



“IT’S A WONDERFUL LIFE”

A Four Week Advent Devotional

written by the Colonial Woods Missionary Church staff

It's A Wonderful Life

Christmas Devotional 2023 by various authors

Colonial Woods Missionary Church

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Cover art and interior design by Chelsea Zalewski

www.cwmc.church



"You see George, you really had a wonderful life. Don't you see what a mistake it would be to throw it all away?"

-Clarence the Angel

Have you ever seen the movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*? It's one of the most popular Christmas movies of all time. Every December, this 1946 drama lights up the screens of millions of homes as we watch the impact of George Bailey's life on his small hometown of Bedford Falls.

While the story is fictional, it paints a powerful picture of the impact one life can make. There is no greater picture of this truth than the life of Jesus Christ. Born over 2000 years ago, Jesus came down to earth as a baby, spending his first few hours lying in a feeding trough. Hard to imagine that this was the earthly welcome to the Savior King whose life would bring victory over death and restore our relationship with the Father. His life is the most wonderful life of all; because through Him, we can now have eternal life, and have it to the full.

We suggest starting this 4 week devotional on **Monday, November 27th** so that each week will lead up to Sunday's message and theme. Join us on this journey as we discover what it means to truly live a wonderful life in Christ.



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Luminos

 Acapella Christmas Concert

6:00 PM | December 3rd

Join us for this special **FREE** Christmas concert featuring a talented young acapella group from Indiana.

Doors open at 5:30 PM.
Seats are first come, first serve.



Don't Listen to Potter

by Pastor Phil Whetstone • Scripture — John 10:11-18

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." John 10:10

What good is a story without a villain? What good is a hero without a foe? In "It's a Wonderful life", it's Mr. Potter. The angry, miserable, greedy _____ (Fill in your own description) He is mean. He is greedy. He is miserable and lives to make others miserable. He is a thief, stealing the money found in his bank (\$8,000 left by uncle Billy) which he knew belonged to the savings and loan. He not only took that which did not belong to him, he used it as an opportunity to further discourage, humiliate, defeat and destroy the likable George Bailey. At one point in the exchange with George asking for help he spoke devastating words that planted a seed of destruction in George's mind. "George Bailey...you are worth more dead than alive!"

It is amazing how the enemy of our soul knows how to whisper in our ears. "You are worthless" "You are beyond Hope" "You should be ashamed" "You are your failures" "You _____"

Maybe you have heard similar words. What a difference when we hear the voice of God. Jesus said the thief, the enemy of your soul, wants to steal your security, kill your hope and destroy your life. But "I am come that you might have abundant life."

He speaks life to us. He speaks Hope to us. He speaks that we are of great value. More than simply offering days of existence, He offers a life of meaning, impact and significance. So reject the Mr. Potters, and embrace the Hope that comes only in the voice of Life, Jesus Christ who offers Life.

It's a wonderful life!

Read:

Isaiah 43:1-7, I John 4:9-10, John 10:11-18, Ephesians 2:4-10

Reflect: What do they communicate to you about how God views you?

The Gift We Can Count On

But Not One We Expect

by Pastor Jayson Tuckey • Scripture — Isaiah 9:6

So imagine back to when you were still in Elementary School and it's Christmas morning. Excitement is high and more likely than not, you have an idea in your mind what you either expect or desire to get for Christmas as a gift. And to be honest, at that young age it's not hard to confuse what you desire, with what you expect. Now it's time to open the gift and you can't contain your hyper anticipation for what's to come. You rip past the tape and get the corner of the paper and shred it as fast as you can to get to the waiting present. You get it open and it's not what you wanted. Not what you expected. It's not bad, in fact it's pretty great, but it's hard for you to move past what you were expecting.

For the Israelites, they too had expectations of what they were going to get. The Messiah had been prophesied more than 300 times over many centuries. It had become so ingrained in their culture that they had no doubt He would come. But after so many centuries both in and out of captivity, temples being built and destroyed, and massive cultural changes, what they wanted from a Messiah was more important than what God was wanting to do for them.

When they finally received their Messiah, many of them didn't even accept that He was really the Messiah because He completely defied their expectations. Jesus and His ministry ran countercultural to everything they thought was normal. But that's what Jesus does. To quote The Chosen, "Get used to different."

