

# LOVE | CAME DOWN

fbcpb  
love up. love out.



**2018  
ADVENT  
DEVOTIONAL**

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## **TO MY SPECIAL FAMILY AT FBCPB:**

I love you all so much. I am so excited to be your discipleship pastor. I have an unquenchable desire for us to grow in our pursuit and love for all things Christ! I am praying that this Advent devotional, "Love Came Down," will serve its intended purpose as a tool to bring your families together to discuss, ponder and marvel at the gift of love that is Jesus Christ. I pray that in some small way this will empower us to love and trust God even more as we reflect on His great promises of hope, peace, joy and love. Here's to many more seasons of falling more in love with each other and Christ!

-Dave McCormack

# HOPE

December 3 - *A New Sign*

Luke 1:5-7

It had been 400 years since God's people had heard from the prophets. They believed a Messiah was coming. The story, the promise, had been passed on from generation to generation. Finally, in Luke's Gospel, we see the beginning of the Christmas story. We see angels appearing to Zechariah to inform him that his wife, Elizabeth, would bear a child. His name would be John. We now know him as John the Baptist. He came to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. Finally . . . could this be the "hope" that people had longed for? John was not the Messiah, but his birth was the first New Testament sign that the Messiah was coming to earth!

1. Have you had times in your life where you felt like you've been in a drought? Have you felt hopeless?
2. In those seasons of hopelessness or doubt, how can we be assured that Jesus is still present, still faithful?

**PRAY**, thanking God for the many times in scripture He has proven Himself faithful. Thank Him for the unfading hope we have in Him. Ask Him to give you hope in your times of discouragement and doubt.

# HOPE

## December 4 - *His Unique Plan*

### Luke 1:18-19

So, after the silence between the Old and New Testaments, we have seen new activity. An angel has told Zechariah and Elizabeth they will be having a son who will “prepare the way for the Lord.”

(Matthew 3:1-3) In Luke 1:18, we see Zechariah’s reaction to this news. He questions the validity of the angel’s revelation. Zechariah doubts this could happen because he and his wife are older. This sounds a lot like Abraham’s reaction in Genesis 17; however, we see in both situations that God’s plan carries on in spite of our doubt and/or misunderstanding. God was protecting and fulfilling the lineage of His Son, Jesus, in both situations. The hope we have in God’s plans can be certain and trusted because His plan is eternal!

1. Have you ever doubted God’s plan?
2. Reflect on some times in your life where God’s plans were shown greater than yours.
3. How can God’s promises help develop our plans to give us eternal hope?

**PRAY** to God today, thanking Him for His unfailing plans. Thank Him that His ways are higher than ours. Ask Him to form your plans and give you a hope for the future.

# HOPE

December 5 - *Reproach for Righteousness*  
Luke 1:24-25

In biblical times, many people viewed barrenness as a sign of reproach. Surely some thought that Zechariah and Elizabeth were in disfavor with God because they were childless. Now we see Elizabeth is with child at an older age. This would be a great sign to everyone in that time. Really, it would have been miraculous. This helps me reflect on the reason the Messiah was coming to earth in the first place. We, as humans, are in disfavor with God because of sin. We are disconnected. There is a great chasm between us and God; however, just like with Elizabeth, God shows up with a beautiful, mysterious plan! He would send His Son to make a way for us to be made right. The reproach of our sin would be exchanged for His righteousness! What hope this brings.

1. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 . . . How does today's devotion and this verse provide hope?
2. What are you holding onto today that you need to give up and let God's righteousness take over?

**PRAY** that you will live in the truth of God's eternal hope. Give thanks for the great exchange . . . God's righteous Son taking our place on the cross to defeat sin, death and hell.

# HOPE

December 6 - *Living Hope*

Luke 1:13

We have been talking about the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Zechariah's name means, "Jehovah has remembered." God remembered His promise, and God always keeps His promises. (2 Cor. 1:20) We can experience that same great joy of the assurance of God in His promise. Peter tells us, in his first letter, that God has caused us to be born again to a living hope. (1 Peter 1:3-5) This passage tells us that this living hope is an inheritance that is IMPERISHABLE, UNDEFILED and UNFADING. Look at those three words of promise from our Father in Heaven! In this we rejoice! We rejoice, no matter what we will endure on earth because we have a great eternal, living hope.

1. How does knowing we have a blessed assurance of salvation help you to live your life now?
2. Are there moments where you feel like God has forgotten about you? How does today's words of hope speak to you?

**PRAY** today and thank God for the living hope we have because of Jesus. Reflect on the eternal aspect of our great hope!

# HOPE

## December 7 - *The Lord is with You* Luke 1:13

In the sixth month, an angel (Gabriel) appeared to a young virgin girl named Mary. The angel told her she would be having a Son. She would be naming Him Jesus. He would be great and He would reign forever and His Kingdom would know no end. And there you have it . . . the HOPE of the world! Jesus, the Messiah, was coming to earth. The promise from God to send a Messiah began in Genesis 3.

