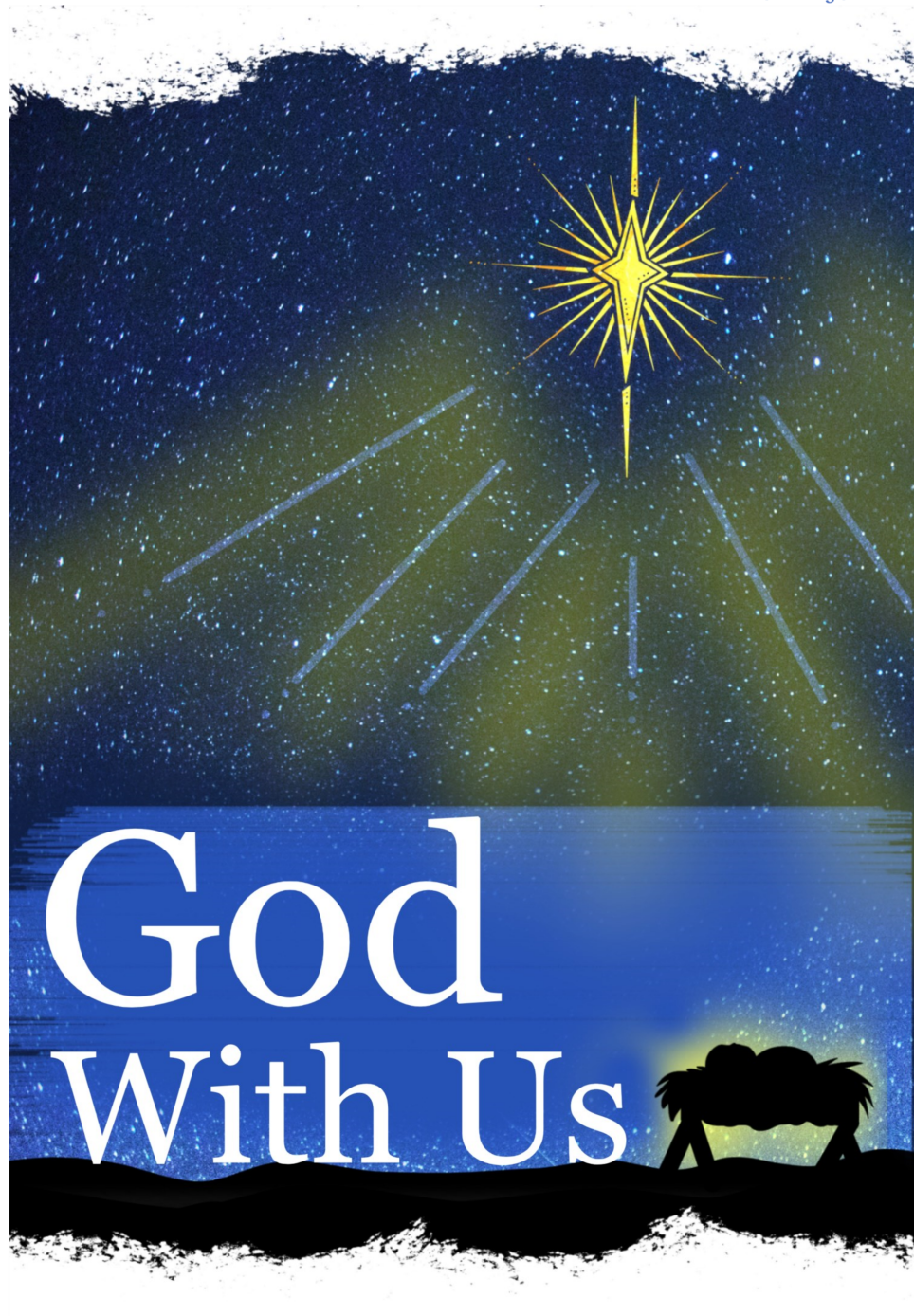
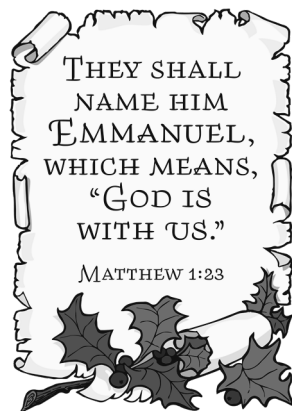


2023 ADVENT DEVOTIONS





This devotional booklet has been written to help all who read it, especially families, to enjoy a more meaningful celebration of our Lord's birth this Christmas. And it's hoped that readers will be reminded that God allowed Jesus' birth because He wanted to be with us in a special way for a reason.

Midweek Advent devotions will be offered each week. Make them a whole family gathering! During these devotional services, we'll learn that God came to be with us as our **Potter**, our **Shepherd**, our **Living Branch** and our **Guide**. Each night we'll light the Advent wreath, sing songs, have special responses for

children, say prayers, have a message for children and adults, and enjoy putting together family craft projects.

HERE'S THE SCHEDULE:

Week 1 — Nov. 29th — Our Potter (Isaiah 64:8-9): God is with us as a Potter, and we are His clay. Through faith in Jesus, we're formed as a new creation as God shapes us according to His will.

The craft project: an air-dried clay Christmas Tree ornament.

Week 2 — Dec. 6th — Our Shepherd (Isaiah 40:10-11): God is with us as our Shepherd. Jesus, our Good Shepherd, came to lay down His life and rise from the dead to bring us forgiveness and eternal life.

The craft Project: a cotton ball sheep ornament.

Week 3 — Dec. 13th — Our Living Branch (Isaiah 11:1-2): God is with us as our Living Branch. Jesus, a shoot from the stump of Jesse, was born into the family tree of King David. By faith we're the branches and Jesus is our true Vine.

The craft project: a small decorated evergreen branch ornament.

Week 4 — Dec. 20 — Our Guide (Isaiah 2:3, 5): God is with us as our Guide. He leads us according to his Word. Jesus guides us to God and to eternal life.

