

TWENTY-TWENTY-FIVE  
CEDAR SPRINGS ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

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*Prepare Him Room*

LETTING GO OF WHAT'S HOLDING US BACK

# INTRODUCTION

This Advent season, we gather under a new invitation—Prepare Him Room: letting go of what’s holding us back. Advent is a season of making space, of opening our lives afresh to the God who comes near. And if we’re honest, each of us holds on to things that crowd the heart: fears, expectations, habits, or comforts that quietly keep us from receiving Christ more fully.

As we journey toward Christmas, we’ll consider what the Lord may be gently asking us to release— not out of loss, but out of love. For when we loosen our grip, we discover the grace of a God who longs to fill every emptied place with his presence.

Through the preaching on Sundays and the daily devotionals throughout the week, we’ll walk together in this season of holy attentiveness. Each day offers us a fresh opportunity to reflect, to surrender, and to welcome Christ’s renewing work in us.

This Advent, may we open our hands and hearts, trusting that whatever we let go of, God is ready to meet with his peace, his joy, and his transforming love. Come, let us journey together as we prepare him room—making space for the One who comes to dwell with us and make all things new.

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**JAMES FORSYTH**  
Senior Pastor

## HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

1. **Pray.** Thank God for his love and ask him to help you hear and apply his word.
2. **Read.** Read the daily devotional and the Bible passage it is based on.
3. **Reflect.** Ask the following questions:
  - a. **Head Questions:** What do you notice? What truth claims are made? What word/verse/idea stands out to you? How does this passage point you to the gospel?
  - b. **Heart Questions:** What resonates with you? Who do you identify with? How does this make you feel? How is God speaking to you here?
  - c. **Hands Questions:** How is God calling you to respond? To think differently? To speak differently? To live differently? To start or stop doing something? In your home, work, church, and community?
4. **Pray.** Ask God to work real and lasting transformation in your life by his grace and the power of the Holy Spirit.

**WORSHIP AT CEDAR SPRINGS**  
**SUNDAY | 8 + 9:30 + 11AM**

# SURRENDER CONTROL

11•30•2025

Luke 10: 38-42

WATCH THE SERMON



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[cspc.net/live](https://cspc.net/live) to  
watch the Advent  
Sermon Series.

This Advent season, you are invited to join us in-person or watch our Sunday worship live.

# UNFINISHED

12•1•2025

ROMANS 5:2

Every year as I prepare music for Advent and the Christmas season, I'm faced with my absolute unworthiness of his birth in my heart. The carols of Christmas tell of his purity, perfection, holiness, and power, but my feeble attempts to "prepare him room" look more often like the filthy stable than the beautiful reception he deserves. Each season is a struggle to wrap my mind and heart around my deficiency and his supremacy.

When Christ came, he came as perfection. He did not, however, come in perfection. He came as the holy God of Creation, but was born through a sinful woman. He came from the glory of heaven to be born in a dirty stable meant for livestock. He came as the ultimate Savior to redeem a marred and fractured people. In that moment, his absolute perfection met us in our irreparable brokenness. But that wasn't the end of his story.

Christ's journey continued through his sinless life, his undeserving death, and his everlasting resurrection. It's an act of grace and love so deep and powerful that it will continue to shape countless lives for all eternity. The human race will never and can never be the same again.

Yet here we are today, surrounded by darkness and struggling to keep our own sin in check. Though his light and love shine deeply within us, we often find ourselves wrestling with pride, jealousy, shame, lust, and hopelessness. We have a profound and irreversible gift in his salvation, yet it seems we are far from running the race with perseverance (Hebrews 12:1). But it isn't the end of our story.

Just as Christ's birth was a prelude to the great Christ-song that he continues to compose, this earthly life is merely the overture of what's to come—a life void of fear, pain, and sin; an eternity overflowing with love, peace, and joy. I will continue to fail and come up short, just as I have since birth. I will continue to prepare a muck-filled stable for him in my heart regardless of how hard I try to keep it clean. But my weakness and sin are not the final word. The dissonant melody that I have composed in my brokenness is not the concluding movement to the symphony. God alone is crafting the postlude. And it is glorious.

This Advent, let's join together in embracing all that our holy and humble Savior has in store for us. Despite the imperfect and dirty room we have prepared for him, let's lean into his birth in us and follow him on this great and mysterious journey.

*Hail, the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!  
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all he brings,  
Risen with healing in wings.  
Mild he lays his glory by,  
Born that man no more may die;  
Born to raise the sons of earth,  
Born to give them second birth.  
Hark! the herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the newborn King!"*

## PRAYER

*Perfect Father, you are the Desire of Nations and our heart's longing. Though we are incapable of fully loving and worshipping you in the way that you deserve, please continue to grow what you have birthed in us. Help us to understand you in new ways this Advent season as we bring our muddied and imperfect gifts of worship before the manger. We commit to love you now and always, our Prince of Peace. Amen.*



**BY WYLEY WILKIN**  
Associate Director of Worship

# PRESENT OVER PERFECT

12•2•2025

LUKE 10:41-42

Christmas carries a quiet pressure—the desire for everything to be just right. At least for me it does. Maybe you can relate. We long for perfection—for the perfect meal, the perfect gathering, the perfect photograph that captures the magic of this sweet season. But in our striving for perfection, we often miss the beauty of the moments unfolding right in front of us.

In Luke 10, Martha needed everything to be just so for Jesus (and wouldn't we?!). Her heart was sincere—she wanted to honor him. But her attention was fixed on the presentation instead of his presence. Mary, meanwhile, simply sat with Jesus. She wasn't trying to make the moment perfect; she was in the moment. And Jesus gently reminded Martha that only “one thing is necessary.”

Perhaps that is our invitation this Advent: to lay down perfection so we can pick up presence. In the sense of how we host, what we do with our time, or even what we post on our Instagram accounts, to remember that the most meaningful moments are rarely flawless. They are often marked by laughter in the chaos, warmth in the imperfection, and love in the middle of the mess.

When we look back on Advents past, our memories rarely hold the details of a spotless house or a perfectly set table. We remember the candlelight, the joy, the sound of familiar voices, the quiet peace of knowing we are loved. Moments make memories, and memories don't remember the mess.

This season, let's be present for the real moments—the ones that matter. The ones where Jesus is quietly near, reminding us that his presence is the gift. Whether you're surrounded by family, missing someone dear, or walking through a quieter Christmas, he wants to meet us right where we are.

Perfection fades. Presence lasts. And when we choose to sit at his feet, to slow down and notice, to love and to listen, maybe that's when we find the “perfection” we were trying to attain all along. The perfection we were made for, the perfection that was and is and is to come, and that someday, we will live out fully. Praise God.