So the question is, what do you expect from Jesus today? Are you letting your own desires in life determine what you expect from Jesus? I've heard many treat Jesus like a "good luck charm". If I'm a Christian that means good things will happen to me, right? Everything will fall into place, I will get the job that I want, money will show up out of nowhere and I'll get everything I want? I am not saying Jesus doesn't care about your happiness, but I do know He doesn't care about it as much as He cares for your soul. What we've been called to isn't promised to be easy, but I do know it will be a greater adventure than you can possibly imagine.

We tend to want to put Jesus in our Christmas gift sized box, but He doesn't fit. If He doesn't, then we need to check ourselves and see if our expectations fit the Jesus that we see in Scripture. And if we let Jesus do the work in our lives that He wants to do, that gift is far far better than the one we're expecting.

When Hope Doesn't Look Hopeful

by Pastor Ann Harrington • Scripture — Romans 8:24-25

Christmas...for some people it is the most wonderful time of year. For others it serves to remind them of all that life is not. Psychologists tell us that the holidays are a time when many people feel overwhelmed, depressed and hopeless. But of all of the times in the year when we should feel hope, it should be when we celebrate the birth of the very One who is **HOPE!**

But I get it, the fact is that sometimes we look around and we can't see any hope. Our circumstances can blind us to the truth. That's true now and it was true for those living in Israel

If we look back at the night Jesus was born, nothing looked less hopeful than a helpless baby born in a stable in Bethlehem. Born in a tiny town, in a small corner of the world, into a marginalized people group that had no power and very little influence in the world at large. Rome ruled the world and the birth of this baby didn't seem like it would make much of a difference. Let's be honest, the casual observer wouldn't be betting on this kid.

But what looked hopeless from a human perspective was actually the birth of **HOPE** for a helpless humanity. Hope arrived as a tiny baby named Jesus. He grew into a man who would live, die and rise from the dead to save people from their sins. He came to offer the hope of eternal life, the hope of heaven, the hope of forgiveness of sins. The hope that the worst thing that happens on this earth will never be the last thing.

Paul tells us in Romans that hope really comes from believing in something that we can't see yet. Stepping out in faith, believing God means what He says in the Bible, believing that the birth of Jesus really did change everything, even though we can't always see it now.

On the night that Jesus was born, no one saw the arrival of a King. The world still didn't look hopeful, but those who looked beyond what they could see with their eyes, saw the hope that came with an infant's first cry.

Hope Defined

by Pastor Chelsea Zalewski • Scripture — Psalm 42:5

"Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God."

A lot of people get hope wrong. They think of hope as an emotion. Even Webster's dictionary refers to hope as a **feeling** of expectation or desire for things to happen.

However, Christian hope is not an emotion. Hope is a choice. It is a determination to believe in God's reality and promise even when the world seems to be crashing down around you. Notice in Psalm 42:5— when the Psalmist was going through a difficult season and feeling discouraged, he said "put your hope in God". That kind of language shows our active role; that we are to **"put our hope in God"**, means we make the choice to put hope on like a garment.

Hope is powerful because only hope can fly in the face of calamity and say "the world can do its worst, but still I will hope that God will care and provide for me!".

The Christmas season seems to bring a fresh feeling of hope in the air. Extended time with family, gifts to give and receive, cheerful music...all of those things are wonderful, but at the core of the season, we discover hope in the form of a small infant Savior lying in a manger. His baby cries pierced through the night air in the same way His unbreakable hope pierced through the dark hopelessness of our world. Our world was (and is) so desperate for His grace and salvation; it's what makes this time of year so special. That even when the world looked lost, dark, hopeless and abandoned, God stepped in to save us by sending His Son. Part of the gift of Christmas, is the yearly reminder of the lengths God would go to restore our relationship with Him.

As Christ followers, we need to remember the power of our hope. And it doesn't just apply to the Christmas season. We have a constant hope that we can lean on regardless of the time of year, or the circumstances we face.

The Rope of Hope

by Pastor Brian Ake • Scripture — Hebrews 6:19-20

"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus has entered on our behalf."

It's a Wonderful Life is one of my favorite Christmas Movies. George Bailey loses all hope to the point of taking his own life when Uncle Billy loses the \$8000 dollars (which when adjusted for inflation to today is over \$100,000). But, it is the thieving money baron, Mr. Potter, who actually steals the money trying to ruin George Bailey and his business. George Bailey almost surrenders to Mr. Potter when he meets with him in desperation. But he wisely decides against it. I love the end of the movie when George Bailey comes to his senses and though he knows he may be going to jail; he realizes what he has in his wife, family and life and has a different outlook toward his hardship. I shed tears when the town shows up at his house at the end of the film and poured money in front of him to cover the \$8000.