The craft: a special Bethlehem Star ornament.

Life in this sinful world is often be very difficult, even during Christmas time! We get caught up in the "hustle and bustle" of this time of the year, overwhelmed by worldly concerns, and forget that Jesus is the reason for the season. So, if you take an ever-so brief moment to read these devotions, and take full advantage of worship opportunities, without a doubt, you'll know that God IS with you, and will bless you, and will give you peace.

SEE YOU IN CHURCH!

Pastor Dave

WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT GOD IS WITH US?

December 1

Isaiah 41:10

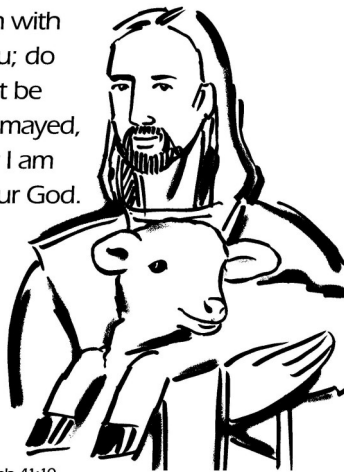
So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

What a wonderful verse to lift up in your life. Do not fear as God is with you and will strengthen you. How often in our daily life we have experienced fear of something. Maybe fear on a small scale such as a fear of spiders or bees or falling Or a fear on a much larger scale such as fear of a broken relationship or fear of a family accident or even death.

However, God is saying that He will strengthen you and uphold you and help you. He is here for you. He will uphold you with his righteous right hand. What better words have not been spoken. Isaiah heard these words more than 2700 years ago. The people of Israel repeated this verse over and over again as they went through their trials and tribulations, their wars and captivity hanging on to the fact that God was with them and would extend His righteous right hand to lead them as they waited.

This is the season when the wait is over, as we observe a short season of waiting, Advent, culminating in the birth of Our Lord and Savior announcing that God will be with us each day. During this Advent

So do not
fear, for I
am with
you; do
not be
dismayed,
for I am
your God.



Isaiah 41:10

season hold on to God's hand and know that He is guiding you and strengthening you for whatever journey is ahead for you.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, I give great thanks that you are here with me and that I can see you extending your hand to me in every trial and fearful event I experience. May your love and righteousness surround me during this Advent season. Amen.

Mary Jo Mikulski

December 2

Matthew 1:23

*Look! The virgin will conceive a child!
She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,
which means 'God is with us.'*

Paul tells us in today's reading that even today God is at work in every aspect of our lives. He is with us through everything we face. His love for us is as a father loves his children. A love that surpasses all understanding.

We can easily get caught up in this holiday season of giving and receiving gifts. Remember the ultimate gift from God, our Heavenly Father is his Son, Jesus Christ. Who was sent here to free us from our sins so that we may have eternal life in his Heavenly Kingdom.

*Heavenly Father,
We pray you will give us eyes to see through the gifts we receive from friends and family. Eyes that see clearly the person who gave us these gifts and then through that person into God who is the giver of all gifts we receive. We pray for God to help us to share the good news of Jesus with our friends and family so they too can experience God's great Fatherly love for us.*

Regards,
Rochelle Lemieux

"THE VIRGIN WILL
conceive
and
GIVE BIRTH
to a
son,
AND THEY WILL
call him
IMMANUEL"
(which means "God with us").
MATTHEW 1:23, NIV



December 3

Matthew 18:20

For where two or more gather in My name, I am with them.

A friend told me about a gathering she'd been to. A woman she didn't know sat in the chair next to her. Nancy, my friend, for some reason during the conversation, started telling this new acquaintance about her daughter's recent kidney transplant and all the disappointments and the lengthy process waiting for a donor kidney. Nancy said she could tell this woman was listening to what she had to say and paying attention so she continued. She told how grateful they were for the family that chose to donate their loved one's organs and how awful it was for their joy to come from someone else's unimaginable loss.

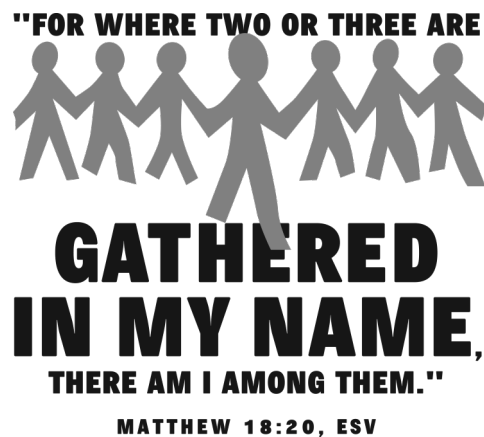
This new friend told Nancy: "You just don't know how much hearing this today means to me. I lost my son a year ago today, and it is comforting to know that we saved lives like your daughter's with his organ donation."

When Nancy told me this, I said this was not a coincidence or "chance meeting." This is what our pastor calls a "God Moment." God put you there to tell your story and bring comfort to a grieving mother.

My hope is that during this Holiday Season of parties and gatherings, we choose words that can bring comfort and joy to those who need to hear what we have to share.

Heavenly Father, Guide us in all that we say and do as we share the Good News of our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Linda Crist



December 4

1 Corinthians 3:16

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?

Moses "I am slow of tongue," David "I am just a boy," Jeremiah "Alas, Sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak: I am too young," Peter "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." And then here we are, "I can't, I am not worthy, I don't know scripture, on and on we deny the most basic truth that God uses imperfect people to affect an imperfect world, and that He dwells within us.