YOU ARE INVITED TO SPEND

*Christmas*

AT CEDAR SPRINGS

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24

FAMILY SERVICE | 4PM

CANDLELIGHT SERVICE | 7 + 11PM

## PRAYER

*Lord, help me to let go of perfection and embrace the beauty of real moments. Teach me to be present with you and with those I love this season. May my heart rest in your presence, where joy and peace never depend on anything being perfect.*



BY BETHANY FRENCH  
Worship Ministry Associate

# HELP MY UNBELIEF

12•3•2025

MARK 9:23

This story of a desperate father bringing his tormented son to Jesus's disciples may seem like an unusual choice for an Advent devotional, but in this season of waiting, there's a lot we can learn.

The boy in this passage had been robbed of his speech and hearing and suffered violent seizures. His father brought him to the disciples hoping for help, but they couldn't drive the demon out. When Jesus arrives, the crowd quickly gathers around him. The father explains his son's condition, his voice filled with pain and desperation. Jesus expresses frustration—maybe with the disciples for their lack of faith, maybe with the crowd for their doubt, or maybe with a world so broken and afflicted by evil. Whatever the case, his heart is still full of compassion.

Having just watched the disciples fail, the father wrestles with whether Jesus could really do what no one else had been able to do. In desperation, he cries out words that many of us can relate to: "I believe; help my unbelief!" (v. 24). Jesus doesn't scold him for this mix of faith and doubt. Instead, he acts. With a word, Jesus commands the demon to leave and never return, and the boy is healed. Later, when the disciples ask why they couldn't cast it out, Jesus answers simply: "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer" (v. 29).

So why look at this passage during the Christmas season? Like the father, we often say we believe in God while secretly carrying around pockets of unbelief. We celebrate the miracle

of the virgin birth and proclaim that Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, yet sometimes we quietly doubt whether he can truly transform the darkness we see in the world around us—or even the struggles we face within our own hearts.

Advent is a season of hope and expectation, a time to remember that the same God who sent his Son into the world is still active today. The same Jesus who healed that boy is still redeeming lives, healing hearts, and shining light into dark places. Like the father in Mark 9, we need to cry out: "I believe; help my unbelief."

There's also a lesson here for us in the disciples' experience. Jesus had given them authority, yet somewhere along the way they seemed to forget their complete dependence on him. His comment about prayer suggests they were leaning on their own strength instead of God's power. We can fall into that same trap—trying to handle life on our own and then wondering where God is when things don't go as planned.

This Advent, let's remember how deeply we depend on him. And let's ask God to grow our faith so that our prayer echoes the father's words: "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief."



## PRAYER

*God, as we celebrate this season, please help us tear down any limits we have placed on you. We know that you are the same Jesus who came to us in a manger, healed the sick, and redeemed the lost, and that you are still at work in our lives today. Lord, may our hearts echo the father's heart in this story: "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief."*



BY DANIEL DAVIS  
Director of Middle School Ministry

# CHRISTMAS IN THE SADNESS

12•4•2025

MATTHEW 2:11

My mom absolutely loved Christmas. For her, it was the best time of the year because it was when she knew that her kids and her grandkids were happy. Even though she lived in a different state, just the knowledge that her family were opening those presents on Christmas morning brought her so much joy.

Mom passed away a couple of months ago. Soon after she went to be with the Lord, I drove the eight hours to her apartment where my sisters and I began the task of cleaning out all of the things she held dear. Among the photographs, dishes, mementos, and more, there were Christmas decorations.

Seeing those prized decorations—some of them the ones we grew up with—brought back so many amazing memories of Christmases growing up. My sisters and I, now in our 40s and 50s, spent time poring over pictures of ourselves as kids where we were opening presents around the Christmas tree. It didn't take long to notice that our mom wasn't in any of the pictures—that's because she was always the one taking them. She wanted to hold onto those memories so much.

And even though she's gone now, I suspect she would have loved to have known that we had that sacred moment together, remembering the good gifts that she gave us. In fact, it wasn't only the presents wrapped in gaudy paper that she gave us. The best gifts of all were the family she built, the faith in Jesus

that she passed on to the three of us, and the love that endures, even though we are all around different trees on Christmas mornings these days.

Christmas will be hard this year. Not because we'll all be opening a few less presents, but because her memory will always be tied to this season. As the years go on, I know that the feeling of sadness at her absence will turn into sweetness as we remember her.

The three of us (my two older sisters and I) have done our best to pass all of those things onto our families. We may not be three wise men, and we may not have gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but the gifts we bring this year will be the legacy of our mom's faith, the family unity that she fought so hard for, and the commitment to praying for all of us that she held so dear.

I suspect that Christmas is hard for many of you as well. If it is, it's okay. Jesus sees you in your sadness and he's with you in it. As for me, it will be a Christmas of telling stories about my mom, eating her favorite foods, and probably shedding many tears. Christmas is a time of joy, but that enduring sense of hope that we feel as believers doesn't always mean happiness. Jesus sees you and he knows how you feel because he feels it too. May your Christmas be full of life and light, even in the midst of your sadness.

## PRAYER

*Father, thank you that you see us. In a time that is so focused on being merry, merriment is in short supply for many of us. Be with us even in our sadness. Thank you for the ways that you love us when we're hurting, and thank you for the knowledge that you hurt alongside us. Help us to find joy this season, even among the sadness. In Jesus's name. Amen.*



BY JOHN BARBER  
Director of Adult Ministry

# GLORY AND GRACE

12 • 5 • 2025

MATTHEW 17:5

Have you ever tried to keep a secret? When you're young, it's almost impossible! And when you're older, it's still hard but maybe you've learned some self control, or maybe it's hard because you have to keep secrets like someone's having a baby! It's a secret soon to be discovered, if all goes according to plan, right? And some secrets you've been privy to are secrets that belong to others to tell. Jesus told Peter, James, and John not to tell anyone about the vision they saw "until the Son of Man is raised from the dead" (Matt. 17:9, ESV). Do you ever wonder why Jesus said that? I have, but I usually just skim that part of the verse and don't think much about it. Recently, however, I heard a sermon on this very passage from Dr. Richard Joe, the new Professor of Missions at Covenant Theological Seminary.

Matthew 17:2 (CSB) says, "he was transfigured in front of them." The Greek metamorpho (transfigured) is where we get metamorphosis, which means "a change of physical form, structure or substance; a striking alteration in appearance." I wonder how Jesus changed and why. Do you? Dr. Joe offered a clear gospel explanation. Jesus was revealing himself in his heavenly glory to his three closest disciples. "His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light" (v. 2) while he prayed. "Like" and "as" are used in similes describing his face and clothes in the best way possible. Can you imagine what descriptives you'd use if you were there?

