

HOLIDAY 2017

GRACE MAGAZINE

N E V E R

A L O N E

THE WAY THAT LEADS TO LIFE



SPECIAL HOLIDAY DOUBLE ISSUE

THE EXCLUSIVITY OF CHRIST

THE NEW COMMANDMENT | ADVENT: HYMNS OF JOY



*Senior Pastor Mike Adkins
prays during our All-Campus
Night of Worship in September.*

Photo: Stan Sutrich

Finishing strong. It's the highest goal of my life. In my calling, my ministry, my marriage, my family, my friendships — I want to close out my days having lived in a way that honors God and loves people.

That kind of ending doesn't happen by accident. A life well-lived must be planned, protected, and fought for. We must think ahead and picture what we want our future to be and

stay on track and keep focused on God and His word. This is kind of a double issue:

The first part focuses on the truths we'll unpack during *Never Alone*, our next sermon series in the book of John. The theme is taken from the hopeful verse in John 14:18: "I will not leave you as orphans, but will come to you." We'll also be exploring the truth behind Jesus' commandment to love one another, and

FINISHING OUR YEARS WELL MEANS FINISHING OUR DAYS, OUR HOURS, AND OUR MINUTES WELL.

then act accordingly. We have to use our time wisely and make our choices carefully.

Finishing our years well means finishing our days, our hours, and our minutes well.

So that's my challenge to you in this *Holiday Issue* of **Grace Magazine**. We're headed in to the final two months of 2017. I want you to finish strong. Love well. Stay true to your commitments and deepest desires to follow God and care for people. Make choices today that end this year with faith and integrity. This magazine is just one of the tools we offer at Grace to help you

Christ's claim to be the only way to God. Join us each Sunday through the end of November for this!

The second part of the magazine focuses on the spiritual season of Advent. We'll be hopping out of the book of John during the month of December, celebrating the Christmas season and the coming of our Savior, Jesus. Our Advent series, *Hymns of Joy*, will dive into the truths of who Jesus is and what Christmas means through the lens of four ancient and beloved carols. I love this time of year, and I'm looking forward to it!

See you Sunday,



LOCATIONS

GRACE CLERMONT

Meets at Grassy Lake Elementary School
1100 Fosgate Drive, Minneola
Service Sundays at 10a
Pastor Caleb Brasher

GRACE LAKE NONA

Meets at Laureate Park Elementary
7800 Laureate Blvd, Orlando
Service Sundays at 10a
Pastor Dr. Ben Bailie

GRACE EDGEWOOD

Serves Edgewood Children's Ranch
1451 Edgewood Ranch Road, Orlando
Service Sundays at 3p

GRACE ORLANDO

2300 Pembroke Drive, Orlando
Services Sundays at 9:15, 10:45, & 5:30p
Senior Pastor Mike Adkins

GRACE OVIEDO

Meets at Indian Trails Middle School
415 Tuskawilla Road, Winter Springs
Services Sundays at 9:15 & 10:45a

GRACE WINTER GARDEN

Meets at Whispering Oak Elementary
15300 Stoneybrook W Winter Garden
Services Sundays at 10a
Pastor Grant Nixon

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GRACE LIFE

NOTES & NEWS FROM OUR ONE CHURCH IN MANY COMMUNITIES



Irma closed the locations of most of our campuses after the storm, but thanks to our one church model, we were all able to worship God together at the Grace building the following Sunday. Photo: Rick Garrett.

1

GRACE FAMILY COMES TOGETHER FOR HURRICANE RECOVERY

Hurricane Irma took a huge toll on Central Florida, and Hurricane Maria devastated many of our friends and relatives in Puerto Rico and other islands. The Grace family has responded to both.

Both before and after Irma, Grace connected to help others prepare for the storm and recover from it. Across our campuses, we boarded up each other's windows, cut down trees, cleaned up debris, and repaired damage to homes. With so many out of power, Grace families offered their homes and businesses to each other for hot showers, AC, and charging phones. Grace also provided financial assistance and food to those who were without.

Grace helped clean up our community, too: the Oviedo campus helped clean the courtyard at Indian Trails Middle School where they meet each Sunday

and at the Thrive Crisis Pregnancy Center. Grace Clermont served by cutting down trees and clearing debris at a local retirement home for missionaries.

"I was encouraged to see the people of Grace coming together as a family - serving others in the church as well as neighbors and even strangers in need," said Pastor Rick Garrett. "I saw people taking steps in generosity, hospitality, and community as they sacrificed and served. We were also able to come together in all-campus worship at the Grace Church property, even when our portable facilities were closed."

To help Puerto Rico recover from Hurricane Maria, we collected water, baby wipes and diapers, infant formula, batteries, trash bags, and more, all of which will be flown in directly to citizens there. One of our Grace members also partnered with a local pet store to donate almost 1,000 pounds of dog food to the island.



Above: graceKIDS! Partners with parents to help kids take their next step toward Christ. Photo: Nancy Kitch. Top right: Jesus' Birthday Party at Oviedo last year. Bottom right: Our free Advent boxes help your family count down to Christmas.

2

GRACEKIDS PARTNERS WITH YOUR FAMILY FOR HOLIDAY FUN, FOCUS, AND SERVICE

graceKIDS! loves your family, and we love the holidays, too! We are excited to partner with you to help you focus your family on Jesus and grow during this special season. Here are just a few of the things we have coming up:

Operation Christmas Child: A Service Project for the Family

Pick up an Operation Christmas Child box to fill on October 22 at your Grace campus! Operation Christmas Child is a project of Samaritan's Purse, an international relief organization. Families fill boxes with small toys, hygiene items, and school supplies to reach out to kids around the world with the good news of Jesus Christ. Boxes can be returned to your campus on October 29 and November 5, where they'll be delivered to be shipped.

Pick Up Family Advent Boxes Starting November 19th

Our Advent Boxes are a fun, creative

way graceKIDS! partners with your family over the holidays. There are daily and weekly activities to help you countdown to Christmas and focus on Jesus. Pick up yours for FREE at your campus starting November 19th; Advent starts Sunday, December 3.

PJ and Donut Breakfast Party Sunday November 26th

Thanksgiving weekend is made for relaxing, so on Sunday, November 26th, we invite you to just roll your kids out of bed and bring them on in to church as-is! Kids can wear their pajamas to church, and we'll feed them breakfast right in their classrooms. It's one less thing for you to worry about during the holidays.

Jesus' Birthday Party Sunday, December 10th

On Sunday, December 10th, we'll be throwing a birthday party for Jesus at all our campuses! We invite you bring your kids for the celebration, including the Christmas story, birthday fun, and treats to share.