As we celebrate and worship in this Advent Season and ultimately the culmination of the Christmas Celebration, Christ comes down to us in the Manger. We find the depths with which our Lord, our Creator, our Savior has taken to show His love. Throughout history we have many examples of God reaching out to us and desiring a relationship with us, from the Garden of Eden, where God literally walked with Adam and Eve, to the sending of the many prophets with the Message of God's grace, to Moses being called at the burning bush, to David and the Promise of his never-ending kingship, coming to reality in Jesus' birth. We hear the story of Saul/Paul, who had violently persecuted early Christians, and then Jesus himself reached out and directed Paul in Truth and led him to be a leader of the church, to be His Temple. To this day Jesus sends His Spirit to dwell in us, You and me. He doesn't say "Get Perfect and we'll talk" No, He says you are my temple, my dwelling place, and I can and will use you, me, us, in His ministries. As you look at the Nativity scenes, as you look at Christmas trees, as you see the bell ringers, be reminded of Jesus' promise, "I will be with you always, even till the end of the age."

Kevin Hansen



December 5

Zephaniah 3:17

The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.

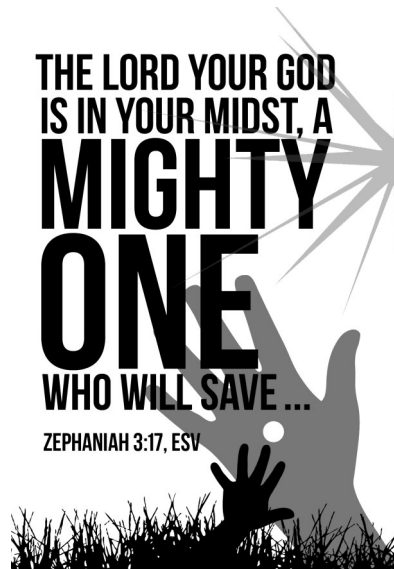
As I reread this passage, I am struck with awe that our Father, creator of all things, takes great delight in us and rejoices over us. In my dictionary, delight is defined as (verb) to please someone greatly or (noun) great pleasure. When I think of taking delight, I can't help but think about our children and grandchildren, and how we have found delight in them over the years. At this point Alex, our youngest, is two years old and he makes us smile every time we see him. No matter what he does, we can't help but smile and laugh, even if he is being scolded for doing something he shouldn't. He is quite simply delightful.

When our older grandchildren (Abby 8 and Hunter 10) were Alex's age, we missed many of these delightful moments. Now that we are blessed to live nearby and see them often, we are reminded that there are many delightful moments to enjoy at any age. Every day is indeed a gift!

As imperfect as I am, I am grateful that I am able to love and be delighted. When I think about our perfect Father, who is always with us, I marvel that His love for us and delight in us are stronger than anything we can feel. While we can't begin to fully comprehend His love and delight, we know that our God is true to His word, and His love is so great that He sent his only Son to save us.

We pray: Dear Father, we thank you for your love, your care, your mercy, for always being near us, and most of all for sending your son to be our Lord and Savior. We ask that you would fill us with wonder this Advent season. Help us to remember all that you have done for us. Let your love flow through us to everyone we meet, so that they too may experience your great delight. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Gary and Susan Tobison



December 6

Revelation 21:3 **A New Heaven and a new Earth**

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."

Revelation, so many seem to think, it's the end, but really, it's a new beginning! (if you are a believer) Chapter 21 is about God bringing to us the new heaven and new earth, where he will live among us, the way it was intended before we sinned.

Also, in this Chapter it talks about this new heaven will be a place with no worry, no jealousy, no need for any monetary or worldly goods, no death, mourning, crying, or pain. This will be a place of peace, contentment, joy, and LOVE.

Since our theme this year is "God with us" this verse actually says "They will be his people, and God himself with be with them and be their God." We need to rejoice in the fact that in our eternal lives, we will be living with HIM, our Savior. No more worrying about all the earthly and worldly wants and needs that we seem to spend most of our time chasing. Which, as I keep aging, leads me to our REAL MISSION IS THE GREAT COMMISSION! (see, Pastor Doug, we have been paying attention). Ask yourself, what is it I am spending my time, talent, and treasure for? Earthly treasures or God's mission? God's got a great new place for us, so people get ready!

Heavenly Father, we thank you for being our Savior, for your grace and gift of eternal life and setting us free. Help us to not place our faith in the "worldly" treasures. Thank you for preparing a new Heaven and a new Earth to live in eternal harmony with you. Peace and blessing to all this Christmas Season. Amen

Jim Hogle



GOD IS WITH YOU, AND HE KNOWS
WHAT YOU ARE GOING THROUGH

December 7

Deuteronomy 7:9

Understand, therefore, that the LORD your God is indeed God. He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands.

God is with us

A Navy Seaman that was my dad

A Sailor's wife that was my mom

The Van De Mark girls

daughters of a Navy family

For Love of God, of Country, & of Family

That was our family creed and we lived this every day at school when we placed our hands over our hearts and recited The Pledge of Allegiance pledging loyalty to our country.

And God is with us

At the crack of dawn, the school flag was hoisted up the flagpole a visual reminder of those who shed blood & died fighting for our freedoms

Yet God is with us

Then came the school's morning announcements for the day

And what a day December 7, 1941 WAS.....A DAY THAT WILL LIVE IN INFAMY!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

And we cry out

Yet where was God in all this???

Father's & Sons dead in battle,

Husband's lost at Sea,

Young men robbed of their young lives &

Families forever Gold Starred

Yet, God is with us?

My parents were 10 years old, too young to serve

Yet, God is with us!

Hundreds of sailors like my dad, went down with their ships just like the Destroyer my dad sailed on.

Yet, God is faithful!!

Young women with young husbands forever parted

Wives abandoned

never to see their fighting husbands come home again

My parents were married 58 years

And Yet, God IS with us!!!

Children never to be born

I am the eldest of 4 beautiful daughters

Yet, God keeps his covenant of Love for 1,000 generations to those who love him!!!

