and our responsibility are to do everything we possibly can to let everyone on earth know a child was born — not just any child. Hear the word of the angel as the announcement was made to the shepherds on that first Christmas: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus said, "No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven — the Son of Man" (John 3:13). Love came down at Christmas time. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Why do we share our faith with people in our communities? Why do we send missionaries to the most remote places on earth to take the gospel to those we will never personally have a chance to meet? We do it for the very reason that God's love is so amazing. He is not willing that any should perish. This incredible love is the foundation of the commission Jesus has given us. It's what compels us to "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" (Matthew 28:19-20).

As we begin this final week of Advent

thinking about the love of God, let's be reminded that His love is tangible. It's personal. And it's available — not to some but all. "For God so loved the world!" He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Share your faith this Christmas season with the full confidence that God deeply loves the one you're talking with because, for that person, Love came down!



SACRIFICIAL LOVE

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”

JOHN 15:13

It's fascinating that the first time the word "love" is mentioned in the Bible is in Genesis 22. There we read the account of Abraham offering his son to God as a sacrifice. God said to Abraham, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Genesis 22:2).

Abraham's heart was already broken at the loss of one son. His firstborn, Ishmael, was forced to

leave home because of a family feud. Now, only a few years later, it appears as though Abraham will lose Isaac too. Nevertheless, not understanding why God would make such an incomprehensible demand, Abraham acts in obedience.

You and I have the benefit of knowing how everything turned out. Abraham built an altar. He arranged the wood. He bound Isaac on the altar, and in an act of faith we can't completely fathom, he raised the knife and was about to plunge it into his son's chest. At that point, the angel of the Lord spoke to Abraham and said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not with-

held your son, your only son, from me" (Genesis 22:12). Instead, a ram, provided by God as a substitute, was sacrificed in Isaac's place.

Fast forward 2,000 years. On a mountain in the same mountain range where Abraham offered Isaac, another Father offered His Son as a sacrifice. This time, God did not stay the hand of the executioner. God the Father allowed His Son, Jesus, to die in agony and bloodshed on a cruel Roman cross. This is truly sacrificial love! "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

At Christmas, we think about the tiny newborn in the manger wrapped in

swaddling clothes. Those clothes were a foreshadowing of the grave clothes that would ultimately wrap the lifeless body of Christ after He was taken down from the cross. The love of God is so gigantic that He allowed His Son to take our place as a sacrifice for sin. You never have to ask the question, "Does God truly love me?" The answer is a resounding YES! "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Who do you know who needs to personally experience the love of God? Do something today to enable that person to hear the "good tidings of great joy!" (Luke 2:10).



LIVING LOVE

“I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

EPHESIANS 3:17-19

As you look back on your life, what are your earliest memories of experiencing love? Many are blessed to say they felt genuinely loved by their parents. Maybe it was a grandparent. Some knew the love of a special friend.

Others didn't experience authentic love until they were married.

I wonder how the Apostle Paul would answer that question if we were allowed to ask it. Is it possible the first time he saw true love in action was on a day when a man was murdered because of his commitment to Christ? This man I'm talking about is Stephen. On that day, when people were hurling rocks at Stephen, Paul (then Saul) held their coats so they could throw even harder.

I have to believe Paul never got over this experience. Maybe it was even flashing through his mind as he wrote the prayer in Ephesians 3 mentioned above. He prays that you and I would be "established in love." He longs for us to under-

stand "how wide and long and high and deep" the love of Christ is. Even though this love "surpasses knowledge," he still wants us to experience it.

He saw that kind of love radiating from Stephen on that day. In his dying breath, Stephen lifted up a prayer that is almost identical to the prayer Christ prayed from the cross, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60).

It's not difficult to love those who love you and treat you well. Anybody can do that. But Jesus tells us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. That's a different matter altogether. Yet, Jesus didn't just tell us to do it — He demonstrated it. His life was always characterized by love, even when the love wasn't reciprocated.

The rich young ruler couldn't commit when Christ told him what it would cost to follow Him.

Yet, even as the man was walking away, the Bible tells us clearly that Jesus loved him (Mark 10:21). With tears streaming down his cheeks, Jesus cried out, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37). And from the cross, Jesus prayed for those who were willing participants in His execution, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).

How did Jesus love in the face of over-

whelming hostility? How did Stephen do it? The same way you and I are able to do it. "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). We can also live a life of love by simply allowing God's Spirit to love through us. We live in a brutal and hostile world. Yield yourself to Christ in a fresh way today so people will experience the love of God as they encounter you.



TRANSFORMING LOVE

*“You shall love the Lord
your God with all your
heart, with all your soul, and
with all your strength.”*

DEUTERONOMY 6:5

Do you ever get tired of being like you are? Do you ever look at your life and think, “I thought I’d be further along by now?” You’ve been a Christian for several years, and you can’t help but think, “I thought I’d be less like the world and more like Jesus by now.” Or “I thought I would have overcome more of my sinful struggles and habits by now.” Or “I thought I’d be more disciplined in my spiritual pursuits by now.”