It was reiterated throughout the Old Testament. (Isaian 7, 9 . . . Zech. 11) Now, we see the tangible flesh beginning of this great hope we have in Jesus. He was leaving His address in Heaven to come to our filthy world and “dwell among us.” (John 1:14) Jesus, our Redeemer, was coming to make ALL THINGS NEW!

1. Try to imagine Mary's feelings when the angel appeared.
2. Why do you think God chose to carry out His plan in this way?
3. How does this renew your hope in God?

**THANK** God for His eternal plan. Pray for people to have faith to believe in the virgin birth. Ask God to reveal to you the ways that you can be a part of this plan during your life.

# PEACE

December 10 - *How?*

Luke 1:34-35

Peace is a great word. Just saying the word makes a person feel better; however, it's so hard to understand it and live it out. In today's passage, we see Mary's response to the angel Gabriel telling her she would "bear a son." Mary responds in verse 34 with a question we are all too familiar with. She asks, "How?" that resonates with us on so many levels. "How am I gonna get through this?" "How will this turn out?" "How could he do that?" I find myself asking God "why" or "how" a lot. I love the answer the angel gives in verse 35. Basically, he says the Holy Spirit will handle it. What if we could rest in that truth? How much easier would life be if we lived out the belief that God will take care of it?

1. What is keeping you from experiencing a true peace in God?
2. How would those situations look different if you let God handle it?

**IN TODAY'S PRAYER**, ask God to give you peace in the toughest situations of your life. Pray for your friends and family to gain peace and rest.

# PEACE

December 11 - *Nothing is Impossible*

Luke 1:36-38

Peace is a word that is defined as “a state of quiet” or “harmony” or “freedom from oppressive thoughts.”

Mary has been told by an angel that she will bear a son named Jesus. The angel also lets her know that her relative Elizabeth, who was considered barren, is having a baby boy in her old age. In verse 37, the angel says a phrase that will bring quiet to the noise, harmony to the chaos, and a freedom from the captivity of depression or anxiety. He says “For nothing is impossible with God.” Mary responds that she is a servant and will do whatever God asks.

Everything changed when Mary realized that she served a God who is in the business of doing the impossible. Perhaps the most peaceful place we can be is in the middle of a situation that shows us we have to be completely reliant upon a completely capable God.

1. How does Luke 1:37 change your outlook in life?
2. Do you face situations with the attitude of “I am Your servant, I will do whatever You ask, God?”

**PRAY** for God to help you live a life that shows you believe God can do the impossible. Give God the situations in your life that are trying to destroy your peace. Maybe just sit in a quiet place and listen to God.

# PEACE

December 12 - *Sing a Song*

Luke 1:46-56

Mary was in a tough situation. She knew she would be ridiculed and judged harshly by others. She knew Joseph, her fiance, would find this hard to believe; however, she trusted God and submitted to His authority and plan. I love what happens next. Instead of Mary being depressed, worried, or fearful . . . she sang. She sang! Mary had a song in her heart because she understood this was the Savior's entrance plan into the world. She felt joyous and humbled. The lyrics of the song in Luke 1:46-55 show that Mary was very familiar with scripture, as each verse is filled with prayers and praises from the Old Testament. She knew she would be called blessed for the rest of her days and beyond (v. 48) . . . not only because she was handpicked to bear Christ, but moreover because she would have Christ with her for eternity. All of us can be called blessed for eternity when we carry Jesus within us.

1. What kind of song is your soul singing?
2. How does singing about and to Jesus help us feel more at peace? What songs do that for you?

Just spend some time today in worship through song and prayer. Thank God for the song in your heart.

# PEACE

December 13 - *Do Not Fear*

Matthew 1:18-25

Have you ever gotten bad news? I'm talking the type of news that changes everything. Joseph found out that his fiancée, Mary, is going to have a baby even though they had never been together in that way. This is a Jerry Springer show-type of situation. He decided the only thing he could do is leave her. He was a nice guy, so he decides to do it quietly and quickly; however, God sent an angel to tell Joseph "do not fear." Yet again, we see our great God giving peace and comfort to His child in the midst of a crazy, tough situation. It's been stated by multiple preachers that "do not fear" or some variation of that phrase has been written in God's Word 365 times. Perhaps that can be a daily reminder that we are living for the Prince of Peace and He has everything under control.

1. Why do we live in fear?
2. What are ways God has spoken to you in your times of restlessness or chaos?

**PRAY** for God to get rid of fear in your life. Pray for peace to conquer fear and doubt. Praise God for fighting our battles for us. Pray for strength to live in His victory.