So sayeth the Lord 🙏

Merry 🎄 Christmas ☩ America ☩

Lynne Van De Mark



December 8

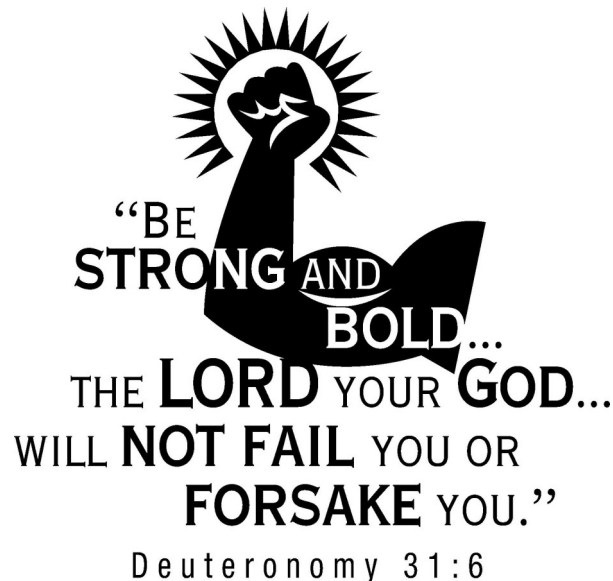
Deuteronomy 31:6

Be strong! Be courageous! Do not be afraid of them! For the Lord your God will be with you. He will neither fail you nor forsake you.

This is a verse I need to commit to memory. So often when faced with difficulties, I become overwhelmed with fear and anxiety. Often times it keeps me from moving forward and reaching out to others. This verse reminds me, and all of us, that God is *always* with us. Strength and courage does not come from our own abilities, but from our knowing and trusting in God. No matter what challenges we face, we can trust that God is not only with us, but He will never abandon us. He is there to guide us. He is working for our good. As a friend reminded me, I can get out of my comfort zone and move forward. I can do it by trusting that I am not alone. Trusting that God goes with me and He gives me strength and courage.

Prayer: *Thank you, God, for your love and being ever present with me! I'm sorry for those times that I forget this and let anxiety take over. Thank you for not abandoning me. Help me to remember that you are always with me, giving me courage and strength to move forward in your name. Amen.*

Kathy Vessels



December 9

Romans 8:38-39

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any power, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There is a chill in the air as I lay here tonight and think upon your words. Lord, you know “who I am.” You know “what I am.” You “knew me while I was still in the womb.” And yet you still sent your son, Jesus, to die on the cross to show us the depth of your love for us; to show us the desire you had to be a part of our lives now and throughout eternity.

Paul wrote this passage to the Romans and it is just as relevant today as it was over two thousand years ago. God is with us in the small decisions as well as the big challenges in life. Every day we need to open our hearts to his direction and offer to do his will.

I make a list of things to do but God decides what gets done. Sometimes I will run into someone with a million things on the list to get done BUT something in what they say changes the entire direction of the day.

Sometimes I know the person and other times the person is a stranger and I know, Lord, you have put me in their path for a reason. You give me the words to say when I don't know what to say. Sometimes it is just “holding space” for someone who needs to cry.

Thank you, Lord, for your unfaltering love. Thank you for walking beside me during this journey. And, when it's time... thank you for greeting me on the other side.

But for now, Lord, I am your servant. Let the light of your love shine through me. I am your vessel.

Linda Burdett

neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor rulers, nor
things present, nor things to
come, nor powers, nor height,
nor depth, nor anything else
in all creation, Will be
able to separate
us from the love
of God in Christ
Jesus our Lord.
ROMANS 8:38-39, NRSV

THE POWER OF THE INDWELLING SPIRIT

December 10

Luke 11:13

If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

Luke 11:8

I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

SHAMELESS AUDACITY!!!

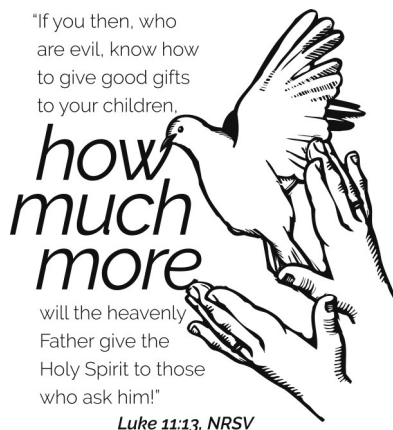
This goes against everything I know about being a kid and an adult. We didn't have much, and we surely were not encouraged to ask for much as I was growing up. Mind you, it was fine, but the idea of shamelessly asking for gifts from my parents was rarely a path that bore fruit. We were given what we needed and then some, but we were also taught to simply be grateful and not ask for too much. God shatters this, doesn't He? Here, Jesus tells us that we need to ASK, and we will receive, we need to SEEK, and we will find (Luke 11:10).

I am willing to think I am not the only person that was taught not to ask too much. But when it comes to God, what is too much? He is perfectly Holy and generous and loving and faithful, AND He tells us we need to ask and seek from Him. We love our children and want to provide for them, even though we are fallen. However, not many of us 'open the flood gates' on requests in a way that Jesus opens them in this chapter of Luke. The lesson for me is to not worry about asking too much, worry about asking too little!

Father, you are so giving and loving, yet I still fail to seek you and the Holy Spirit. Thank you for the constant reminder to ASK.

In Jesus name, Amen.

Jim Herr



December 11

John 14:23

Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."

I would like to think as I write this message that everyone reading this is in relationship with Jesus and are in touch with the Holy Spirit that is Jesus. John Chapter 14 is not a long chapter, and I would encourage you to read the whole chapter. John is the disciple that challenges his readers to understand that there is a spirit in Jesus, the Holy Spirit that we can have this Holy Spirit in our lives if we believe in Jesus and ask him to come into our lives.

My prayer for all of you who do believe in Jesus and have a relationship with Him that there is a renewing of energy to be able to carry out our faith in our daily walk with other believers and encourage the non-believers.

For my Christian friends that struggle to believe in Jesus I pray there is a spiritual awakening and that there is hunger to understand this baby Jesus that literally changed the world over 2000 years ago and continues to change peoples' hearts and minds today.