Years ago, I heard a preacher say, “If you’re not walking with Christ, you don’t

have an obedience problem — you have a love problem.” That’s a hard pill for us to swallow, but I think it’s more true than we probably want to admit. As followers of Christ, we know when we’re out of fellowship with God. We know the difference between right and wrong. We know the difference between a life that honors God and a life that dishonors God. We use words like “should” and “ought.” For example, “I really should be doing this,” and “I really ought to stop doing that.”

I think the old preacher was probably right. Instead of concentrating on obedience (which might be behavior modification), we need to focus on love. After all, Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). It’s not difficult to spend time with

someone you love. Think of the things you're willing to sacrifice and give up; think of the lengths to which you will go to change your schedule or do whatever it takes to see somebody you love. Love doesn't ask, "What is the least I can do to get by?" Love always wants to do more. As a follower of Christ, love doesn't say, "What is the bottom line of obedience and commitment I can give to Jesus and still feel like I'm a decent Christian?" No, love looks for a way to go the second and third mile.

Let me interject some good news at this point. Jesus doesn't expect us to pull this off in our own power. He says to us, "If you love me keep my commandments" (John 14:15). But don't stop reading there. In the next sentence, He gives us the secret as to how

this can be accomplished. "And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Helper, that he may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth ... for he dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:16–17).

God never tells us to do something without also giving us the power to do it. Paul says it so well in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."



FINDING LOVE

“This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

LUKE 2:11

My daughter and my grandson love to do puzzles, especially around Christmas time. They spend an incredible amount of time examining the tiny pieces and putting them into place. They have a cat named Milly, and like most cats, she's sneaky. She loves to slink around the table and chairs looking for an opportune time to paw away and steal pieces of their puzzle. Often, she gets away with her crimes. After days of hard work, they get down to the end and realize they are missing some pieces. The search begins. Finally, they find Milly's

stash of ill-gotten goods and recover the valuable piece or pieces. There is joy and satisfaction as they pop those pieces into place and gaze upon the whole picture, now complete.

The Bible talks about the great joy experienced when something is found. In His parables, Jesus talked about the joy of a shepherd finding a lost sheep, a woman finding a misplaced coin, a father finding a runaway son, a traveler finding a hidden treasure and a merchant finding a valuable pearl. Can you imagine the joy the shepherds experienced when they found Jesus in Bethlehem that first, wonderful Christmas night?

I found Jesus when I was eight years old. Or did Jesus find me? Sometimes we get those things confused. I know now that I love Him because He first loved

me (1 John 4:19). Yet, I can tell you that, even as a child, the significance of what happened changed my life forever! The amazing love and forgiveness of God overwhelmed me!

The angel gave specific directions to the shepherds that led them straight to Jesus. They found Him exactly as the angel said they would. Who do you know that needs directions today? Who can you lead to Jesus this Christmas? Share with them the wonderful news of the Savior. Furthermore, through your generous gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering[®], you can help someone on the other side of the world hear that same amazing gospel message!



LOVE WORTHY OF WORSHIP

“And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are you to take the book and to break its seals; for you were slain, and purchased for God with your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.’”

REVELATION 5:9

The nativity scenes we see and set up are very beautiful, but most are not chronologically correct. The wise men are nowhere to be found in Luke's account of the Christmas story. It was the shepherds who visited Jesus on the night of His birth. The wise men didn't show up in Bethlehem until several months later.

We read the account of their visit in the second chapter of Matthew.

We understand why the wise men weren't there on the actual night of Jesus' birth. They had a long journey to make. Most scholars believe the wise men came from Persia, a distance several hundred miles away from Judea. You and I are inspired when we pause long enough to consider the length of time and the difficulties these men must have experienced on their adventurous excursion. They had come to Jesus for a reason, and their purpose would not be thwarted. The Bible says, "And when they came into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him..." (Matthew 2:11). These men, strang-

ers to the land of Israel, are a powerful demonstration that the love of God is for all people, not just a select few.

Every person on earth worships something, but only Jesus is truly worthy of our worship. Andrew Peterson says it so well in his song, "Is He Worthy?"

Is anyone worthy? Is anyone whole?

*Is anyone able to break the
seal and open the scroll?*

*The Lion of Judah who
conquered the grave*

*He is David's root and the Lamb
who died to ransom the slave.*

From every people and tribe

Every nation and tongue

*He has made us a kingdom
and priests to God*

To reign with the Son!

Is He worthy? Is He worthy?

Of all blessing and honor and glory

Is He worthy? Is He worthy?

Is He worthy of this?

He is!

"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"
(Revelation 7:9–10)





REACHING THE NATIONS, TOGETHER.



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