From the Grace Instagram (@discovergrace), shots of campuses serving all over the city after Hurricane Irma.



3

GRACE OVIEDO STUDENTS SERVES THE ORANGE COUNTY ACADEMY

On the first Saturday in October, a group from the Grace Oviedo Student Serve Team traveled to the to The Orange County Academy in Bithlo to paint hallways and classrooms and to serve the teachers and students at the school

There are many challenges in the Bithlo area in eastern Orange County, ranging from poor water quality to lack of transportation. This school has a vision to build community and help stop poverty in Bithlo as it serves families and helps to meet kids' basic needs.



We had an amazing night at our All-Campus Night of Worship in September, with band members and pastors from every campus leading us in the praise of our God. Photos: Stan Sutrich.

UPCOMING ALL-CAMPUS EVENTS



ADVENT SEASON STARTS DECEMBER 3

Join us at your campus each Sunday in December for our celebration of Advent, the season of anticipating Christmas and the coming of Jesus. Our sermon series, *Hymns of Joy*, will focus on the theology of Jesus through four ancient carols.



ALL-CAMPUS CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICES SUN DECEMBER 24

Our annual All-Campus Christmas Eve Candlelight Services will be held at the Grace Church building at 2300 Pembroke Drive in Orlando. Sunday, December 24th; five services to choose from at 10:45a, 1:30p, 3p, 4:30p, and 6p. *Childcare available for five and under with registration only; watch for info.*



NEW YEAR PRAYER AND COMMUNION SERVICES SUN DECEMBER 31

Be there for this special Grace tradition to help you focus a new season on Christ. Our annual New Year Prayer and Communion services will be held on Sunday, December 31st at your campus. Regular service times at Clermont, Lake Nona, Oviedo, and Winter Garden. Orlando campus 9:15A and 10:45A only, no 5:30p service that day.

Photos: Christmas Eve, Alex Menendez; Baptism Sunday, Chris Kocher.



BAPTISM
SUNDAY
11.05.17

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NEVER ALONE

HOW CHRIST
FREES US
FROM
LIVING
LIKE
ORPHANS



BY MIKE ADKINS
SENIOR PASTOR

Being alone is tough. I'm not talking about taking time for yourself. That can be helpful and even spiritually rejuvenating. We all need time alone.

But there is a kind of aloneness that is an ache that can't be soothed. It comes from deep within us. It can be rooted in many things and find expression even when we are with other people. Sometimes group gatherings are the loneliest places in the world.

Practically, this distance between us and God reveals an orphan mentality. An orphan is someone without any family. They are alone. They have no support system so they must do it themselves. An orphan finds themselves always feeling like loving and living for God is a duty and obligation. Other people are connecting to each other and to God, but not them. This only furthers the feeling of isolation and distance.

Author and church planter Rosemarie Miller in her book, *Anything Is*

WE OFTEN HEAR AND BELIEVE THE PROMISE OF GOD TO BE WITH US, BUT LATER WE FEEL LIKE GOD WILL NEVER BE CLOSE AGAIN.

In the gospel of John, Jesus comforts His disciples with the idea that when He dies, they will not be left alone. He says, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live (John 14:18-19)."

Jesus' carefully chosen image of an "orphan" is very appropriate. One of the religiously rooted reasons we feel alone and even desperate is that we relate to God at a distance.

What stands between us? Our desperate need to prove ourselves acceptable or accepted.

Possible with God, says, "The gospel was not my working theology: Mine was moralism and legalism — a religion of duty and self control through human willpower. The goal was self-justification, not the justification by faith in Christ that the gospel offers. But, as many people can tell you, moralism and legalism can 'pass' for Christianity, at least outwardly, in the good times. It is only when crises come that you find there is no foundation on which to stand. And crises are what God used to reveal my heart's true need for Him."

Miller's point is true: in crises, our true foundation is revealed. In the book of John, the disciples have

come to this kind of crisis. Jesus has predicted His impending death. They don't really believe He is planning on leaving them. (After Jesus dies, it is fascinating to see how the disciples' response reveal they are shell-shocked by what has happened, even though Jesus told them it would.)

Jesus makes them this promise, "...I will come to you (John 14:18)." He says He isn't going to leave the disciples alone forever.

good graces. We feel like we have to earn everything in life ourselves. We feel like we have to be good enough alone.

Miller writes, "We go through the day believing that it is up to us to figure out how to solve our problems and get on with life. The result is that we live with an uneasy guilt and fear because we have not measured up to our standards or won the approval of others."

IT'S A SAD PARADOX: A SPIRITUAL ORPHAN DESPERATELY WANTS TO BE CONNECTED TO OTHERS AND GOD, BUT BELIEVES THAT THE ONLY WAY TO BE WORTHY IS TO BE INDEPENDENT AND SELF-SUFFICIENT.

And then His promise is followed by three days of silence — three days where everyone assumes He is gone forever.

It's the same way for us. We often hear and believe the promise of God to be with us, but later we feel like God will never be close again. We retreat into an "orphan" mentality — believing that we are alone in the world, that we have no Father, and that we have to work to be loved.

Often, that leaves us in a place where we subconsciously spend our lives struggling to be put back into God's

It's a sad paradox: a spiritual orphan desperately wants to be connected to others and God, but believes that the only way to be worthy is to be independent and self-sufficient.

No doubt, the disciples felt this fear in those three days after Jesus' death. Everything they had hoped for was gone. Everything they had put their faith in was destroyed. Now, they were on their own in matters of life, death, and eternity.

Ironically, it would be Jesus' sinless life and sacrificial death — and the three loneliest days ever — that would

secure for us a permanent place in the family, adopted by God.

So, how do we rid ourselves of this constant sense of aloneness fueled by an orphan mentality?

It's simple, but not easy. But here are three steps to take:

1. We dwell on the resurrection, not the crucifixion. We focus on the joy and victory that has come to us, not our problems. We intentionally focus on our hope in the future and not our past.

2. We let people love us. An orphan can't trust anyone. They are not cared for, so they have to take care of themselves. They can never be weak, and they can never depend on anyone. To move beyond being an orphan, we must let others care for us in intentional ways. We must stop doing everything ourselves.

3. We trust in Jesus' righteousness and not our own. We have no hope of satisfying God, but that is good news, because the pressure is off! Christ has been good enough for us to satisfy God. It's not our worry anymore. We obey out of love and not religious duty.

Miller says it this way: "Living to please God — repenting of the true guilt that comes when we put anything besides God at the center of our lives, trusting in the blood of Christ to cleanse the conscience of dead works, and relying on the power and presence of the Holy Spirit for the tasks of the day — is truly the liberated way to live."