The point was—and is—Jesus revealed a shadow of his glory in Matthew 17, but it wasn't the right time to reveal more. Moses and Elijah revealed the reflective glory of Jesus as shown in the parallel passage in Luke 9. But what Peter didn't understand was that the full glory of Jesus wasn't this appearance—it was yet to come.

What Peter, James, and John saw was like seeing a reflection in a mirror. What was to come was going to be the true source. If we prepare him room, he'll reveal his true glory and grace. In Matthew 17:9 (ESV) Jesus says, "Tell no one," and in Matthew 28:19 he says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." In this passage we see the reflection, which is still valuable, but "go deeper to the source" and "seek the greater treasure" (Dr. Richard Joe).

Advent is a time that starts the adventure of the gospel that is the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus kept hidden a temporary glory to a few on a mountainside and revealed a glorious love to the world on a cross! Prepare him room, for his glory is his grace! Prepare him room for his reflective glory to be revealed in you as you reflect his love and grace to the world. The secret is ready to be told! The "Son of Man" is risen and will come again! His revealed glory to the world—God's "beloved Son"—"listen to him!"

## PRAYER

*Jesus, you have revealed who you are to the world to us. May we be your light to the world, your anchor to the storm tossed, your grace to the weary, and your hope to hopeless. By your sufficient and powerful grace, strengthen our ears that we may truly hear your voice, and strengthen our voice that we may clearly tell of your gracious love. For your glory we pray in Jesus's name. Amen.*



BY CLAY HARRINGTON  
Pastor to Senior Adults

WORSHIP AT CEDAR SPRINGS  
SUNDAY | 8 + 9:30 + 11AM

# CLEAR THE CLUTTER

12·7·2025

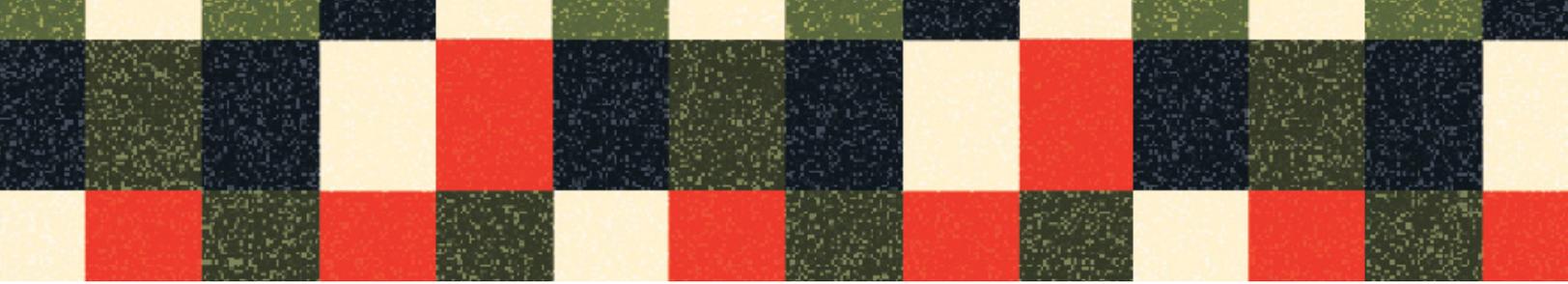
Matthew 4: 18-22

WATCH THE SERMON



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# COMPARISON

12•8•2025

JOHN 4:29

One winter weekday in 2007, the Big Valley Christian Lions seventh grade boys basketball team was locked in a contest with the representatives from Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School, the Falcons. The score wasn't particularly close; it was, as they say, "a lot to a little" in favor of the Falcons, and during a timeout in the fourth quarter of this blowout, a young Josh Douglass was called on in the huddle to enter the game for the first time and play out the rest of the running clock. You'd think this would be an exciting moment, but for an insecure, undersized, two-years-young-for-his-grade Josh, the huddle was marked by instant panic. A quick check of my teammates' faces to see how they would react revealed a smattering of jokes, disses, and sneers from boys who were doubtlessly as insecure and scared as I— as I was.

The game ended the way you would think, and while walking through the parking lot with my dad after the game, I started to cry. "What's wrong?" he asked. "Dad, they dissed me in the huddle," I said through gasps and sniffles. My dad responded with words that have been burned into my brain for 17 years: "Why does it matter to you what they think?"

He went on to explain that if I let the opinions of others dictate my wellbeing, I would find myself lost and blown around by the wind. The alternative was to find my identity in Christ, rejoice in the fact that I got to play the great game of basketball at all, and know that I was loved by him and my mom no matter what those boys thought of me.

As we move through Advent and ask what God might have for us in this season, take this moment to think about the

way you're comparing yourself to others. Whether it's money, success, put-together-ness, or like seventh-grade Josh, the opinions of others, sin within us often sounds like the voices of the masses declaring, "You're not good enough," "Everyone's staring at you," "You're behind," and so on. These voices take God's loved ones into deep pits of despair and angst and leave us feeling alone and unloved.

Encouragement can be found in seeing God made strong in the weakness of people like stout Zacchaeus, runty David, and speech-impaired Moses, but the Samaritan woman at the well reminds us that even in self-inflicted circumstances, the presence of Jesus and the power of the Gospel free us not just from sin, but from the opinions of others. A woman who, despite her present state and the chorus of societal jeers attached to it, finds relief, peace, and the exuberant joy to shout from the mountaintops that the life-giving tranquil heart spoken about in Proverbs 14:30 only replaces the rot of envy by the piercing, redeeming love of the Creator.

As we tell the world of the One who loves us in the midst of everything we are and have done, we pray that all would come and see him and know "that this is indeed the Savior of the world" (John 4:42, ESV).



## PRAYER

*Father, have your hand of peace on us in this season. Give us rest that only you can provide and remind us constantly that we are yours; and that is more than enough. Amen.*



BY JOSH DOUGLASS

Associate Director of High School Ministry

# CHOOSING THE GOOD PORTION

12•9•2025

LUKE 10:42

“Get out the door! GO, GO, GO! We are going to be late!!!” I yell across the house as we are trying to get everyone to the car. In this moment I realize that this has been the song of our season. We are rolling into school on what feels like one wheel most mornings. The activities we are adding to our plate are increasingly more. Don’t forget soccer practice on Tuesday for one kid and practice on Thursday for another. Oh and two games on Saturday. Do we even have time to sit down and eat together this week? Wait, we have class Christmas parties on Friday too! Did I sign up to bring something? My mind swirls with all the to-do’s as I’m reminded of Mary and Martha.