What spiritual or physical battle might you be facing today that our "Mr. Potter" (Satan) is using to try and steal your hope and cause you to give up on Jesus? Physical hardships; unanswered prayers; financial issues; temptations! Let me encourage you with Hebrews 10:23 *"Let us **HOLD** unswervingly to the Hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful."*

Our hope in the Lord is not something that "may" happen. For example: "I hope it doesn't rain today." "I hope I don't become ill." No! Hope in the Lord is something that is sure and certain. Our hope is an "anchor" for the soul. We all know that ships have an anchor connected to a chain that connects to the ship. Well, our anchor in heaven is connected to God Almighty in the Holy of Holies because of what Jesus did for us on the cross. That anchor is connected like a grappling hook from glory down to us by a rope. We hang onto that rope. Don't let go no matter what. It is interesting that the Hebrew word for hope is **tiqvah**; which when translated means: "Rope."

Romans 8:18 *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."*

No matter what we are suffering through on this earth; don't give in to "Mr Potter"; But, realize the HOPE you have in Christ and never let go of the **"ROPE OF HOPE"**

Romans 12:12 - *"Be Joyful in **HOPE**; patient in affliction; fervent in Prayer."*

Sounds of the Season

Check out our Christmas Playlist on Spotify!



Peace in the Midst of a Storm

by Pastor Bruce Ake • Scripture — Philippians 4:7

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

In the classic movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey's life takes a turn for the worse and he reaches a point of total despair. Yet throughout the movie, we can see how George realizes that his life still has value for his family, business and his community.

Most of us can probably relate to the times when we had similar experiences and/or feelings of having no peace in our lives - maybe even to the point "like George" of ending it all. In these times, we can turn to God's Word for the needed peace to take us through the journey of intense frustration.

Take a look, again, at the scripture above - "*Do not be anxious about anything.*" Not very easy when we may not be thinking clearly at the time. However, God calls us to not be anxious. We certainly understand that anxiety does not lead to peace.

Remember when George prayed? From that point, his life began to change when he asked God for help. Prayer is a powerful weapon we can use during anxious times. George eventually discovered peace through the strength and comfort God gave to him while facing desperate times. An amazing life-change took place when George began to discover more and more how great his life actually was (though he still never found the money Potter kept for himself). Like George, try and find the reasons why we can be grateful for what we do have and let God take care of the rest.

So, I say go and watch the movie again, or maybe for the first time. Reflect on George's lesson of peace during the midst of a storm. It certainly wasn't enjoyable while on the journey, but in the end he experienced the peace that transcends all understanding and guarded his heart in spite of his circumstances.

Go and live your life the best you can with God to help you and you will discover, as well, that..."It's a Wonderful Life!"

A Wonderful Life of Peace

by Sean Hurley • Scripture — John 14:27

It's a Wonderful Life is a classic movie that reminds us of the profound impact one person can have on the lives of those around them. It's a story of redemption, selflessness, and the profound realization that every life has a purpose. In a similar way, our journey as Christians is filled with the promise of a wonderful life—a life of peace that transcends understanding.

In John 14:27, Jesus assures His disciples and us of the gift of His peace. This peace is unlike any the world can offer because it is a peace that originates from the Prince of Peace himself. It's not dependent on our circumstances, but rather on our connection with Christ. Just as George Bailey came to realize the impact of his existence, we, too, have a significant role to play in God's divine plan.

In the midst of life's challenges, we may often wonder, "Is my life making a difference? Does it matter?" The answer is a resounding "Yes!" Just as George Bailey had a profound influence on the people in Bedford Falls, your life has a purpose that goes far beyond what you can see. God has placed you in the lives of others to be a source of His peace, love, and joy. But how do we experience this wonderful life of peace in the midst of life's ups and downs? Here are a few steps to consider:

1. **Trust in God:** Just as George Bailey learned to trust in the greater plan, we must trust that God is in control and has a purpose for our lives. Trust that His peace will sustain you.
2. **Surrender Your Worries:** Release your fears and anxieties to God through prayer. As you do, you'll find that His peace guards your heart and mind.
3. **Focus on Others:** Like George Bailey, find joy in serving and helping others. Acts of kindness and love can bring peace not only to others but also to your own heart.
4. **Reflect on God's Promises:** God's Word is filled with promises of His peace. Spend time reading and meditating on these promises to remind yourself of the wonderful life He offers.