When God looks at us, He sees the goodness of Jesus and not the distance that we feel.

You can trust that.

God sees you as His son or daughter.

You can trust that.

God sees you as someone He loves.

You can trust that.

God sees you as a sinner, and still wants a relationship.

You can trust that.

God sees you with Him in eternity.

You can trust that.

And when you trust these things, you are no longer an orphan.

VISION IN ACTION

HOW GRACE'S ONE CHURCH
MODEL SUSTAINED THE
WINTER GARDEN CAMPUS



BY KELLY ADKINS
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

PHOTOS: STAN SUTRICH

At the beginning of 2017, Grace Winter Garden came to a crossroads.

They had a strong community of amazing people, but they were without a campus pastor, a worship leader, and the funds or time to find either one.

"The decision could have very easily been made to close down the Winter Garden campus," says campus leader Mike Winslow. "It would have made sense in worldly terms. A church of our size with our limited financial resources would have folded on its own."

But the one church — Grace Church — believed in the people and potential of the Winter Garden campus community. And so our one church in many communities model sprang into action.

"Sacrifice and commitment are the engine that propels the church forward in its mission to help people take their next steps toward Christ," says Senior Pastor Mike Adkins.

"We knew we had something worth working for at this campus — a team of leaders anxious and ready to be equipped & encouraged to lead who just needed investment and direction."

The Grace team engaged a world-class search company to find a new campus pastor, and then began to work diligently and consistently

where they were gifted and able to serve the people of Winter Garden.

Pastor Ben Bailie of Grace Lake Nona took over the majority of the preaching and pastoring on Sundays, as Winter Garden gathers in the morning and at that time, Lake Nona met at night.

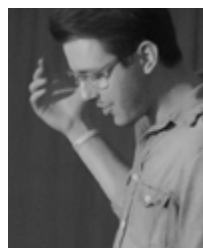
Pastor Mike Price of Grace Orlando organized and led the worship on Sunday mornings, and also leading the process to find and hire a new worship director.

Executive Pastor Rick Garrett led regular meetings with the campus leadership team, keeping them informed and connected to the whole church and encouraging them to take their own next steps. He also worked closely with Pastor Mike Adkins to hire the right leadership for the campus.

"The Winter Garden people are amazing," says Pastor Rick. "They knew they had something to offer, but this season made them hesitant to do it. The one church model of Grace helped them take their next steps toward Christ, too, by giving them courage to lead and help others and strengthening them as a team to position Winter Garden to keep going and growing."

It worked well. New member Paula Wilson and her family became a part of Grace Winter Garden during the transition. "It's hard to believe

Left: The Winter Garden leadership team's crazy photo game is on point. Right: Pastor Grant Nixon arrived in August to become the Campus Pastor of Winter Garden.



but we didn't find out until later that, at our first Sunday service, there was no official teaching pastor or worship pastor for the Winter Garden Campus," says Paula. "You would have never known because of the strong leadership from everyone within the church. They didn't skip a beat that Sunday. This community is so special, and that's what drew us in — it truly was the people."

when we needed both. Grace led sacrificially and I can't emphasize it enough, Grace led *well*. Pastor Ben led me personally with sermons and content that was engaging and challenging. Without Rick and Mike working with staff, it would've been much tougher. I believe in a model when leadership embraces and exemplifies the model. Grace leadership just does."

**"I BELIEVE IN A MODEL WHEN LEADERSHIP
EMBRACES AND EXEMPLIFIES THE MODEL.
GRACE LEADERSHIP JUST DOES."**

Winter Garden leader Carter Munroe knows that the one church makes this kind of community possible. "The one church model was tested with this situation," he says. "There are a lot of 'network churches' that I've seen or been a part of where I believe this would not have ended well. But the one church allowed Winter Garden to survive by providing a rudder when we needed direction and support when we had no staff, and it set goals and vision

Now, Grace Winter Garden is positioned well for the future with the hiring of Campus Pastor Grant Nixon and Worship Director Ricky Ortiz. "I'm looking forward to seeing how God will impact the lives in our community because of the commitment of Grace Church in Winter Garden," says campus leader Todd Chapman. "Very excited to have a grounding of campus leadership in Grant and Ricky as we look to help others grow in their faith in Christ!"



A big reason that Grace Winter Garden was able to survive and thrive? Your commitment to expanding your generosity during our two-year ONE Initiative. Your increased giving this year kept this campus moving forward with new leadership and new ministry, helping people in this neighborhood take steps toward Christ.

onegracefamily.com

MORE WORDS FROM GRACE WINTER GARDEN

For the other churches to support us financially during the time of transition and provide the funds for the pastor search — what a huge impact and beautiful picture of how the church worked in the Bible.

T Munroe, Administration

The “one church,” although spread throughout Central Florida, became closer. We had so much help from countless others that it confirmed that I was part of something so much bigger, celebrating, serving and worshipping our great God.

Mike Martinez, graceOPS

I had a pretty firm grasp on the concept of “one church,” having been with Grace since 2012. The beauty was seeing Grace put their words and mission into action. Pastor Rick came in immediately and organized an interim leadership team. Pastor Mike Price not only stepped up on stage and led worship on Sundays, but sacrificed week nights from his family and his job responsibilities to encourage and support the worship band and leadership. Pastor Ben spent his personal time driving up each Sunday morning to deliver the message. Pastor Mike Adkins kept the lines of communication open by coming out and sitting with the whole campus to answer questions and keep everyone in the know with

next steps. Without the commitment of the one church and the support of the other campuses, we wouldn't have been able to keep this together.

Mike Winslow, Guest Services

We were really able to grow in our appreciation of the Body of Christ's church as a whole. Yes, “one church in many communities” is Grace's vision, but it is also encouraging to remember how supportive we can be to other believers who don't attend Grace in how we are all one church living, loving and serving wherever the Lord has us in this world. It really encouraged me to not only be looking for needs within the Grace communities but in a more broad sense as well.

Adam Gragg, graceOPS

I am excited to see growth in our congregation and to meet all the amazing people God is sending our way. I am excited to see how this will impact the future of graceKIDS!

Robin Lamb, graceKIDS!

The one church model gave us hope that our doors would stay open. I understood the concept of one church, but to see people truly living it was inspiring. The sacrifice that so many people made, made all of us want to do more.

Hadley Winslow, Guest Services

THE NEW COMMANDMENT

CHRIST SETS THE STANDARD FOR LOVE

BY GRANT NIXON
PASTOR, GRACE WINTER GARDEN



Jesus is leaving.