Much like the Advent season, a season of anticipation, preparation, and reflection, we often find ourselves caught up in the whirlwind of activity. In this passage, we see that Martha is busy with the tasks of hospitality, and the reality is that

Martha’s service is commendable, but her heart was worried. Her anxiousness kept her from enjoying her guest. While her sister, Mary, sits at Jesus’ feet listening. Martha sees Mary as being lazy when in fact she was being hospitable, and her heart was bent toward Jesus. Though Martha’s work is good and important, Jesus gently reminds her that being present with him is better. Mary is seen as having a posture of stillness, attentiveness, and devotion.

The craziness of our to-do lists and the hustle and bustle of the season may cause us to be too busy to reflect on our Savior. But he is the “why.” Advent invites us to be like Mary—to pause, listen, and to make room in our hearts for Christ. In a season that celebrates his coming, we are reminded that he is already here, waiting for us to draw near.

## PRAYER

*Lord, forgive our hurriedness. Help us to slow down this Advent season and focus on seeking you above all else. Still us in your presence. May we not miss the joy of your coming by being consumed with busyness. Amen.*



BY RACHEL MEEKS  
Elementary Ministry Associate

YOU ARE INVITED TO SPEND  
*Christmas*  
AT CEDAR SPRINGS

# AN OPENHANDED LIFE

12•10•2025

LUKE 21:3-4

In Luke 21:3-4 (ESV) Jesus said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

I remember my grandmother Lucy telling me when I was young, “You can’t out-give God.” Years later I asked her exactly what she meant by that, and she pointed out that everything we have belongs to God—not just our money and possessions but our bodies, our time, and talents. Grandmother Lucy was

talking about living an “openhanded” life. In Jesus’ teaching about the widow, we see someone who lived an openhanded, generous life, in spite of her financial limitations. The season of Advent reminds us that in Jesus, God generously gave us his very best; he held nothing back.

Like the widow, the more we experience God’s loving kindness toward us, the more we’ll trust God’s provision for our future and the more freedom we’ll feel in letting go of things we possessively cling to. Our hearts can find satisfaction in him.

## PRAYER

*Father God, in this time of Advent, expand our hearts with humility and move us to be generous givers of our resources, our time, and our gifts. Through your Spirit, teach us to live self-forgetting lives so that we might live generously, all for your glory. Amen.*



BY ALAN EDICK  
Pastor of Care

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24**  
FAMILY SERVICE | 4PM  
CANDLELIGHT SERVICE | 7 + 11PM

## LET HIM IN

Luke 2:1-20

# STEPPING OUT OF OUR COMFORT ZONE

12•11•2025      2 TIMOTHY 1:7

We all have a comfort zone where life feels safe and easy. But stepping outside of it often reveals our fears—whether it's public speaking, traveling, learning a new skill, or facing heights. For me, being around children is natural, but standing in front of adults is terrifying. Even writing this brings fear. Yet, I know that when I choose to step out of my comfort zone, I grow in faith and see God's faithfulness more clearly.

At Christmas, I think of Mary—a young girl asked to face her fears and say yes to God. She became the earthly mother of our Savior. What God asks of me pales in comparison, yet her “yes” encourages me to trust him with my own fears.

In 2 Timothy 1, Paul reminds Timothy of his sincere faith passed down from his mother and grandmother. In verse 7, he writes: “God gave us not a spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control.”

God's Spirit equips us to move past fear. He gives us his power—*dunamis*—the root of our word “dynamite.” It is miraculous strength that enables us to do what we could never do on our own. Have you ever faced something so overwhelming that afterward you knew, “It's not me...it is the Lord”?

God also gives his love—*agape* love. It is sacrificial, unconditional, and focused on the good of others. When we

act in love beyond our own capacity, we recognize it is his Spirit working through us.

The Spirit also gives us self-control. God doesn't leave us stranded and alone to figure this life out; he equips us to respond like Jesus. As we stay close to God by spending time in the Word, he guides us.

I experienced God guiding me in His strength and power and not in fear when my dad was at the point of Jesus calling him home. A hospital chaplain asked how I remained so calm and if I worked in the medical field. I simply said, “No, I'm in children's ministry.” She looked puzzled, but I could confidently reply, “It's not me...it is the Lord.” God had been preparing me, giving peace that passes understanding. I knew God was with me, with my dad, and in complete control of the situation.

So, where do you see this in your own life? When have you relied on his power, felt his love flowing through you, or yielded in self-control to what Jesus asked? Fear does not have the final word—God's Spirit does. And when we step out of our comfort zones, we see more clearly: It's not me...it is the Lord.



## PRAYER

*Lord, thank you for not giving me a spirit of fear. Help me rely on your power, live in your love, and walk in self-control as I face what feels overwhelming. May others see, “It's not me...it is you, Lord.”*



BY JACKIE CAMPBELL  
Preschool Ministry Associate

# ABIDING BEFORE DOING

12•12•2025

JOHN 15:5

There's a truth I'm learning to live by: God works in me before He works through me.

At the start of a busy day, I often make my list and dive into it, hoping to accomplish something meaningful. Sometimes I even ask God to bless my list. But despite my efforts, I can find I've accomplished very little for his Kingdom.

Then there are days when I begin differently.

I spend time with Jesus.

Not to learn something new.

Not to ask for help.

But simply to be with Him.

It's the kind of presence that doesn't need anything. Like sitting quietly with a close friend, sharing space without words, and just being together.

On one of those mornings, Jesus gently reminded me: he is not only with me—he is in me, and I am in him.

As I carried that awareness into my day, I still worked through my list, but John 15:5 came alive. This time I saw fruit. Eternal fruit. Kingdom fruit.

“Apart from me you can do nothing.” This passage reminds me that Christ works in me before he works through me. Christ is my source of life and fruitfulness. Just as the branch draws nourishment from the vine, I draw everything I need from him. Even Jesus, while on Earth, did nothing apart from the Father—he did what the Father did, and he spoke only what he heard from his Father (John 5:19, John 14:10).

So, I'm learning to let Christ work in me—giving me his presence and peace—before I ask him to work through me. When I abide in him, I can bear much fruit for his Kingdom.