# PEACE

## December 14 - *Peace Be With You* Philippians 4:4-9

We have seen over the past couple of weeks how Zechariah and Elizabeth and Joseph and Mary have had a sweet peace in spite of an unusual situation. It's really hard to understand this kind of peace. Freaking out, overreacting, worry and complaining are much more "normal" reactions to undesirable situations. A very good friend of mine died of cancer. Peace about the situation was not my first reaction. I was heartbroken and disturbed. I was really confused; however, years later as I watch his family grow and move deeper in their walk with Jesus, I've come to realize God can use what we see as tragic to accomplish greatness in His story. C.S. Lewis says, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." The world will never understand the peace of God. We Christians still struggle to grasp the depths of it! Today, I'm comforted in that realization. Paul told us, in today's passage, that the peace of God surpasses all understanding. May we live in it as we learn of it more and more.

1. Do you understand how to live in God's peace?
2. How are you experiencing the peace of God this Christmas season?

Today, just **GIVE PRAISE** to God that His ways are higher and greater. Pray that you will trust Him more and more in spite of how much you understand pain and its purpose.

# JOY

December 17 - *Son of Man, Son of God*  
Luke 1:39-45

The word “joy” has many synonyms. Some of my favorites are jubilation, rejoicing, bliss and delight. In today’s passage, we see Mary visiting Elizabeth. Elizabeth exclaimed the baby in her womb (John . . . Jesus’ cousin) leaped for joy when she heard Mary’s voice. (Luke 1:44) This incident gives me joy on two different levels. First, we are reminded that Jesus came to the earth as a human. This means He experienced our humanity in a very real and tangible way. Second, we see the supernatural way in which the baby leaped in the womb upon Jesus’ arrival. Jesus was also coming as 100% God! What delight, bliss and jubilation we have in knowing that Jesus experienced life as a human and understands us in all ways?! We also rejoice in knowing that Jesus is God and He is completely capable of handling all our issues in His complete sovereignty.

1. How does Jesus’ title, “Son of Man,” give you joy?
2. How does Jesus’ title, “Son of God,” give you joy?

**PRAY** a prayer of praise today as you thank God for His beautiful understanding of our ways. Praise Him for His great plan that brought Joy to our world!

# JOY

December 18 - *True Treasure*

Luke 2:1-7, 19

Have you ever met someone who had nothing, but yet they had everything? I didn't have much growing up. We were probably pretty poor by most standards; however, I never really knew that as a child.

My mother had such a peaceful joy, no matter the circumstance. We were rich in love and health. In the beginning of Luke 2, we see the birth of Jesus! Mary and Joseph have traveled to Bethlehem for the census. So many other families had too, so all the rooms were occupied. Then, Mary gave birth. Verse 7 of Luke, chapter 2 tells us she "laid Him in a manger" and "wrapped Him in swaddling cloths." The word, "manger," translates into a feeding trough for animals. Swaddling cloths were used by impoverished moms to wrap the baby tight. Mary, with nothing in the world . . . no room, no bed, no baby clothes . . . sat there with baby Jesus. Though she had nothing, she held EVERYTHING! Joy, true joy, supercedes situations. Our true joy is in Christ, not circumstance.

1. Do you have a true sense of joy in every situation?
2. How does Mary's contentment convict you to handle situations in your life?

**PRAY** for the joy of contentment today. Pray that we would be more affected by our Savior than our situations.

# JOY

December 19 - *Good News of Great Joy*

Luke 2:8-20

One of my favorite things about the Christmas story in Luke is how the angels appeared to the shepherds. Many songs have been written about this unusual occurrence. There are so many layers to this part of the story. Shepherds were lowly people. They weren't considered important or powerful. Many of them were dirty and lawless, actually. Isn't it powerful that it is shepherds who God chose to speak to directly about His Son's birth? One minute they are in the midst of the mundane and the next they are encountering Jesus. I see a sense of foreshadow here. The angels brought "good news of great joy that will be for all the people." Jesus' birth would signal the beginning of the messianic salvation. We, who were once dead in our trespasses, lowly and dirty, now have a way to be saved! (Ephesians 2:4-10) Joy to the world . . . the Lord is come . . . let earth receive her King!

1. How do we correlate with the shepherds?
2. How does God speaking to the lowly shepherds encourage us to share the Gospel?

**PRAY** for people who are stuck in a life without Christ. Pray for a boldness to share the "good news of great joy to all the people."

# JOY

December 20 - *Depart in Peace*

Luke 2:25-38

Not much is known about Simeon and Anna. Luke includes both of them in his narrative about the birth of Christ; however, what little we do read about them shows us a lot. Simeon was a devout man who waited at the temple daily to meet Jesus. Anna fasted, worshiped and prayed all day every day at the temple, waiting for the arrival of Jesus. Simeon held Jesus and immediately proclaimed He is the Messiah. Anna began to give thanks that very moment and share with everyone that this is truly the Messiah. Isn't their devotion and resolve both amazing and incredibly convicting? The one thing in both of their lives that brought them true joy was to long for the Savior. Simeon even says "now, your servant may depart in peace." Simeon was ready to die now that he met Jesus. This is the only way any of us can be ready to die. May we live with a longing to meet our Savior face-to-face, for that is the only way we can meet death with a true joy!