That's the context of the new commandment Jesus gives His disciples in John 13:34-35.

He says in verse 33, "Where I am going you cannot come." Their teacher and leader of the past three years, for whom they have left behind family, friends, and careers, is leaving them. What do they need to hear at a moment like this? Maybe a carefully crafted condolence? Or a promise of assurance to comfort them?

No — Jesus gives a command.

He says in verse 34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

A new commandment?! The disciples have three years of teachings, parables and commandments to obey and ponder. Where are the words of comfort?

If we keep reading the gospel of John we know that they are coming in just a few short chapters. We know Jesus will tell them this beautiful truth, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

But at this moment Jesus doesn't say that, instead he chooses to give them a new commandment. Why?

Because Jesus' departure is a commission for His disciples.

Jesus says in verse 35, "By this (new commandment) all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Jesus is communicating to them that His physical departure is not an end to His presence and work in the world. His presence and work will continue through the disciples!

What this means for us is that, because Jesus has not yet returned and His work of redemption and restoration is not complete, this commission is extended to all of us today who are disciples of Jesus.

Jesus' departure is a commission for all of us.

We are the physical representatives of Jesus that continue His redemptive work in our world today. Paul makes this commission clear in his second letter to the Corinthians when he writes, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Paul identifies as an ambassador or physical representative for Christ with the mission of Christ — calling people to be reconciled to God. We, like Paul, have the same calling on our lives as disciples of Jesus.

Jesus, knowing that we need guidance to live as His ambassadors, graciously gives us a helpful, new commandment: “You love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”

As you read this commandment, you may notice that it doesn’t seem very new. After all, Leviticus 19:18 says “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The disciples would have been familiar with this command — love

Himself and served them (Philippians 2). It wasn’t glamorous or fun service, but love isn’t concerned with itself — love is helpful. This example of Jesus shows us that our love for one another should be expressed through humility and helpfulness. We should be “foot washers” — humbling ourselves to serve others in meaningful ways.

When we do this, the world notices. “By this all people will know that you are my disciples.” This type of

THIS TYPE OF HUMILITY AND SERVICE IS PECULIAR IN THIS WORLD. IT STANDS OUT. IT STOPS YOU IN YOUR TRACKS. BECAUSE IT’S NOT OF THIS WORLD. BECAUSE IT’S JESUS.

your neighbor as yourself. They would probably be able to recall in vivid detail the Parable of the Good Samaritan, where Jesus famously illustrated loving one’s neighbor as one’s self. So this new commandment would seem very old to them.

So what is new about this new commandment? Jesus.

Jesus said, “You love one another: just as I have loved you.” Jesus sets the standard of love through his own example toward them.

We find this example at the beginning of this chapter as Jesus washed his disciples’ feet — a traditional act of humility and service. Jesus had no obligation to wash His follower’s feet, but He lowered Himself and counted them as more significant than

humility and service is peculiar in this world. It stands out. It stops you in your tracks. Because it’s not of this world. Because it’s light in the dark. Because it’s Jesus. So we will fulfill our commission when we obey this commandment.

As a church, if we are serious about helping people take their next step toward Christ, then we need to be serious foot washers. We need to be a church filled with people humbling themselves for the good of others. We need to be a church filled with people quick to give of their time and resources, not because they are prompted by a pastor, but because God let them see the need first. We need to be a church of people who really believe that the only way to find our life is by losing it. We must be foot washers. Let’s love one another like Jesus.

10 WAYS TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

Invite one neighbor over for dinner each month.

If someone is new in town, invite them to join your plans for the weekend.

Organize a walking group or running club.

When someone tells you they have an upcoming job interview, a test, or a doctor appointment, mark it on your calendar. Follow up on the big day with a note of encouragement to let them know you are praying for them, or ask them how it went afterward. Better yet, do both!

If you see someone moving in, bring them dinner, cookies, or basic supplies they might need before they unpack, like paper towels, toilet paper, and hand soap.

Ask your neighbor to be their friend on Facebook. This is a great way to find common ground and things to talk about the next time you see them.

Practice random acts of kindness. Take your neighbor's trash out, or put their trash can away after pick-up. Mow their lawn "just because."

Use your kids as an ice breaker. Invite a fellow mom and her kids over for a play date, and get to know her over a tall glass of iced tea.

Get outside the walls of your house. You'll meet neighbors as you walk the dog, take walks, work in your yard, or hang out at your neighborhood pool. Don't just wave; be intentional about saying hello and getting to know them.

Organize a neighborhood get-together so that your neighbors can meet each other. In 2012, a woman in Dallas made it her goal to have 500 people over for dinner, one neighborhood dinner at a time. She created *Neighbor's Table* (neighborstable.com) and helped to turn her neighborhood into a community.

You can't love your neighbor well if you live an overscheduled life. The key is leaving margin in your life so that when the opportunity to love your neighbor arises, you're available.

From the article "10 Ways to Love Your Neighbor" by Ed Stetzer on *Christianity Today's The Exchange*.



ADVENT

A SPECIAL
SECTION FOR
GRACE CHRISTMAS

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THE HISTORY OF ADVENT

HYMNS OF JOY

OUR CHRISTMAS MESSAGE SERIES
UNCOVERS THE THEOLOGY
OF FOUR ANCIENT CAROLS

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COME, THOU LONG EXPECTED JESUS

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O COME, O COME EMMANUEL

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JOY TO THE WORLD

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O HOLY NIGHT

THE HISTORY OF ADVENT

Liturgy. Ritual. These words have deep meaning, feel heavy, and often seem distant. They seem descriptive of activities that are occasional, formal and apart from everyday life.

Yet we are a people of daily liturgy and ritual — of repetitive actions and behaviors. From the first groggy cup of coffee each morning to the droning

In other words, our practices reveal the very things we love, precisely because these practices focus our attention and affections on them. Life is liturgy, and as we grow in our understanding of this reality, we begin to understand the importance of embracing intentional liturgy — purposeful practices that mold our desires and affections toward the things of Christ.

OUR PRACTICES REVEAL THE VERY THINGS WE LOVE, PRECISELY BECAUSE THESE PRACTICES FOCUS OUR ATTENTION AND AFFECTIONS ON THEM.

news anchor who serenades our evening rest and everything that happens in the middle, we all have a rhythm. The morning jog, the nightly walk, the Saturday morning shopping, the blowing out of birthday candles — all of these are rituals and together they make up the liturgy of our day, our week, our year, our life.

In fact, if we took time to examine these rituals, this liturgy, we would find within them our values — those things most important — things that consume time, resources, and finances. We would discover as James Smith states, in his book, *Desiring the Kingdom*, “Our ultimate love or desire is shaped by practices, not ideas...”