In the end, just as George Bailey's life was wonderfully transformed, our lives can also be marked by a profound sense of peace when we live in alignment with God's purpose. Your life matters, and it is indeed a wonderful life when lived in the light of Christ's peace. Embrace it, share it, and let the peace of Christ overflow in your life and the lives of those around you.

Cast Your Cares

by Pastor Katie Johnson • Scripture — Philippians 4:6-9

Who here has ever been anxious? Who freaks out a little over that? Maybe a test result from a doctor? The doctors have to do more tests and you wait on the phone call, knowing their response could change everything. Maybe you are anxious when it comes to friendships and family relationships. What about your future? Does that bring you anxious thoughts? Let's be honest ... we all have been anxious before!

Read Philippians 4:6-9. These verses are my life verses. They remind me that in the midst of everything to go to God and not to worry.

1 Peter 5:7 says, *"Cast all your cares upon Him for He cares for you."*

Things happen in this life. Some are within our control; maybe we've made mistakes and are facing the consequences of them. Some things are beyond our control: family issues, health problems, and world problems. But the amazing thing is what God's response is to all that: *"Cast your cares upon me."*

Throw them to God. Give your mistakes, your fears, and your worries to Him, because He cares for you. And when you do that, something amazing happens.

What makes the peace so different is that it's not based on what is going on in the world. In life, there are situations that will happen to you. There will be big, tough situations, and small ones. Maybe your family will face divorce, or you'll fail a test or lose a job, have a sickness hit your family, or lose a loved one. During those times, God wants to bring you peace. He doesn't want you to trudge through all this alone.

He wants to give you a peace that will keep you firmly planted when life tries to knock you down. A peace that will keep you from moving backward when trouble comes. Instead, God's peace will keep you moving forward through all that life throws at you.

Lonely Peace

by Pastor Dan Hamrick • Scripture — John 14:15-31; Romans 12:2

"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."

For those of you who know me, I love spending time with people. I have been known to be called a "People Person". I enjoy people so much that when people are not around I tend to get very lonely. If I go long periods of time without people I can get an overwhelming sense of loneliness that overcomes me.

Loneliness comes in all forms to all people. It can be a lack of people in your life, lack of belonging, lack of fitting in, lack of social contact, simply put loneliness means different things to different people. Even those who like to be alone and are not "people" people struggle with loneliness. And it is in that "loneliness" that our soul tends to lack "peace".

One definition of loneliness I read said that loneliness is a "state of mind linked to a certain need not being filled." As I read this definition something stood out to me. That if loneliness is truly a "state of mind" that means it can be changed.

Romans 12:2 tells us that we need to *"be transformed by the renewing of our mind"* in order to be in God's will. So how do we do that? How do we begin transforming our minds? Well, it's not by ourselves. It's with the help of the Lord. If you haven't already, take a few minutes and read John 14:15-31.

Did you see it? Verses 16-17 states...*"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 in you."*

Even when you feel at your most vulnerable and lonely, we need to remember that, when you have Christ as your Savior, you are never alone. He has left his Holy Spirit with us and inside of us. And it's in that knowledge that he reminds us in verse 27 *"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."*

It's in this "Lonely Peace" that God says he is always with you and will never leave you!

A Calm Heart

by Christina Stein • Scripture — Psalm 29:11

"The Lord gives strength to his people, and the Lord blesses his people with peace."

After spending the day outside in the cold there is nothing better than to get home, curl up with a blanket, sip some warm delicious drink and be still in the soft glow of twinkling Christmas lights. Just thinking about it makes me feel content, cozy, and peaceful.

When talking to my preschoolers about things like "Peace" I realize I know how it feels, but it's hard to put into words that they will understand. So I break down the concept, research all the definitions and try to figure out how to relate it to my little friends. Some of the best definitions came from kids themselves:

- Peace is when we get along.
- Peace is not fighting.
- Peace is feeling safe.
- Peace is not feeling worried.
- Peace is not feeling mad.
- Peace is when our hearts are calm.