INVITE YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS TO JOIN US FOR

*Christmas*

AT CEDAR SPRINGS

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24**

FAMILY SERVICE | 4PM

CANDLELIGHT SERVICE | 7 + 11PM

## PRAYER

*Lord, give me time with you today—not to get something, but simply to be with you. Help me love you and be loved by you. Let me know your presence and be present with you. May I find joy in you, and may you delight in my presence too. Let me be content in you as I walk through my day, and as I abide in you, use me to accomplish much for your Kingdom.*



**BY MARK STEIMER**

Pastor of College and Congregational Care

WORSHIP AT CEDAR SPRINGS  
SUNDAY | 8 + 9:30 + 11AM

RELEASE THE GRIP

12·14·2025

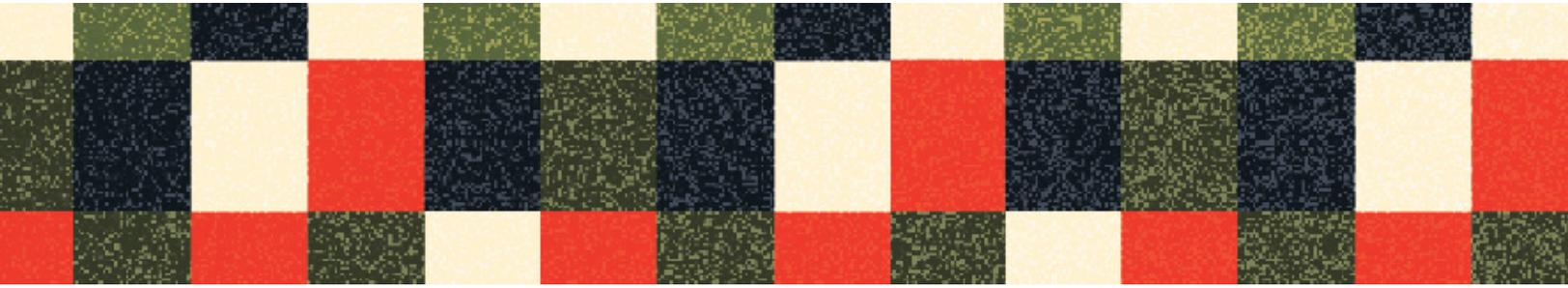
Mark 10:17-31

WATCH THE SERMON



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# TRUSTING THE LORD

12 • 15 • 2025

MATTHEW 14:27-28

This comes from the classic story from Matthew’s gospel of Peter walking on the water. Actually, Peter sinking in the water is probably a better description of what actually happened, but you get the picture.

As I’ve thought about ways that the Lord would be calling me this Advent season to “prepare him room” by letting go of what’s holding me back, one of the key themes that keeps coming back time and again is the idea of trust; trusting that Jesus was who he said he was and resting on his promises.

If you really pressed me on why this is hard, I’d land on the vulnerable reality that I simply lack trust in those moments to accept that when Jesus calls me into the waters of the future or the unknown, he’s already there. That’s exactly the picture we see in the verses above.

So often, Christ would tell me to “take courage” and “don’t be afraid.” It’s the risen and reigning Lord that’s calling. So often, I’ll follow that command for courage with a qualification or condition. “If it really is you, tell me to do \_\_\_\_.”

So often, he’ll answer not with words of condemnation, but with a kind and gentle affirmation, “Come.”

And so often, my feet will begin to sink into the water because I lack the trust in him and his promises to know that where he

calls his people, there he already is himself. And where he is there is peace and freedom (Phil 4:7; 2 Cor 3:17).

You see, there is no place that we can go to escape his presence (Psalm 139). Peter wasn’t going to outrun him on those waves! Yet, how often do we struggle to believe that as he invites us to step with faith into our own futures, it’s not because he wants to somehow learn about what that is going to look like as we do, it’s because he’s already there. He is there and is beckoning us as a beloved father calls out to his children to come and join him in the work he’s prepared beforehand (Eph 2:10).

Peter’s failure—and so often our own—is just as much a lack of trust in the Lord as it is a fear of what he’d be calling us to. At least for me, it’s not the waves that get me. It’s that I need to know for sure that Christ will be there with me. So, this Advent season let’s explore together what it would look like to hear the Savior say, “come,” and to follow him with our eyes fixed on him, the founder and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:2).



## PRAYER

*Lord, as you call us out to the waters of the unknown, would you grant us the faith to walk unafraid? To trust you for all that you’ve proven, time and again, that you are? You are the Lord, and we seek this season to follow you as your children with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. Cause courage in us until our faith is made sight. Amen.*



BY LANDON PAUL  
Pastor of Worship

# NOT PERFECT, BUT LOVED

12•16•2025

PSALM 139:14

I often struggle with a deep desire to make sure my work and actions are perfect. It's not driven by a need for praise or acceptance, but by a fear of letting others down. When I pause and ask myself what might be keeping me from drawing closer to God, the need for perfection stands out.

But then I think about Jesus and His disciples. They weren't perfect. Even with Jesus physically present, they made mistakes. They doubted, misunderstood, and failed at times. Yet Jesus didn't reject them—he loved them, taught them, and continued to walk with them.

The people Jesus pursued weren't the polished or the powerful. They were the outcasts, the overlooked, the broken. And he saw them as worthy. He loved them deeply.

This reminds me that God isn't asking for perfection—he's asking for trust. He's not measuring my worth by flawless performance, but by my willingness to follow him, even in weakness. My striving for perfection can become a barrier, a way of trying to control outcomes instead of surrendering them to God.

Scripture says I am fearfully and wonderfully made—not perfectly made. God never said he created me to do perfect things. He said I am wonderful in his eyes. God took time to knit me together with care and intention which alone speaks of my worth. He calls me to do my best, yes—but more than that, he calls me to rely on him, to trust the gifts he's given me, and to let go of the fear of not being perfect.

My identity isn't found in how well I perform. It's found in being a child of God—one He created with purpose and love.

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*Christmas*

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**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24**

FAMILY SERVICE | 4PM

CANDLELIGHT SERVICE | 7 + 11PM

## PRAYER

*Lord, thank you for creating me exactly as you have. I pray to surrender my heart to you and trust that as I seek you, you will guide me and my actions. Help me to remember that my worth is found in you—not in my work or accomplishments—so that I may draw closer to you. Thank you for your loving and intentional design in creating me.*



**BY LISA TARANTINO**  
Director of Elementary Ministry

# FOR THOSE WORN OUT AND TIRED

12•17•2025      MATTHEW 11:28

In January of 2024, I found myself struggling to get out of bed. No matter how much sleep I got, it was never enough. I didn't want to eat, go outside, be with friends, or do anything besides sit in my apartment and cry. I later went to my doctor and counselor and learned that I was struggling with depression and anxiety, and felt crippled by an inability to feel the love of Christ. At that moment, the words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30 met me very personally. Here, Jesus calls those who are tired and worn out to come to him, to recover the life they have lost through real rest and unforced rhythms of grace. If you or someone you know feels this way, know that anxiety and depression don't have to hold you back from Jesus, and in fact, you can be met more personally than you have ever imagined.

For those who are tired and worn out, few people capture what it looks like to go to Jesus with those struggles like King David. A man after God's own heart, he openly and faithfully pursued the Lord amidst the depression and anxiety he experienced in his life. In Psalms 31 and 102, David finds himself wondering where the Lord is in his day of distress. David accuses the Lord of hiding his face from him, and writes about his lack of appetite, issues with sleep, and the tears he can't stop shedding in his loneliness. He talks about a grief that causes his body to wear out, and talks about the anxiety and terror that come at him from every side.