The observance of Advent creates the opportunity to reshape our way of thinking as we approach Christmas. In fact, this is how the season came to be celebrated in the first place. The English word advent (derived from the Latin *adventus*) simply means “coming” and speaks to the longing the Jewish nation experienced as they waited for their Messiah. Christians in the first centuries began to recreate the feeling of anticipation with prayer, fasting, and repentance as they focused attention not on the birth of Jesus, but on His Second Coming. They used the season to prepare them for Epiphany, a Christian celebration in January, commemorating the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles/Magi.

Just as generations of Jews waited with delayed hope, these Christians wanted to remind themselves that life is short, this world is temporal and the Savior, the Messiah, would one day return. By the Middle Ages, Christians had begun using Advent to prepare to celebrate Christ's birth, and yet it retained the longing for the Second Coming as well. Thus, worshippers mingled the penitential preparation for the Christ's return with the joyous anticipation of Jesus' birthday.

And so we continue in this tradition today. Excitement. Joy. Celebration. The Savior has come and with Him, our salvation. Anticipation. Longing. Hope. And the Savior will come again, and with Him, the restoration of all things. As the popular Christmas carol, Joy to the World, reminds us:

*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow,
Far as the curse is found.*

This is truth worthy of celebration, of ritual, and of liturgy. Pastor John Piper says that "Christians throughout the world have their different ways of celebrating Advent. Some light candles. Some sing songs. Some eat candies. Some give gifts. Some hang wreaths. Many do all of the above." Yet the goal of each celebration is to create the liturgy that will turn our hearts' attention and affection toward Christ. That we might be a people who remember the meaning and thus experience the joy of the Christmas season.

BY RICK GARRETT, EXECUTIVE PASTOR

WHEN IS ADVENT?

Advent begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas and ends Christmas Eve. This means the earliest it begins, depending on where that Sunday falls, is November 27, and the latest it starts is December 3. Whereas Lent (the preparation for Easter) is always 40 days, Advent ranges in length from 22 to 29 days.

This year, is at the short end of the spectrum: Advent begins on Sunday, December 3rd and ends on Christmas Eve, Sunday, December 24th.

HOW DOES GRACE OBSERVE ADVENT?

Grace celebrates Advent in several ways:

A Christmas message series — this year it's called *Hymns of Joy* — which focuses on the theology in four of our favorite Christmas carols

Liturgical elements in every Advent service

Advent boxes for families to use all month long

Advent prayers emailed daily to your inbox



COME LONGTHOU EXPECTED JESUS

A HYMN OF OUR ULTIMATE HOPE

BY CALEB BRASHER
PASTOR, GRACE CLERMONT

Charles Wesley lived from 1707-1788. He was the founder and leader of the Methodist Church, and widely known for the massive number of hymns that he wrote in his lifetime. In fact, Charles wrote more than 6,000 hymns while he was alive — that’s roughly a hymn per day for over 35 years!

One of his most popular hymns is the Advent song, “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus.” It was first published in 1744 in *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord*. This small collection of music was so popular, it was reprinted over 20 times over the course of Wesley’s life.

The original song was written as only two eight-line stanzas, which are now generally the first and last stanzas. Typical of Wesley’s writing, almost every couplet in this hymn is connected to at least one or more biblical references or allusions. Along with its biblical literacy, this hymn also contains many poetic and theological elements. Wesley captures the very heart of Advent as he celebrates the first coming of Christ as well as turning his eye to Christ’s second coming.

Throughout the hymn, imperative verbs are used six times in the two stanzas:

Come, thou long-expected Jesus

*From our fears and sins **release** us*

*Let us **find** our rest in thee*

*Now thy gracious kingdom **bring***

Rule in all our hearts alone

Raise us to thy glorious throne

These commands give the song an urgency and longing as the people of God once again are looking towards and longing for the return of their King. Wesley also uses repetition throughout the lyrics, mainly the word “born” — appearing four times to emphasize the incarnation and mission of Christ:

Born to set thy people free

Born thy people to deliver

Born a child and yet a king

Born to reign in us forever

In these lyrics we find the most humble image of our delivering King. The one who left His throne, became an infant, and came to His wounded people in a broken creation bound to sin in order to set them free and deliver them.

As the song declares, He is our rest, our strength, our consolation, our joy. While we live in a much different time from Wesley, the longings of our hearts are just as deep. We long for identity, purpose, love, and security. And for those that are willing to look through the window of this hymn into

This is the main thrust of Advent: to lift our eyes to our returning, delivering, slavery-freeing, death-defeating, joy-fulfilling Messiah. Songs like this help us fight against the temptation to get so comfortable in this life that we stop longing for the next one.

Celebrating Advent in the liturgical calendar builds in a season each year to remind us of this specifically. Satan will do everything he can to keep our eyes from Christ's return and get us to focus on the things of this world. A friend of mine has said, "Satan is a master anesthesiologist. He uses the

SONGS LIKE THIS HELP US FIGHT AGAINST THE TEMPTATION TO GET SO COMFORTABLE IN THIS LIFE THAT WE STOP LONGING FOR THE NEXT ONE.

the very heart of the biblical message, those longings can be found in the hope of Christ. Hope itself is central to the Christian message.

Our security is not in our bank accounts. Our deliverer is not a politician. Our joy is not found in our circumstances. Our hope is not found in our possessions.

Where is our ultimate hope found in this life? We find it in the final line of Wesley's hymn: "Raise us to thy glorious throne."

comforts of this world to numb the longing of Christ's return in the hearts of His people."

How do we fight this? We read scriptures that remind us of the hope we have in Christ. We talk to other Christians who have a more tangible grasp of this hope. And we sing songs like this to stir our heart's affections.

May our prayer sung in these words find its home in our heart as it echoes the closing words of Scripture:

"Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

COME, THOU LONG EXPECTED JESUS

CHARLES WESLEY (1744)

Come, Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.



O Come O Come Immanuel

THE DEEP
LONGING
OF ADVENT

BY PASTOR DR. BEN BAILIE
PASTOR, GRACE LAKE NONA

O Come, O Come Emmanuel" is my favorite Christmas hymn.

Why? Maybe it is because of its historical roots. Originally a Latin hymn, it is over 1,400 years old, dating back to the 8th or 9th century. It originated as an *antiphone* sung by monks all across Europe as a part of their Advent liturgy.