Do you feel peaceful? This season can be challenging to have a calm heart. Schedules are crazy and there are so many extra things to do. Add to that strained relationships with family, financial stress or health issues and to many it may not feel like the most wonderful time of the year.

In Matthew 11:28 it says, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."* We are blessed with a loving God who knows you and understands you. He knows your hardships, but He also knows the plan He has for you and the reasons for it all.

I encourage us all to take time this season to be still and seek the one who blesses His people with peace.



Colonial Woods Missionary Church presents

THE
JOURNEY
A Christmas Musical

Dec. 15, 16, 17

CHRISTMAS MUSICAL 2023

7:00 pm



Joy Filter

by Lisa Henry • Scripture — Colossians 3:2

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." John 10:10

Especially during the Christmas season we hear about joy. We sing about it! But sometimes...joy may seem elusive. Hidden. Lost.

In the movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*, George loses sight of joy. On Christmas Eve, life deals him a seemingly final blow and his joy is shattered. He tries feverishly to focus in and fix an insurmountable problem to no avail. He returns home, still focused on all that has gone wrong and that focus becomes his filter. The lens through which he sees everything, including himself. He goes home and sees everything there through a joy-less perspective. He sees a drafty, broken home filled with bothersome noise and problems. He loses his temper, barks at his family, and leaves. Finally, still focused on the trouble and mess of the day, George cries out a prayer of desperation. This crucial moment is where George begins to refocus. To fix the lens that sees only problems and hides joy.

Many of us can relate to this scenario. Life certainly brings its share of trouble, mess and sorrow. There are times that we are far more aware of anguish than joy. In Colossians 3:2 God's word reminds us to refocus. He says, *"Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things."*

Too often in times of desperation we replay problems over in our minds, trying to find solutions when instead, we need to pray, refocus and regain perspective. This helps us fix our minds on things above, finding that joy, deep, deep down in our hearts. Joy, rather than happiness, chooses to respond to the things of this world with a contentment that God is with us and will remain in us. We may be shaken, but we are not without hope.

George learns a great lesson in this beautiful movie. He rediscovers the joy deep within and runs home. With a renewed focus on the things that matter, he sees everything through the lens of joy. The trouble and mess of the day remain. His home is still drafty, broken and noisy. But George has rediscovered joy.

This season, and always, may we not lose sight of joy, no matter the circumstances. Let's fix our mind on things above and sing out loud or within our hearts, "Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Joy, unspeakable joy!"

My Abacus Is Broke

by Pastor Tim McCulloch • Scripture — James 1:2

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds”

If there is something that I am good at, it is counting. Throughout the year, I count all sorts of things. Obviously, I am very involved in counting and tracking the weekly offerings. Counting the cost of keeping the church's doors open is another aspect of my job. I also count people, bulletins, flowers, time . . . okay . . . I count a lot of things. I am obsessed with counting. I find immense joy in counting, but I have never found any joy in counting my trials.

Let's just forget about counting the trials. There are so many other things that can be joyfully counted. I was always one to count the number of presents that I would get under the Christmas tree to compare to the amount received by my brothers so that I could ensure I was still my parents' favorite child. Counting the variety of Christmas cookies consumed is another activity that brings joy. I count it all joy to tabulate marshmallows in hot cocoa, Christmas carols sung, and viewings of "It's a Wonderful Life." (I may draw the line at joyfully counting fruitcakes.) With so many other fun things to count, why on earth would I want to joyfully count my trials?

James writes this verse acknowledging something that we all know is true. This life we live is not filled with only candy canes and gingerbread men. There have been and will continue to be trials that we encounter. Even in the midst of this Christmas season, we will encounter trials. For some, it seems that every Christmas season presents a new trial to endure.

When these trials inevitably arrive, there are two routes we can take. We can try to take on the trial with our own strength. This will lead to frustration and exhaustion. The second route is relying on the ever present, all knowing power of God to help us navigate the trial. To understand that God is able to use the trial to mold you more into His image. To remember that God loves you so much that He is not going to leave you alone as you face this trial or any other trial that comes afterward.

Counting it all . . . joy when you meet trials should not be viewed through the miserly lens of Ebenezer, but through the expectant view of Tiny Tim. Trials are not fun, but JOY can be found in them knowing that God will be by our side throughout them and His ultimate plan for our lives is unshakeable and undeterred.