Annette Lang



"Anyone who loves me
will obey my teaching.

John 14:23

December 12

Romans 8:26

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

Wow! Christmas mornings always brought so much excitement. And my sixth Christmas was no exception as when I came down the stairs I saw the present I had asked Santa for: A real typewriter!

Now focus on what happens next....don't spend time thinking about the nerd child I was. As I bent over the typewriter, I saw that there was a letter typed on it. My mother said, "read it, Tommy." So as I read the letter perfectly and came to the close of the letter I read, "Love, Sharon." When what was written was "Love, Santa." My mother groaned and then simply said one word, "Tommy." It was at that instant I suddenly and assuredly knew exactly why my mother groaned. She knew.....I knew..... she was Santa!

I can only imagine that the same way I understood my Mother's groan is what Paul describes in this passage as how the Spirit can intercede for us. (Aaaahhh)

Please pray with me: *Dear heavenly Father, I ask for your Holy Spirit to be in my midst, to fill me and help me to act like one of your servants. Lord, mold my thoughts and even my groans to be intentional in these days of turmoil to provide solitude and hope in your love, mercy and grace. Holy Spirit please comfort me and fill me with the courage and desire to communicate with my heavenly Father even when that prayer may only be a groan. He knows my thoughts as assuredly as a little boy knows who Santa is. Thank you for loving me and blessing me. Amen.*

Tom Hooper

We do not know how to *pray* as we ought, but that very *Spirit* intercedes

Romans 8:26



December 13

Galatians 2:20 (KJV)

I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

According to Paul in this verse, Christ's crucifixion had become his own death to his old way of life. His present life is defined by his faith in the Son of God who loved him and gave himself for him.

How many of us could say the same thing? As we came to believe in Jesus and His death and resurrection, we might also say we have been crucified with Him, giving up our sinful lives as best we can. Even knowing we still sin every day, we also know that Jesus, the Son of God, born in a manger so long ago is with us every day, loves us and gave in to that awful death for us, because of that love He has for us. Keep the faith!

(As a side note, having so recently celebrated the Reformation, the rediscovery of the basic message of Galatians brought about the Reformation. Galatians is often referred to as "Luther's book," because Martin Luther relied so strongly on this letter in his writings and arguments against the prevailing theology of his day.)

Dear Lord, you are always with us no matter how life changes. If we hold on to yesterday's blessings too tightly, we miss the blessings of today. Help us to recognize your presence and ask your guidance in all we do. Merry Christmas! Amen.

Vicki Cooper



GOD'S IMMENSE LOVE FOR US

December 14

Psalm 86:15

But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.


Ah, slow to anger. How I pray I was slower to anger. What about you? It always amazes me how willing the creator of the universe is to love us and show us so much patience. Even when his patience was not enough, he sent his only son. Do you suppose God counts to 10 before he reacts? I very much doubt that he needs simple human tricks to avoid saying the wrong thing in anger. I ponder on this and realize He is truly perfect and patient and loving by nature, while we are fallen. Where we need tricks and tactics to manage our shortcomings, He simply does not have any shortcomings.

It leads me to prayerfully ask for this patience and love that transcends human weakness. Of course, we are not ever going to live without sin, but we certainly strive to be as Christlike as possible. As His disciples, we can work on how we react in a way that is foundational. I try every day to have a foundation of understanding and empathy to others to curb my sinful anger. Thanks be to God for His example and the Son he sent to confirm His love and faithfulness.

Father, be with us now and always and guide us towards patience and understanding and away from evil and anger.

In Jesus name, Amen.

Jim Herr



*But you, Lord,
are a compassionate
and gracious God,
slow to anger,
abounding in love
and faithfulness.*

Psalm 86:15

December 15

Romans 5:5

Hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

I pray God will be with me each day. And each day something new comes along. Sometimes it will bring a smile and with this I am given hope.

In the past I have always done everything myself and not asked others for help. Now I find I have difficulty lifting heavy things or the ability to pick things up, but there is always someone who helps me.

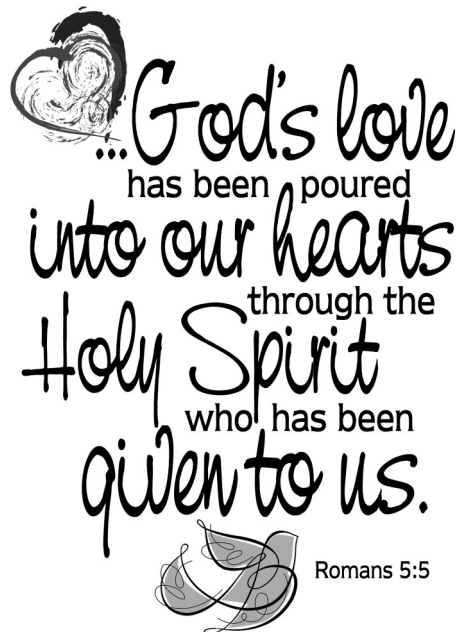
God has shown me that He will provide the resources I need—all I have to do is ask for help. Through this I have been given hope, and God has truly pour out his love through the Holy Spirit upon me.

This has shown me that it is okay to depend on others because God is the one who is sending them to help me. God's love for me is here because of the Holy Spirit. Each day the Holy Spirit sends hope to instill in me the ability to ask and rejoice in the fact that there are those who respond.

We need God as our Hope to guide us in the days ahead during this Advent season. Our Faith in Jesus and His hope bestowed on us as he gave his life for us, guides us as we move forward with a hope for the future.

Prayer: Our Father, continue to instill in us the hope you have shown us. We thank you Lord for being with us as you are always with us. We are so grateful to you and the hope you give us. Amen

Judy Wernersbach



December 16

1 John 3:1

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Seems like a simple concept, that God has lavished his great love on us. If we look around, we should be able to see it everywhere.