Antiphones, from the Greek "anti" meaning opposite and "phone" meaning voice, were the dominate musical style for the Western Church for nearly a thousand years. This musical style was first introduced into the Christian Church by Ignatius of Antioch (who died in 107 AD) as a way for the congregation to sing the Psalms — the primary hymn book for the people of God for 2,500 years. It gave the congregation a way to experience the power of the rhythmic parallels of Hebrew poetry, and by the Middle Ages it took the form of Gregorian chant.

The Latin metrical form of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" was composed sometime in the 12th century as the capstone to the great cycle of hymns called the "O Antiphons" or "The Great O's." These were a series of hymns designed to progressively focus one's attention on the coming of Christ by interweaving a complex series of Old Testament titles for the Messiah into a series of 7 songs. One was sung each day leading up to Christmas.

The first lines of each song are as follows:

O Sapientia (Wisdom)
O Adonai (Hebrew word for God)
O Radix Jesse (Stem or Root of Jesse)
O Clavis David (Key of David)
O Oriens (Dayspring)
O Rex Genitum (King of the Gentiles)
O Emmanuel

The songs were intentionally written so that if you took the first letter of the Messianic title it would spell SARCORE, which when spelled backwards is *Ero Cras*, meaning "I will be present tomorrow." The "O Emmanuel" antiphon would be sung on Christmas Eve.

We are not sure exactly when the songs fell out of use, or how they were recovered. (As with all things historical, the story is a bit complicated.) There are several versions of the hymn, but the oldest English version, and my personal favorite, comes from the famous *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (1861) in which John Neale translated and reworked the seven *antiphones* into the one hymn entitled *Veni Emmanuel* — "O Come, O Come Emmanuel."

But why do I love this hymn?

It is not marked by the explosive exuberance of "Joy to the World," or the haunting beauty of "O Holy Night,"

yet it is my favorite. I love it because it is both hopeful and haunting, mellow and majestic. It is aching articulated. It is longing made musical.

And it perfectly encapsulates and articulates the dual longing of Advent. It brings to mind the longing of the people of God before Christ came the first time, and it articulates the longing of the people of God as we await Jesus' coming the second time.

be the light of the world, and banish the hopelessness of darkness.

The Key of David (Isaiah 22:22).

He rescues us from hell, locks the door behind us, unlocks the door of heaven, and brings us home.

The Desire of Nations (Haggai 2:7). He will draw the ransomed from every people and make them a kingdom of peace.

YOU ARE JOINING IN A SONG THAT HAS BEEN SUNG BY GOD'S PEOPLE FOR OVER A THOUSAND YEARS — EXPRESSING A SENTIMENT THAT HAS BEEN FELT BY GOD'S PEOPLE FOR OVER 4,000 YEARS.

So, as we sing it this year, remember. Remember that you are joining in a song that has been sung by God's people for over a thousand years — expressing a sentiment that has been felt by God's people for over 4,000 years. And as we sing it this year, remember that each of the titles of Jesus has been skillfully interwoven to kindle hope. Remember that Jesus is:

Emmanuel (Isaiah 8:8). "God with us." He will pay the ransom that only a God-man can pay.

The Rod of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1). Springing from a dead stump, He will free His people, by death and resurrection, from Satan's tyranny, and make them free forever.

The Day-spring (Luke 1:78). The dawn of God's kingdom. He will

As we sing this song this Christmas, be drawn into the joyful, victorious refrain, *Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel*, and be humbled by the longing that reminds us that even though the Dayspring has dawned, we still wait.

This hymn beautifully reminds us, as John Piper says, that even though "the final blood is shed. The debt is paid. Forgiveness is purchased. God's wrath is removed. Adoption is secured. The down payment is in the bank. The first fruits of harvest are in the barn. The future is sure. The joy is great. But the end is not yet."

No, it is not. And until it is, we join with all God's people and sing, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel."

O COME, O COME EMMANUEL

AUTHOR UNKNOWN, 12TH CENTURY
FRENCH MELODY, UNKNOWN ORIGIN, 13TH CENTURY
TRANSLATED TO ENGLISH BY
JOHN MASON NEALE, 1851

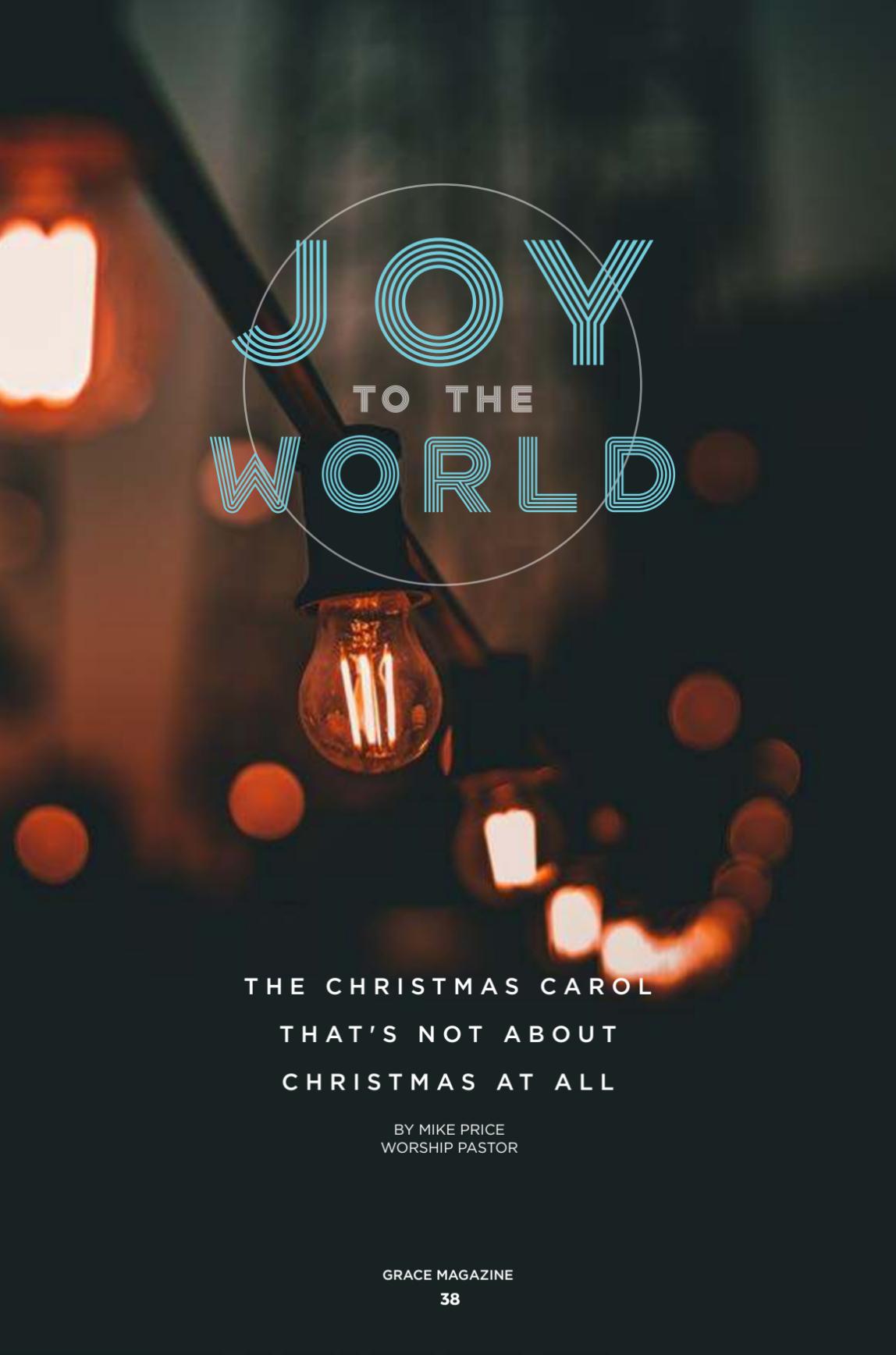
O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny
From depths of Hell Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, O come, Thou Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times did'st give the Law,
In cloud, and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel



JOY
TO THE
WORLD

THE CHRISTMAS CAROL
THAT'S NOT ABOUT
CHRISTMAS AT ALL

BY MIKE PRICE
WORSHIP PASTOR

Joy is a word that is often meant to convey the idea of happiness, but joy is so much more than happiness. Ultimate joy is an unwavering delight in something or someone that is undeterred or distracted by outside circumstances. It is established and sustained despite whatever hardships it must endure. With joy comes a steadfast hope that whatever suffering and trials the present brings, the best is yet to come.

Isaac Watts, known as the "Father of Modern Hymns," has written such favorites as "The Wondrous Cross," "Come Ye Sinners" and "At the Cross." When Isaac Watts penned the words to "Joy to the World" in 1719, his heart and mind were on our coming King and the true joy that His arrival would bring to a broken and desperate world.

Arguably the most popular hymn of the Advent season, "Joy to the World" is sung across the world by millions of people each year. However, Watts did not originally intend for the song to accompany twinkling lights or thoughts of a newborn Savior in a manger. A closer look reveals that it makes no mention of shepherds, heavenly hosts, or wise men. In fact, Watts doesn't look to the New Testament gospels for his inspiration for "Joy to the World," but instead drew inspiration from Psalm 98, where the Psalmist declares:

*Let the rivers clap their hands;
let the hills sing for joy together
before the Lord, for he comes
to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with
righteousness, and the peoples
with equity.*

This Old Testament passage is speaking specifically to the reconciliation of all things, when Christ comes to judge the living and the dead. The Psalmist is looking ahead to the restoration of God's intended relationship with His people. "Joy to the World" was not written with the first Advent in mind, but the second Advent of our King Jesus. Like those who awaited the promised Redeemer of God's people, we also await the return of our King who will make all things new.

Every year, we reflect on the anticipation and preparation of a promise fulfilled. A Light that would pierce the darkness. A Word that would break the silence. A hope that would be stronger than our fear. A joy that would overcome our despair. A love beyond our most extravagant comprehension.

During the Advent season, we celebrate "Immanuel," our God who is with us. We rejoice that Christ has come as an infant Messiah, but we also look forward to His triumphant return as the exalted Sovereign over all creation. As Watts proclaims, all

of creation will join with us and “repeat the sounding joy.” A marred and fallen Creation that once groaned, will now rejoice in overflowing jubilation to see her King establish His everlasting Kingdom.

Each year during the Advent season, we sing “Joy to the World,” because we find ourselves in a second Advent. We long, with great expectation and anticipation, the Day that sin

As we wait, we find ourselves in the “already, but not yet.” The promise of our glorious Savior has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, but the full realization of His Kingdom is still on the horizon. We look forward with a hope that longs to be made complete in the second coming of our exalted Redeemer.

I invite you to reflect on the final stanza of another hymn that speaks to the return of the King:

**AS WE WAIT, WE FIND OURSELVES IN THE
“ALREADY, BUT NOT YET.” THE PROMISE OF OUR
GLORIOUS SAVIOR HAS BEEN FULFILLED IN JESUS
CHRIST, BUT THE FULL REALIZATION OF HIS
KINGDOM IS STILL ON THE HORIZON.**

and death, pain and suffering, and darkness and despair will be forever ended. J.R.R. Tolkien alludes this completion of our time of waiting as the moment when “everything sad is coming untrue.”

We prepare for His return by shining and showing the light of Christ to those around us who are trying desperately to make sense of a broken world. We proclaim to them a joy that far surpasses the momentary troubles of this world.

*When Christ shall come
With shouts of acclamation
And take me home
What JOY shall fill my heart!*

*Then I shall bow
In humble adoration
And there proclaim
“My God how great Thou art!”*

Joy to the World, indeed!

JOY TO THE WORLD

BY ISAAC WATTS, 1719

Joy to the World, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.

Joy to the World, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods,
rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.

O holy night

A TRIUMPHANT SONG SPREADS HOPE IN SPITE OF UNBELIEF, CENSURE, & WAR

O "Holy Night" is not only one of the most beloved Christmas hymns of all time, it also has one of the most interesting histories of any hymn in Christian history.

In 1847, a priest in a small French town decided he wanted a special poem penned for Christmas mass. He commissioned a local poet — commissioner of wines — Placide Cappeau de Roquemaure. Cappeau, though not a churchgoer, accepted the commission, and while traveling in a coach to France's capital city, began to read Luke's account of the birth of Jesus. In that coach, he imagined what it must have been like to be present on that miraculous night. As the words of the gospel of Luke and his imagination swirled in his mind, the beautiful lines of his new poem began to flow through his pen onto the page. By the time he arrived at his destination, the words of "Cantique de Noel" were complete.

Cappeau quickly realized that his poem was meant to be sung. He decided to reach out to his friend, Adolphe Charles Adams. Adolphe was an accomplished musician who was certainly up to the task of matching this beautiful poetry to equally beautiful music. Although Adolphe was Jewish, he married a memorable melody to Christ-exalting lyrics.

The priest loved the song produced by this unlikely hymn-writing duo. "Cantique de Noel" was performed at the Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. The church in France couldn't have been more pleased, and it was soon sung in many Catholic Christmas services all over France.