Joy? Joy. Joy!

by Kylie Niedecken • Scripture — Job 6:10; Lamentations 3:22-24

"At least I can take comfort in this: Despite the pain, I have not denied the words of the Holy One."

The English dictionary holds approximately 171,476 words and yet there is a simple 3 letter word that tends to throw everybody for a loop—joy. What is it? Is it an emotion? Is it impossible to obtain on this side of Heaven? What is joy and how in the world can we find it?

Oftentimes when we think of the word 'joy' the story of Job doesn't even cross our mind, but he gives us one of the best scriptural examples of joy. Job had gone through immense suffering that no one would even wish on their worst enemy, and yet, he found his joy in his faith in God. Joy is a choice of perspective and a relationship with Christ, so it can only exist with Christ. Anything else is just happiness, which comes and goes in waves that can leave us feeling stranded. But joy is so much more than that.

*"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

*"The Lord is my portion," says my soul,
"therefore I will hope in him."*

Lamentations 3:22-24

Sometimes it can be easy for us to choose joy on a day like December 25th when we're reminded of Jesus' birth, but what about December 26th? December 26th has seemingly no importance, it's back into the mundane. The Christmas festivities are all wrapped up and life is starting to resume back to its normal ways. Google will tell you that April 11th is the most boring day of the year and yet it has the potential to be filled with joy—because every single day can be! Joy and mercy are new every morning (Psalm 30:5). A fun fact about me is that I am the furthest thing from a morning person, so choosing joy every morning can be a real challenge! But this is where faith comes in! Joy is readily available to you every single day through Christ, so what are you going to choose today?

There's Joy in the Details

by Lester Killion • Scripture — Romans 15:13, Psalms 139:13-18

The journey of our new born King is a popular story to be told around Christmas time. Joseph sets off to Bethlehem with his pregnant bride on a donkey to be counted hoping Jesus would come soon. The birth was as humbling as possible with the King of Kings born in an animal's shelter, wrapped in a borrowed cloth and laid in a feeding trough for a bed. The birth of Jesus brings us great joy as we celebrate His beginning as man, but have you given thought to each little detail, so minute in size, that still holds purpose and brings joy?

I was tying my shoes one morning in a hurry and one of my shoelaces broke. This travesty never comes at the right moment when I have time to spare or an extra pair of laces handy however, I was able to adjust the situation and get to my destination on time. The next day as I strung a new pair of laces through the eyelets and tightened them up I couldn't believe how much joy they brought me. I'm not sure if it was the clean new look or the lack of worry but I found joy in this small detail of my morning - a shoelace!

I have put a lot of praise and found a lot of joy in the details of life since that morning. I smile and thank God when my shoes are tied with complete laces He provided. Imagine the joy Mary and Joseph may have felt with each grain of sand under the hooves of the donkey, each thread of fabric in the blanket, or each bit of soft hay for Jesus to lay on comfortably. God is in the business of large miracles such as the birth of our Savior but every detail is carefully put together by Him as well.

This Christmas and the days to follow find joy in the details that make up the great things in life. Each snowflake has a destination as the ground is painted white, each note that makes up the carol, each piece of tape used to wrap a present and even every small grain or glitter used to make a child's masterpiece. There is joy in the details of every one of God's creations - even the shoelaces. Be blessed!

Great Joy is Who?

by Jacob Falk • Scripture — Luke 2:10

"And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.'" -Luke 2:10

Picture this- it's a Monday morning and suddenly, your boss comes to you and says, "I have good news for you." Instantly thoughts of a dream vacation, raise, or maybe a promotion race through your mind. You take a guess! However, your boss looks at you with a great big smile on his face and says, "I will be giving you great joy" ... what is so great about joy and how are YOU going to give it to me?

This great joy that we get in Luke 2 is not someTHING but someONE. The angels are bringing good news of Jesus who will be for all the people. Through Jesus we receive the gift of eternal life with the Father. Not only that, but Jesus also tells us that His joy is in us and it will fill us up. (John 15:11)

This joy has come in the healings, the teachings, and the promises that God gives us. It is the joy of the man who receives his sight and falls at the feet of Jesus (Luke 17). The joy of the woman who is told everything about her and ran and told everyone (John 4). This is the joy of the disciples when they see the risen Christ. Finally, it is the joy we will have when we are worshiping God with all the saints in the throne room (Revelations 7).