As a parent or grandparent, we typically, at least most of the time, know what love is and extend it. Our father God always provides us his amazing and unconditional love.

Hopefully, we are grateful and want to return to God and not only our fellow church members but also to the community and world. What more could we ask then be called a child of God? Perhaps we may think undeserved, but that's just the way it is. Am I good enough? Again, I am a child of God, and that is all I need to know and remind myself.

Let us continue to reach out to those in our own communities to extend the knowledge about the great God that we have. Likewise, may there be a global outreach to proclaim the Good News that a Savior was born for each and everyone of us.

And we pray – *Dear Heavenly Father, we are reminded of you in this world during this Advent season in preparation to celebrate the birth of your Son. We are thankful for the great love that you have so generously lavished upon us. May not only we, but more of the world, get to know you and share the blessing of being Your children.*

John Schutte



GROWING OUR TRUST IN GOD

December 17

Isaiah 40:31 (KJV)

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

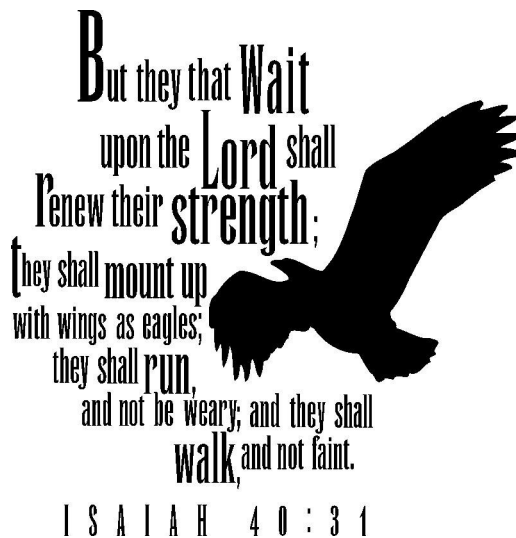
Our verse for today is a beautiful one, one we should keep in the front of our minds daily throughout the year.

The culture we find ourselves a part of, in this 21st century, is not one that is fond of "waiting." We are too busy to wait; we have too much important stuff to do; the day is over before you know it. But the waiting that "renews our strength" is waiting that is "upon the Lord." It is waiting that involves hope and trust. We wait patiently because we hope for future blessings in this life and a joyful reunion with our Lord after life. And as we hope, we also trust that He is beside us and guiding us at all times throughout our life here on earth.

Waiting involves meditation and prayer. Advent is a good time to begin because we are reminded of God's miraculous incarnation. We celebrate His becoming human, and we are reminded of how he was tempted just as we are, but was without sin. He was then and is now, Immanuel, God with us. He took our punishment upon Himself; God Himself paid the full price for our redemption. Let us worship Him with our inmost being this Advent season and beyond.

*Holy and gracious God,
thank you for coming to us
to reconcile us to yourself.
You paid the price for our
redemption. Help us to
fully appreciate that and
to love you to the point of
deep joy!*

In Him,
Trudy Kussow



December 18

Jeremiah 17:7-8 (GNT)

But I will bless the person who puts his trust in me. He is like a tree growing near a stream and sending out roots to the water. It is not afraid when hot weather comes, because its leaves stay green; it has not worries when there is not rain; it keeps on bearing fruit.

TRUST. We use this word in various situations. “Trust me, I know what’s good for you.” We, as parents have said this more than once. As a child who wanted to ‘do it myself’, hearing this was a bit rough. Our government uses this tactic trying to control the masses. TV ads do the same.

But trusting in God can be hard also. However, He provides His blessings to us if we have this trust – not fear. I read somewhere that if you fear/are afraid, then you don’t love/trust God. Ouch!! The older I’ve gotten, the easier it has gotten to trust my Heavenly Father to take care of my grown children and grandkids – whatever life throws their way. (Is this maturity?)

God’s got this!!! Let Him! He is so much bigger and stronger than we are! Whew – thank you, God!!

Father, you are awesome – worthy to be praised and loved. Thank you for holding us in your loving arms and helping us trust you. We love you, Lord!! In Jesus’ name, Amen and Amen.

Suzy Patterson



**But I will bless the person
who puts his trust in me.**

Jeremiah 17:7 GNT

December 19

Jeremiah 29:11

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

Jeremiah 29:11 is part of a letter that the prophet Jeremiah wrote to the Israelites living in exile in Babylon. They were being punished by God for their disobedience. God wanted the exiles to know that he had not abandoned them and there would be an end to their suffering. He had a plan for their future.

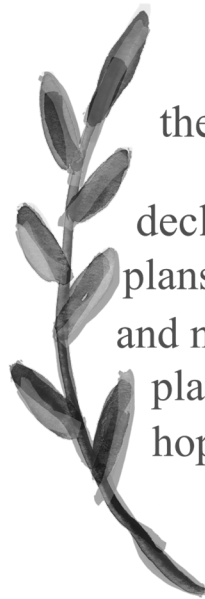
The Hebrew word translated as “plan” also means thoughts, intention, and purpose. As believers, God’s plan for us is to bring us into the new heaven and new earth that he has promised. In the meantime, we live as exiles here on this earth. God’s promise to the Israelites was a promise for all God’s people. And who are God’s people? In the context of this verse, it was the Israelites. But, when Jesus entered the picture, God opened the door for everyone. We are all God’s people. So the truth of Jeremiah 29:11 is still true for us today. God knows the big picture for all humanity, from the beginning of time until the end.

The Lord has a plan for our welfare and will bring it to pass in his own time. We are called to trust in him and wait patiently for the fulfillment of his promises. God doesn’t promise riches, perfect health, or a problem-free life. But, when we continue to believe and have faith in Christ, he does promise to be with us and comfort us in times of need.

God keeps his promise to us in the work of Jesus, his son and our savior, who brings us peace, salvation, and reconciliation with God.