But what makes these psalms beautiful is that David doesn't stop there! The second half of Psalm 102 provides a beautiful reminder in the midst of his depression: "But you, O LORD, are enthroned forever . . . he regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise their prayer" (Psalm 102:12,17). Psalm 31:1-5 provides a similar reminder to those struggling with anxiety: "In you, O LORD, do I take refuge . . . be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me! . . . Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God."

Beloved, are depression and anxiety holding you back from seeing the goodness of Jesus? If so, Jesus is inviting you to a life you might have forgotten exists. One that is full of rest and grace, where you can be motivated to live with Jesus and reflect the fruits of the Spirit to those around you. What you need to do is be honest with him and those around you and meditate on his living Word, and this free and light life that seems far gone can be recovered with him.



## PRAYER

*Lord, I am tired and worn out. The things that sustain me like sleep, community, peace, and even eating don't come easily to me right now. But Lord, you are still on the throne of heaven in all of this. I know you hear my cry and don't despise it, so hear this cry for restoration now. Restore the desire to engage in my life again, and help me enjoy you everyday more than the last. Be my rock of refuge and redeem my spirit Lord, for only you can. Amen.*



BY CALEB SKLENA  
Ministry Resident

# GOD'S WORK THROUGH US

12•18•2025

ACTS 4:13

I love the book of Acts. The events that happen and the boldness of the disciples and early Church never cease to amaze me.

It is not lost on me that Jesus came into the world from the humblest of beginnings and continued his works through people the world would never choose to do great things. God shows us in this that his kingdom is not of this world, and he will use people the world deems incapable of the things that they do if we let him.

For that to happen though, we must do two things:

1. We must be dedicated to spending time with him. This means we study his Word, listen for his voice, and abandon all other idols that so easily entrap us.
2. We must be willing to go wherever he wants us to go, and do whatever he wants us to do.

Those might not seem that difficult, but God humbles the proud and exalts the humble. He stretches us and sends us to do things that are impossible without him. He chooses to use us often in ways that don't suit our strengths or come easily to us. That is no coincidence. We are in a long line of the tradition of people the world would never use.

I invite you to ask the same questions this Advent season that I constantly must ask myself:

God, what do you want me to do?

God, am I honestly being open to that?

Am I simply showing up and letting you do what you can, or am I trying to do this of my own will?

## PRAYER

*Papa, I pray that you will open our eyes to see you this Advent in new and exciting ways that continue to steer us closer to you. May we be open to whatever you would have us do, and walk in whatever you would have for us with humility, grace, and wisdom.*



BY JEREMY JOHNSON  
Director of Sports Ministry

YOU ARE INVITED TO SPEND  
*Christmas*  
AT CEDAR SPRINGS

# WAITING QUIETLY

12 • 19 • 2025

LAMENTATIONS 3:25-26

It seems odd to use a verse from Lamentations for an Advent devotional. After all, Christmas is the furthest from something lamentable as you can get. It's about joy, celebration, freedom, salvation, the King of all creation entering our world, and it's about God's undying love for us. That is the best news, and the best gift, we could ever receive. So why use a verse from this book? Well, it's because we are speaking of Advent, and Advent is quite literally a period of waiting—waiting for precisely the salvation of the Lord. Exactly what this verse describes.

But the process of waiting can be hard. And this concept of “waiting quietly” can seem equally as mysterious. What does it mean to wait quietly? For many of us, the most difficult thing about waiting is to do it patiently. We may know that God is in control, and we may believe fully that he is sovereign and perfect in his plan, but how often do we still struggle against that? To truly just wait until his ways are known? We begin to grow impatient the longer the waiting takes, and many of us grasp for some kind of control over the situation. We revert to our sinful belief that we can make what we think is best occur. We believe that we still need to do something to bring these plans to fruition. It's so hard for us to truly remove ourselves from the equation.

Perhaps by looking at this concept of “waiting quietly” through the lens of Advent, we can be encouraged to use this time to ask God to help us not to fall into impatience as we so often do. During Advent we are waiting for the gift of Christ and the salvation that he brings. There is no way our human souls can do anything to overcome the sin of the world, and therefore this period of waiting for Christ must be done quietly. We have no other alternative; there is no human work in this Christmas event that we are waiting for. All we can do is sit back, “hope in him,” and “wait quietly” for the salvation we could never deserve. That's the very nature of the gospel.

So, this season, ask God to help you experience this period of waiting in a quiet manner, knowing there is nothing you can do to bring about the gift of his salvation. See what that feels like, be present to the truth of the gospel, and as other periods of waiting come about in your life where you feel that pull to jump in and take control, remember what it feels like to wait quietly as we do during Advent. Let our God carry you through whatever you are waiting on just as he does during Advent.

## PRAYER

*Lord, we hope in you. We trust in you. We wait quietly and patiently for the gift of your Son. The perfect gift, the perfect king, the Messiah you have promised from the beginning. Help us to slow down, rest, and wait quietly. There is nothing we can do other than that. Thank you for loving us. Amen.*



BY MATT KERR  
Ministry Resident

## LET HIM IN

Luke 2:1-20

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24

FAMILY SERVICE | 4PM

CANDLELIGHT SERVICE | 7 + 11PM

WORSHIP AT CEDAR SPRINGS  
SUNDAY | 8 + 9:30 + 11AM

Lessons  
&  
Carols

12•21•2025

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Sermon Series.

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# FOLLOWING JESUS INTO THE UNKNOWN

12•22•2025

LUKE 9:23-25

Growing up, one thing that always bugged me was when I thought my parents didn't know where they were going. We'd be driving in the car on a trip. Dad would be driving, Mom would be looking at the map. And if I sensed they were lost at all, I'd begin asking: "Are we lost?" "Do you know where you are going?" I just had to know. They'd always assure me that they'd find their way. But I didn't like it. I wanted someone in the car to know how to get to our destination.

Our lives can bring a level of the unknown. As finite beings we are unable to know all and be all to ourselves and others. The unknown can be paralyzing if we focus on it too much. The "what-ifs" start swirling and we are frozen by the endless possible outcomes to our situations and circumstances. What if we are lost? What if we never make it to where we are going? What if we run out of gas? What if, what if, what if . . . Jesus set a new standard of unknown when he entered our world.

His arrival brought a new level of mystery and wonder. The God of the universe came as a babe in a manger? His disciples responded to this wonder and unknown. They often attempted to stop him and ask him questions. Questions like, "Who are you?" and "Where will we find enough food to feed this crowd?" and "Will we survive this storm?"