1. How does Simeon/Anna's story shape your devotion to prayer and worship?
2. How do you feel about death? How should we feel about it?

**PRAY** about how you are supposed to live and how you are to embrace death. Pray Philippians 1:21.

# JOY

December 21 - *Inexpressible Joy*

1 Peter 1:8-9

I remember when my wife and I received the news that we were pregnant with our first child. I loved that child from that moment on. I had not even seen her yet; however, I was so in love with her! I feel that is how it is with us as we think about Jesus. We haven't seen Him physically, but we have this inexpressible joy because we know we will soon. The people alive at the time of Jesus' birth had been looking forward to meeting Him. We can relate to them in at least a small sense as we look forward to meeting Him in Heaven. Peter says the outcome of our faith will be our joy in salvation. What better joy is there than an eternal joy of salvation? Maybe this Christmas season you need to focus on Jesus more than ever before and experience that deep inexpressible, glorious joy all over again.

1. What is keeping you from a fullness of joy?
2. What do you look forward to saying/doing when you meet Jesus?

**READ** Romans 15:13 and pray for that joy and peace to overflow in you this season. Worship the God of hope who provides these blessings.

# LOVE

## December 23 - *Love Came Down* John 3:16

The Christmas story is all about love. Perhaps the most popular verse in the Bible is John 3:16. The whole verse is predicated upon the beginning phrase . . . “For God so loved the world . . .” The “world” is us before we knew Christ. We were hopeless, restless and devoid of true joy. We were lost! BUT GOD, so loved us that He sent His Son Jesus to the earth to bring us hope, peace, joy . . . salvation! We have nothing to offer Him in return. His love for us is a complete gift of grace. I remember when I was a young boy, I found a baby bird that had fallen from its nest. It was helpless and left to die. I was able to get the bird some help and it was nursed to health and soon grew up to fly and live. We, before Christ, are much like that baby bird. God knew we couldn’t get well and live on our own, so He had a plan. He sent the God-man to redeem the godless man.

1. Read 1 John 4:10 and Romans 5:8.
2. How can we repay the gift of love God has given us?

**PRAY** a prayer of praise to God today. Praise Him for making dead men alive. Thank Him for His great love that we will never deserve or understand.

# LOVE

December 24- *Love Up*

1 John 4:19

Love is extremely challenging to define. We humans have such a twisted view of love. We move on when the going gets tough. We fall in and out of love so quickly. Our love is tragically conditional. Webster's Dictionary defines love as "a strong feeling or affection for and a dedication to another." The reason you may gain a strong affection or dedication for someone is because that someone has done something to earn it; however, it's totally opposite of that with God. We did nothing to earn His affection or dedication, yet He loves us with a relentless, unconditional, amazingly selfless love! This Advent season has reminded us of the greatest act of love mankind has ever witnessed . . . God sent us the gift of Jesus to reconcile to Himself sinners.

What is our response? What is the **ONLY** correct response to such a great love? The more I reflect on and experience God's beautiful love for me, the more I'm compelled to love Him. Our love for Him is only possible because He first loved us.

1. How many ways can you think of that God has shown His love for you?
2. How are you growing in your love for Him?

**PRAY** to love Him more. Meditate on His great love and devotion to you. Just spend some extra time today being fully immersed in your affection for Christ. Sing. Pray. Rejoice. Be still.

# LOVE

December 25- *Love Out*

Mark 16:15, Matthew 28:19-20

I love sports! What is the first thing I do when I see an amazing feat in sports? I call my friends and tell them about it. We all do this very thing. We tell people about that which we love. We share what excites us. Mary, Zechariah and Simeon sang about the Good News. The shepherds proclaimed it to everyone they saw after they met Jesus. The disciples proclaimed Jesus until their deaths. We have the same story to tell! Christmas is the beginning of Easter. Jesus came to earth as a baby, lived 33 years of sinless life to fulfill the Law, then died a sinner's death on the cross that we may have a story of redemption. Each of us have friends, family and/or acquaintances that need to hear this GOOD NEWS! Love came down so that we could love up and love out. We are commanded to share the Gospel. Take this gift and give it to the world. "Go tell it on the mountain, over the hill and everywhere. Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born."

1. Are you striving to love people the way Christ has loved you?
2. Who has God laid on your heart to go and tell the story of love to?

**PRAY** for the person(s) that God has laid on your heart. Pray for God to give you opportunity to share the Gospel. Pray for boldness to seize these opportunities.

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