Come, Lord Jesus. Our hope is in you. You are the source of our strength and comfort. You sustain us in times of trouble. We thank you for your faithfulness and love. During this Advent season, we rejoice in knowing that our future is safely in your hands. Amen.

Rachael Forster



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

Jeremiah 29:11

RESTING IN GOD'S PROMISES

December 20

Psalm 23:4

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me.

This verse speaks volumes to me. On August 12, 2020, when David walked out the door to the ambulance with Covid, struggling to breathe I had no idea we were beginning our journey through the darkest valley. Early the next day, Easter morning, the doctor called and said David was really struggling with breathing. He wanted to put him on a ventilator. When he was stable, they would transfer him to IU North ICU. I did not fear evil, but my world was turning upside down. We were in the season of Covid. I was waiting for my Covid test result. We were all isolated because of the illness. I was alone, or was I?

I later that Easter morning received a call that I had Covid. Christ the Lord had Risen. He had conquered death on the cross. Hallelujah! What would my battle be? Would I end up on a ventilator?

For 33 days we rode the roller coaster ride with good and bad days for David. I truly felt God's presence and the Holy Spirit was giving me insight and thoughts to use in the updates I shared with family and friends daily. David was not doing well. His battle with Covid was very difficult. His body could not fight this illness, and his organs were failing, his kidneys were shutting down, and he was put on dialysis. I was the person everyone was concerned with, but I did fine, and David struggled terribly. I had immune issues, but my Covid symptoms were minimal. Praise God. We were very grateful. God was with us.

At the end of David's battle, the neurologist called me to tell me that he had done a complete neurological examine of David, and he is not responding. I would have to make a decision regarding his condition. Little did I know that Easter morning celebrating Jesus's conquering death, how grateful I would be on May 14, 2020, when I would have to let him go and he was saved. They pulled the tube that morning so David would no longer have to struggle here on earth and could go be with God in Heaven. Praise God. Through all this, my prayers and the prayers of so many gave me strength and peace. I know God was with David and me.

Dear God, how precious is life and even more so with you in it. Your gift of Jesus to us this Christmas is such a blessing. How grateful we are to have you with us on our journey through this life in the good and bad times. For this, we give you thanks, praise and glory.

Peace and Joy!!
Jane Nee

December 21

Psalm 46:1

*God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.*

Dear sweet baby Jesus, we celebrate your coming birth amid so much excitement during the Christmas season. In the middle of the celebration, it is easy to forget the true meaning of your birth. I often think of the world at the time when you were born. It reminds me so much of today: a world in turmoil; a world where we think that all may be lost. Even so the world then and now is looking for the Messiah. The One who is our Savior. You are that One who provides strength and guidance. The One that protects us from harm and provides true happiness during life's challenges. Little did they know 2000 years ago that their Savior for which they were waiting was not a king nor nobility but a child who was born in a manger to an ordinary couple. Today, You are that Savior for us. You are providing hope for our future, protection from evil's harm and happiness during life's challenges. God our Father gave us His Son and because of Your birth and sacrifice we have the promise of eternal life after death. Thank You for being our "...refuge and strength." We praise You and Your birth which was so graciously given for our redemption.

Gary and Risë Helgemo

GOD
i s o u r
REFUGE
&
STRENGTH,
an ever-present
HELP
in trouble.

P S A L M 4 6 : 1

December 22

John 14:16-17 **Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit**

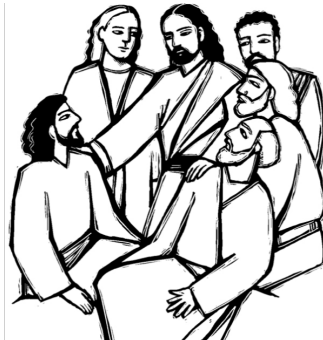
And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever — the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be^l in you.

In Hebrew, the word promise is an active verb. It comes from the root word meaning safety, confidence, trust, assurance, and security. In Chapter 14 of John, Jesus is speaking to the disciples to deliver the news that his time on earth is drawing to a close — news that is very unsettling to the disciples.

Throughout Chapter 14, Jesus is reassuring the disciples that he is not abandoning them. In fulfilling the promise of His birth, death, and resurrection, Jesus shares the powerful message of the Father's love and compassion for His people. With the promise of the Holy Spirit, Jesus reminds the disciples and us that He is with us always and will continue to dwell within our hearts. That beautiful gift is something we cannot fully comprehend and yet, as Christians, we know is ours for the taking. By believing in Christ with your heart, mind and soul, you accept the gift that was so freely given by our Lord.

Heavenly Father, during this season of Advent, help us to remember that the greatest gift of the season is your Son. We are blessed to be your people. Keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus now and always. Amen.

Judy Knafel



And I will ask the Father,
and he will give you
another advocate to help you
and be with you forever.

John 14:16

HOW TO WALK WITH GOD

December 23

Micah 6:8 (NLT)

No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

Here we are two days out from our Christmas celebrations. We hope you have most of your shopping done, plans confirmed, and are ready to welcome the Christ child of Christmas... our God coming into the world... our world... becoming flesh... becoming one with us. The trip that Mary and Joseph were making from Nazareth to Bethlehem was about 90 miles. Today that would be about a 2-hour drive. But at that time, the journey would have been four hard days of walking. With Mary so close to delivery, it would have taken closer to a week.

They were making this trip because Caesar Augustus was requiring a census. That meant everyone had to return to their family's place of origin. For Joseph, that place was Bethlehem.

With that said, let's give some thought to our reading from the prophet Micah. Our theme these last few days of Advent is walking with the Lord. And that is Micah's focus. Micah was a minor prophet of the Old Testament doing his work some 700 years before Jesus' birth. Micah hates injustice, idolatry, and disregard for the poor.