For me His joy fills me up with others. I can feel His joy in the late-night-college-ramen fellowship time with my best friend, or wandering through IKEA because your friends know how much you like Sweden. The joy in Sunday morning greetings from people at Colonial Woods who are excited to see you. The joy in eating lunch with coworkers who challenge you to eat hot sauce that is way too hot. These moments that make you praise God for all He has given you.

The announcement of great joy is one of joy today and in eternity because of the **ONE** who is our great joy. May His joy fill you this holiday season and continue to fill you till the day we are reunited.



Christmas Eve

➤ CANDLELIGHT SERVICE ➤

Celebrate Christmas Eve with us for one of our four identical services on Sunday, December 24th:

11:00 AM • 3:00 PM • 5:00 PM • 7:00 PM



Oh, How He Loves You!

by Pastor Ann Harrington • Scripture — John 1:1-18

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

At Christmas we tend to talk a lot about baby Jesus and how He came down to rescue us and die for our sins. And we talk about how much He must have loved us to become one of us, to live on this earth as Immanuel, God with Us. That's a lot of love! But to fully understand the depth of God's love for us, we have to go back to the very beginning.

In the beginning...He was! Jesus was not created, He simply has always existed. Jesus was not a concept that was created after the fall of man because God needed a Savior to rescue us. Rather, before the creation of one single thing, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit had a plan already in place. Jesus, the Son of God, was always the plan...from the very beginning. And if I am honest with you, that blows my mind.

Before man was created, before the garden, before the fall...before Adam took his first breath, God knew that there would be a need for a Savior and that He would need to come to the earth, that He hadn't even created yet, to rescue mankind from their sins and to provide a way back to Him..

God loved mankind so much that even knowing we would sin, that we would rebel, that we would defy Him and mock Him, and we would break His heart and we would kill Him... even knowing all of this, He loved us so much that He created us anyway.

And since that day He has sustained us, He's given breath to our bodies and life to our souls, He has brought light to the darkness and has overcome the enemy. Not because he needed to, not because He needed us, but because He wanted us. He created each of us because it brought joy to Him for us to simply be here. His love was so great that, knowing all that would happen...He still spoke everything into being...including you! Oh how He loves you!!!!

Life to the Full

by Todd Perkins • Scripture —John 10:10

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

George Bailey believed that his life had no meaning or impact. He believed that it would have been better if he had never been born when he was faced with possible financial ruin. Throughout *It's a Wonderful Life*, Clarence (George's Guardian Angel) shows George all the lives he has touched, and how different his community of Bedford Falls would be if he had never been born. After he realizes the impact his life has made and the gift of life that he has been given, he runs through the little town yelling, "Merry Christmas" and ends up with his family. It's Mary (his wife), in the end, who calls the town into action on George's behalf, to help him save the bank. This is the moment when George realizes he has always been surrounded by many friends and family who adore him. Ultimately, love is what saves George Bailey.

Even though this is a Hollywood story, we can see glimpses of God's grace, purpose, and the opportunity to live a wonderful life to the fullest.

As we celebrate Jesus this Christmas, may we each take time to understand Jesus' eternal mission. He came that each of us would experience a wonderful life. This wonderful life begins with knowing Jesus through a personal relationship with Him. Jesus said, *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full."* John 10:10

Full means containing or holding as much or as many as possible; having no empty space. Just like George Bailey, we have many empty spaces that we try to fill with "stuff" that will never satisfy us. This Christmas, let us focus on filling each "space" with Christ. Let us surrender all of our personal desires and ambitions so that we might fill those spaces with the purpose God has created us for; to love God, and people while sharing the Good News of Jesus!

We are created for an eternal, abundant, and wonderful life. May we give thanks and praise to the Father for sending His one and only Son, who gave His life so that we might have life to the **full**.

The Perfect Outfit

by Pastor Dan Hamrick • Scripture — Colossians 3:12-14

"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

I have many things that I have loved about working at Colonial Woods. One of my favorite things I loved is all the Colonial Woods swag that I was able to wear. Let me tell you why. I strongly dislike picking out clothes and trying to figure out what I am going to wear everyday. It was so nice, walking into my closet and knowing that if it says CW, Colonial Woods, HSM, I love my church, etc. I didn't have to worry about it. I had enough CW gear that I could wear something new everyday for about two weeks! With going somewhere new, besides missing all of you, I am going to miss not having to think about what I am going to wear each day.