I don't know if you've ever found yourself in a situation like this when following Jesus, where he leads you into a place of uncertainty and unknown in the eyes of this world. I've

been there quite a few times over the years as he has asked me to step into some difficult situations or situations that are unfamiliar to me.

However, I want to remind us of Jesus's words from Luke 9:23-25 (ESV): "And he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?'" Jesus patiently leads his disciples into deeper discipleship and relationship with him. He desires for them to follow him into the unknown—into the world that they cannot control—because there they will find a life lived with their Savior. Who wouldn't want to go deeper with Jesus? And the invitation is a daily invitation. He instructs us to, take up our cross daily, and follow him.

It can be hard to trust Jesus. Especially when it means trusting him with everything you have in this world. We cling to our possessions and relationships. And yet, we know that one day Jesus will return just like he left, and make all things new and right in this world. Everything will be okay, and everything will be as they should be. This is the only way we'll gladly and joyfully step out of our comfort and into the fray of living deeply with Jesus. This Advent season, would you consider stepping into the unknown and follow Jesus to a deeper level of intimacy with him as you trust him for your every need?

## PRAYER

*Father, help us to make room for you this Advent season to step out into the unknown and release the control we like to have on our lives. Help us to know and trust in your Son Jesus, and that your plan for our lives is the best plan. We believe you know what is best for us and we want to step out into a deeper relationship with you. Amen.*



BY JONATHAN BROMHEAD  
Pastor of Family Ministry

# LETTING GO OF SELF-AMBITION

12•23•2025

PHILIPPIANS 2:3

It was the most important speech of my life. Well, at least it felt like it at the time. I was a freshman in high school, and I had decided to run for class president. My ambitions of being an all-star high school baseball player had been flushed down the toilet the previous summer when I didn't make the team. Naturally, I had to redirect my ambitions elsewhere. If I couldn't excel athletically, maybe I could excel somewhere else—like student council. So I spent hours and hours preparing an all-important campaign speech. And I made some great promises about my desire to serve the student body and seek their good and make a difference in the community. Of course, I had no idea how I would do those things, but that didn't matter, because that wasn't really why I was running.

My ambition to run had nothing to do with anyone but me. I was looking for a place to be great. The ambition for success didn't die when I was cut from the baseball team, it just got redirected to something else. That's kind of the human way, isn't it? Always looking to get ahead, to stand out, to be set apart. Tim Keller described this human tendency, using the words of Jeremiah 45:5 (KJV), as seeking "great things for thyself." This phrase in Jeremiah is followed by a warning: "seek them not." It's a pithy little statement, "seek great things for thyself? Seek them not." It's easy to say, harder to believe, and harder still to live out. Isn't it good to work hard and

succeed? Isn't it good to accomplish things with the lives that we have been given? Isn't it good to have goals and ambitions? What could ever compel us to let go of selfish ambition?

Unsurprisingly, we have nowhere better to look than to the person of Jesus. "Though he was in the form of God," he is the one who "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:6-7, ESV). Jesus possesses all the greatness this world has to offer. He is God, and he is worthy of all the praise and success and admiration and fame and glory that we are constantly trying to get for ourselves.

And yet, he emptied himself and took on the humble form of an infant born into poverty. In the incarnation we see Jesus lowering himself and seeking great things for us. He became nothing so that we could have everything. We can only let go of selfish ambition when we realize that in him we have all the greatness we could ever desire. In response to Christ's self-emptying love, we can let go of our striving for glory or fame or worldly success and redirect that ambition to the love and service of others.  
midst of your sadness.

## PRAYER

*Father we are a proud and selfish people. Our hearts are always looking out for our own good, our own names, and our own greatness. Help us to take on the heart and mind of Jesus, to become servants who seek the good and greatness of others more than ourselves. Sanctify our ambitions to strive for your glory. Show us even this day how we can serve someone else in your name. Amen.*



BY SCOTTIE HILL  
Ministry Resident

# Christmas

AT CEDAR SPRINGS

LET HIM IN

12·24·2025

Luke 2:1-20

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24**

FAMILY SERVICE | 4PM

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# LESSER LOVES

12 • 24 • 2025

1 JOHN 2:5-6

What stories do you remember from childhood? As the oldest of five kids, I often listened to stories long past the time when they would be considered age-appropriate. Many winter afternoons would find a 10-year-old Allison snuggled with a chubby-cheeked little brother to watch Winnie the Pooh.

In one of these adventures, Pooh ends up comically trapped in a borough entrance. After gorging himself on honey, he simply cannot fit back out and finds himself immovably wedged in the narrow opening. His friends attempt to break him free, but at last tell him the undeniable truth: unless he refrains from honey—and shrinks his round middle—he will remain trapped. Pooh complies, but one tempting night he nearly gives in to his appetite. Realizing his vulnerability, his friends quickly remove the honey, while Pooh says lamentably to himself, “I wasn’t going to eat it, I was just going to taste it.”

While Pooh does desire freedom, his desire for honey still rivals it. I wonder if you, like me, have rivaling loves? Theologian Michael Reeves writes in his book *Delighting in the Trinity*, “. . . we will only change what we love when something proves itself to be more desirable to us than what we already love. I will, then, always love sin and the world until I truly sense that Christ is better.”

How then do we rightly order our loves? How do we know and experience that Christ is better? Let’s consider together John’s words:

*“But whoever keeps his word, truly in him the love of God is made complete. This is how we know we are in him: The one who says he remains in him should walk just as Jesus walked” (1 John 2:5-6, CSB).*

In this letter, John wants to assure his listeners that this Triune God in whom they have believed is the real deal—worth every ounce of devotion and obedience they have. He makes two of the most famous statements about God: “God is light” (1:5), and “God is love” (4:7). This God is one of complete truth, radiant purity, and generous love. And through Christ, he loves us with a love that is full, free, and perfect, with or without us.

Yet, that same complete love is progressively made complete in us as we learn to walk with Jesus and “find out what pleases the Lord” (Eph. 5:10, NIV). John shows us that the gospel of grace frees us from thinking we could possibly earn God’s love, while at the same time freeing us to diligently live into his love by choosing to do what pleases him. Dallas Willard sums this up well in his article in the *Christian Herald* (UK) entitled “Live Life to the Full”: “Grace isn’t opposed to effort, it’s opposed to earning.” As we both trust Christ and align our lives to his, our tastes begin to change and our loves find their right place.

Would we, this Advent season, look long at this God whose perfect love overflowed to us in the coming of Jesus, and then ask: Where might lesser loves (just a taste, even) be keeping me from living into God’s love? Then, led patiently by the Spirit, might we make room to experience ever more of his love by following him in child-like trust and obedience. Beloved friends, it’s true: Christ is better and his love sets us free.