So in one of the best known verses of Scripture, he begins by asking a question, "What does the Lord require of you?" When we were in college, there were required courses, and there were electives. The required courses were the basics, mandatory classes everyone had to take. Just like Joseph was required to go to Bethlehem. It was non-negotiable. So three things Micah says are required. Micah uses some imperative verbs. They are verbs that ask the questions, What, How and Who. What are you doing? How and who are you loving? And How and with Whom are you WALKING?

How many times have you heard the most important thing in life is not "talking the talk but walking the walk?" So true! Faith is best expressed in deeds of loving kindness.

For the last 7 years, we have published a quarterly journal called *FootPrints*. Indeed, we follow in the footprints of all who have gone before us. And you can trace those footprints of believers to the one whose birth we celebrate.

To walk humbly with God is to live in close fellowship with Him in modesty and with our ego in check. You can talk about your walk all day long; but what God blesses is walking with Him. He wants to be with us. That is what Christmas is all about. Walking humbly with God simply means living in quiet fellowship with Him. Humble walking simply means living our lives so others can see something of God in us. In Jesus, we see what justice and loving kindness look like in a walk with God. Our Christian faith is a step by step process, each and every day, each and every way we can. A blessed Christmas to you.

Dear gracious God, thank you for sending your son in whose example and footsteps we are called to follow. Throughout his life Jesus walked humbly with you his father. May we strive to do the same. Amen.

Terri & Doug Gast

December 24

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV)

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

[This is a Christmas Eve devotion. I hope its faith encouraging for you!]

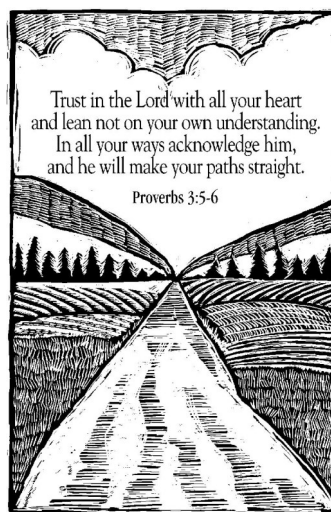
Trust in the Lord, *who is always with you*, is so important but sometimes so difficult. You love Him and are thankful for the blessings He's given you -- especially the gift given in Bethlehem's manger. But what do you do when difficult times come, and you've prayed, and it seems that He's silent? How do you hold on to your faith then?

Maybe you think that you need to do almost everything on your own, so you focus a lot of energy on doing that and become confused and your faith waivers. No, don't try to do all the work! Trust that God will show you the direction to go, and that He'll be with you all the way thanks to His grace and mercy.

How can you make sense of all that is going on in your life, especially during this often hectic season, and still trust in the Lord to handle it? Well, you need to lay all your fears, worries, and problems at His feet in prayer. And try not to think of this as difficult because it's actually the easy part! The difficult part is not picking them back up! Yes, many times you'll pray to God, giving Him all your pain and anxiety, but the next day you worry about those same problems. Only through true faith and trust in the Lord can you truly be free. Jeremiah 29:11 says, ***"For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future."*** Yes, God has a beautiful plan for your life. Allow Him to reveal it so that you can flourish in faith in Christ Jesus during *this* season and in *every* season of your life.

PRAYER: *O God, thank you so much for Your grace and mercy. Thank You for loving me so much that you sent Your son to die on the cross for me. The Bible says that You will never leave nor forsake me, and that is such a beautiful promise--a promise that can carry me through tough times. Help me to trust in You Lord. In Your name I pray. Amen.*

*In HIS love,
Pastor Dave*



December 25

Colossians 1:9-12

We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better.

As Paul prayed for brothers and sisters in Christ in Colosse, it was for *spiritual blessings*. In fact, his desire for *all* Christians is that we study the scriptures to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Savior, Jesus. *Why?* Because such knowledge enables us to walk with God and be wise about our salvation.

Paul also knew that pride can be dangerous because it causes selfishness and encourages reliance on one's strength and abilities. He knew that unless one's faith and witness are firmly rooted in God's love, they're like a "sounding brass" or "clashing cymbals." And if our lives aren't producing the fruit of the Spirit; patience, love, and joy, humility, goodness, kindness, and self-control, we aren't walking with or glorifying our God. So, Paul prays for us to be strengthened by God, and reminds us that the strength received isn't *ours* but from *God* who is with us to help us produce Spirit fruit.

Yes, faith is needed to remain strengthened by God and to be able to endure in this sin-filled world. In fact, the joy of the Lord **is** our strength as His power is made perfect in our weakness. Yes, as God's children, we're clothed in His righteousness, peace, truth, and grace so that we can endure and follow the example of Christ who came, as the Babe in a manger, *to be God with us* and take away our sinfulness. *Yes, folks, that's the reason for the season!!!*

Heavenly Father, I pray for all believers in Christ and for myself, that during this awesome season we'll be strengthened by You and helped to endure the trials and difficulties of life knowing that Your strength is made perfect in our weakness. This I ask in Jesus' name, Amen.



HAVE A BLESSED CHRISTMAS
EVERYONE!!!

Pastor Dave & the Hill Family



NEW YEAR WISHES

We Wish You Love...

- ✧ Within your home
- ✧ From a grateful congregation
- ✧ And a new realization of how much your heavenly Father loves you and your contribution to His church.

*"This is how God showed His love among us:
He sent His one and only Son into the world
that we might live through Him." 1 John 4:9*

We Wish You Joy...

- ✧ Of knowing you are in God's hands
- ✧ Of seeing the hand of God working through your talents and gifts
- ✧ That comes through the realization that your Heavenly Father is the source of all worthy things.

*"I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.
Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you;
He is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:10-11*

We Wish You Peace...

- ✧ To replace the encumbrance of anxiety and worry; let not your heart be troubled
- ✧ That comes from knowing your people are His children and your church is His church
- ✧ That defies explanation and allows you—while in the midst of the storm—to embrace Him as the solution.

*"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you
as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and
do not be afraid." John 14:17*

Pastor Dave Hill & Pastor Doug Gast



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