When I read Colossians 3:12-13 it says *"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."* Those two words in verse 12 say *"clothe yourselves"* and when I read them I am in front of my closet all over again.

You see we are called as believers in Christ to **daily** put on things like compassion, kindness, humility, etc. And I get it, there are days you just want to stay in your PJ's and not have to worry about that. Yet God doesn't give us that option. The bonus is, like my CW Swag, we don't have to worry about what to wear because **HE** tells us.

Paul follows these two verses with this in verse 14, *"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."* Paul lets us know that if we can take this outfit, which already is amazing and add **love** to it, then it will tie everything together perfectly.

When we can go out into the world and show people the love of Christ it will bring unity to a world that is in utter chaos. May we be a Church who daily puts on love.

My only question for you is this, "How's your outfit today?"

Clothed in Love

by Lisa Henry • Scripture —Colossians 3:14

In yesterday's devotion, Pastor Dan started an idea that I want to expound on. In Colossians 3:12-13 the Lord tells us to clothe ourselves with a number of godly virtues. In verse 14 He says, *"Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony."*

In the movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*, we see these virtues in the Bailey family. They become known by these virtues as they live and work in the town of Bedford Falls, helping and caring for many within their community.

Throughout the movie, we see George and Mary **choose** to **put on** love. A choice that isn't always easy.

We watch young George clothed in love as he sees the heart of his employer, rather than the mistake. We watch George clothed in love as he trusts the relationship and good intention of his Uncle Billy rather than the forgetfulness. We watch as both George and Mary lovingly share their honeymoon savings rather than use it for themselves. We watch as Mary, the children, and the town all come together, clothed in love to help George without hesitation rather than leave him alone in his very bad mood and discouragement. We watch as people, choosing to be clothed in love bring harmony to difficult situations. Harmony is a weaving together of different parts resulting in a pleasing arrangement.

I'm challenged by the immediate response Mary and the children have when George acts so unlike himself and is quite harsh and ugly in his time of despair. Clothed in love, they respond without hesitation to gather help and to pray for George. They don't fight back at his mean words. They don't hold a grudge. They know George. Through their love for him, they see the man they love rather than the dissonance of his discouragement. When George returns, they welcome him home, with mercy, forgiveness and love.

And that is how the Father responds to us. Through love. We are covered and made clean by Jesus' forgiveness and clothed in his love, so that God sees us and not our sin! This Christmas, let's choose to live as Colossians 3:12-14 says, and especially above all, to be clothed in love. And may we experience the harmony of that love in our lives and with our Lord.

Be the Light

by Pastor Phil Whetstone • Scripture —John 1:4-5, Matthew 5:14-16, Ephesians 5:1-8

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp & put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." -Matthew 5:14-16

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light." -Ephesians 5:1-8

I admit it, I am a fan. My son Wesley and I try to watch *"It's a Wonderful Life"* every Christmas season (along with a few others). We enjoy quoting it, trying to imitate the various characters. One voice that still eludes me but impacts me is given by Clarence, the Angel, as George Bailey begins to see the impact of his life.

"Strange, isn't it? Each man's life touches so many other lives. When he isn't around he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?"

It's the power of concentric circles. Concentric circles are what happens when you throw a pebble into a still pond; it leaves multiple ripples of circles expanding across the pond. A small insertion point of disturbance or displacement has an expanding impact beyond the initial engagement. A small encounter can have a lasting impact on a larger scale than we ever imagined. What's interesting is that the life offered us in Jesus Christ is powerful and life changing. *"Once lost but now he is found"* (Luke 15:24) *"...you must be born again."* (John 3:7) *"...you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."* (1 Cor 6:11).

But that transformational power is to reach far beyond our life. He proclaims that we become "the light". Christ's call to this "Wonderful life" is to be like a pebble in a pond, or a candle in the dark. We are called to radiate the life, love, and forgiveness of Christ into the lives God has placed in our life. As it has been said, we are the only Jesus many people ever see.

So on this very near Christmas Day, Celebrate Christ! Rejoice in Life! But remember...He is also challenging us to be light into someone else's life.

Wishing God's Blessing & the Merriest of Christmas' **Pastor Phil & Tammy Whetstone**

Notes

We hope you enjoy this Christmas devotional!

For more Christmas fun, check out all that's happening at Colonial Woods!



www.cwmc.church