## PRAYER

*Father, Son, and Spirit, would you help us to pause and to truly see you. In seeing you, would we experience your love? And in experiencing your love, would we desire to love you in return with our whole lives. Satisfy us with your love and free us to follow you wholeheartedly as we taste and see that you are good. Make your home with us, Lord, as we walk with you. Amen.*



BY ALLISON WALKER  
Elementary Ministry Associate

# SERVANT LEADERSHIP

12•25•2025

MARK 10:45

Christmas is the season when we celebrate Jesus's birth: God himself taking on human flesh and dwelling among us. But if we pause and look more deeply, the manger is not only a symbol of humility, but a call to a way of life.

Jesus, born as a servant king, showed us that true greatness is not found in power, position, or possessions, but in surrender and service. It is his character of leading by serving others that makes him strikingly attractive.

Yet many of us struggle to step into that calling. I know I do. I am often held back by the things that steal my peace and keep me from embodying Christ's love. Pride whispers that I need recognition. Fear convinces me that if I don't look out for myself, no one else will. And disappointment when life hasn't gone as I've hoped can lead to bitterness, which closes me off to giving and receiving love.

This is why Christmas is such good news. In the birth of Jesus, God shattered the chains that keep us bound. He entered our broken world not with armies or crowns, but with swaddling cloths and a feeding trough. He came as one who would wash feet, touch lepers, embrace children, and ultimately carry a cross. His leadership wasn't about climbing higher, but stooping lower.

Servant leadership begins in the heart. It means choosing peace over striving, love over fear, and humility over pride. Jesus said, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26, NIV). The Prince of Peace leads by serving, and his Spirit empowers us to do the same.

So, what does this look like in our lives this season? At home, servant leadership might mean slowing down enough to really listen to those around us instead of just accomplishing all the tasks. It might mean doing the unnoticed chores, or giving grace when tensions rise and leading in repentance. At work, it could mean putting others' needs ahead of your own advancement, encouraging rather than competing, and modeling integrity when it costs something. Everyday choosing to do the right thing, not the easy thing.

In community, it might mean extending hospitality to neighbors, giving generously, or stepping in where no one else wants to serve.

The irony of the Christmas story is that the way to true joy and peace is not through holding on, but through letting go. When we release pride, fear, and selfish ambition, we make room for Christ to reign in our hearts. And when he reigns, his peace and love overflow into every part of our lives.

Jesus calls us to walk in his footsteps, leading not by power, but by love.

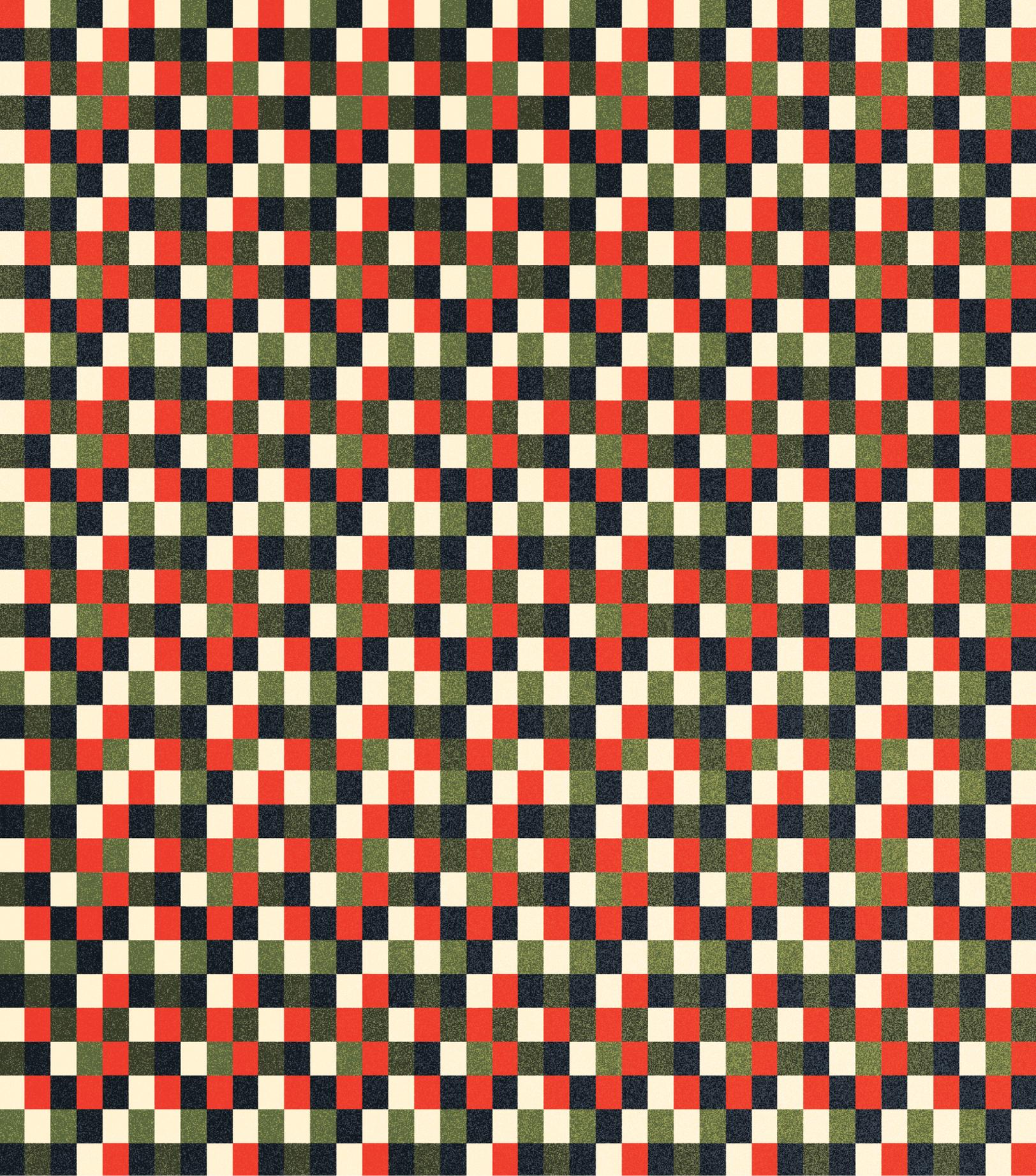


## PRAYER

*Father, thank you for sending our servant leader. Teach us to follow your example, laying down pride and fear so that your peace and love might fill our hearts and overflow to others. This Christmas, may we lead as you led, through service, humility, and love. Amen.*



BY STEWART SCOTT  
Associate Director of Counseling Ministry



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