But fortunes quickly changed for "Cantique de Noel." Church leaders discovered that the lyrics were written by a man who had split from the Catholic Church to join the socialist movement, and that the music was written by a Jewish musician.

The song was publically denounced by the Church.

But this official ruling against “Cantique de Noel” couldn’t weaken the French people’s love for the hymn, and they continued singing it in their homes and communities.

The French people weren’t the only ones enchanted by the song. The American writer and abolitionist, John Sullivan Dwight, was moved deeply when he heard the lines of the third verse:

Truly he taught us to love one another; his law is love and his gospel is peace. Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother; and in his name all oppression shall cease.

Dwight translated the French song into English and printed “O Holy Night” in his magazine. The song quickly found favor during the Civil War, especially in the North, as an anthem for freedom.

Back in France, the censored song made a miraculous appearance in the Franco-Prussian War. Legend has it that on Christmas Eve 1871, while fighting raged on between Germany and France, a French soldier jumped out of his trench and began to sing “Cantique de Noel.” After listening to the familiar Christmas hymn, a German soldier climbed out of his fortification to answer the song with another Christmas hymn, “From

Heaven Above to Earth I Come.” The fighting stopped for the next 24 hours as both sides observed Christmas Day. Shortly after this incident, the French Church embraced “Cantique de Noel” once more in their holiday services.

But that’s not the end of the amazing history of “O Holy Night.” On Christmas Eve in 1906, radio operators on ships and wireless owners at newspapers were shocked to hear something no one had ever heard over the radio — a human voice. Reginald Fessenden spoke the first words ever broadcast over the radio airwaves: “And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed...” And after reading Luke’s account of the birth of Jesus, he picked up his violin and began to play the first song ever broadcast over the airwaves: “O Holy Night.”

This incredible history of an incredible hymn reminds us that God will have His glory in a non-believing French socialist, in the beauty of poetry, across nations, in the horrors of war, and even in the birth of new technology.

*Christ is the Lord!
O praise His Name forever!
His power and glory
evermore proclaim.
His power and glory
evermore proclaim!*

O HOLY NIGHT

LYRICS BY CAPPEAU DE ROQUEMAURE

MUSIC BY ADOLPHE CHARLES ADAMS (1847)

TRANSLATED TO ENGLISH BY JOHN SULLIVAN DWIGHT

O Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of our dear Saviour's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining.
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices!
O night divine, the night when Christ was born;
O night, O Holy Night , O night divine!
O night, O Holy Night , O night divine!

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming,
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.
O'er the world a star is sweetly gleaming,
Now come the wisemen from out of the Orient land.
The King of kings lay thus lowly manger;
In all our trials born to be our friends.
He knows our need, our weakness is no stranger,
Behold your King! Before him lowly bend!
Behold your King! Before him lowly bend!

Truly He taught us to love one another,
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains he shall break, for the slave is our brother.
And in his name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
With all our hearts we praise His holy name.
Christ is the Lord! Then ever, ever praise we,
His power and glory ever more proclaim!
His power and glory ever more proclaim!

**N E V E R
A L O N E**

THE WAY THAT LEADS TO LIFE



DISCUSSION GUIDE & MESSAGE NOTES

{ INCLUDING OUR ADVENT SERIES }

THIS WEEK'S BIBLE VERSES

John 14:6

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

What is your background with Christianity? Were you raised in the church, or just checking it out for the first time in life? Have you been a Christian your whole life, or did you believe in Jesus later in life?

Share a story about a time that you took someone at their word. Was it easy to trust them right away, or did it take some convincing? What happened after you believed them? Did they stick to what they promised?

What does it mean for Jesus to be the way? The Truth? The Life? What are we supposed to do with this knowledge?

How does Christianity compare to other world religions? What is the major difference from all other religions in the world?

The beauty of Christianity is that Christ will meet you where you are, no matter your circumstances or past. Where are you at in your faith in this moment? Are you still checking it out? Do you trust that He is who He claims to be? If you were to take one step this week toward Christ, what would it be?

[illegible]

THIS WEEK'S BIBLE VERSES

John 13:1-30

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

How would you define humility? What are some ways that you have seen humility displayed in your family or friends?

How would you have responded to Jesus washing your feet if you were one of His disciples?

What does Jesus mean when He says “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me” to Peter in verse 8? Is Peter’s response appropriate?

When Christ declares that His followers ought to wash one another’s feet, He’s pointing to the sacrificial humility of His followers. That they would have servant hearts. In what way can you serve your neighbor this week? What next step can you take to follow His command?

If Jesus already knew that Judas was going to betray Him, why didn’t He do something to stop it?

[illegible]

THIS WEEK'S BIBLE VERSES

John 13:31-38

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

How does our culture view love today?

In verses 31 and 32, Jesus uses the word “glorify” five times. Why is it important that we see the cross in the same way Jesus sees it? Is this a difficult concept for you — to view the cross as glory?

It seems ironic that Jesus would give us this new command in the midst of Judas’ betrayal and Peter’s denial of Him. How must Jesus have felt? When others disappoint or hurt me, how can I respond with love and grace?

Why is loving other Christians an effective way to show the Gospel to non-Christians (13:35)? How can you love someone this week with this same love Christ has shown you?

Read 1 John 3:11-18. How is your view of loving one another challenged or strengthened through this passage?

[illegible]

THIS WEEK'S BIBLE VERSES

John 14:1-14

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

When you imagine heaven, what images come to mind? In what ways is your imagination about heaven limited?

Jesus begins this passage by telling the disciples not to let their hearts be troubled. Why, at this point in the story, would the hearts of the disciples be troubled?

What promise does Jesus make here? What does it mean when Christ says He is going to prepare a place for us?

This isn't the first time we see the disciples confused by Jesus' words, and it isn't the last. Does this help you to believe scripture, or does it hinder you? Why?

What does it mean to ask in Jesus' name? Can we therefore expect every prayer to be answered the way we want it?

[illegible]

THIS WEEK'S BIBLE VERSES

John 14:15-24

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

Rate yourself on a scale of 1-10 on how enthusiastically you keep Jesus' commandments. Does this scripture affect the rating you would have given yourself before reading it? Why?

Why can't the world receive the Spirit of Truth? How are believers different? Why is this important in our walk with Christ?

Which of Jesus' commandments are the most difficult for you to obey? Why is this particular commandment so difficult? How have you battled the temptation to break this command?

What does Jesus mean when He says He will not leave us as orphans? How can that give us comfort? How can it put our obedience into perspective?

Spend time in your Grace Community to split into smaller groups of 3-4 people. Spend time praying for each other about specific struggles and challenges.

[illegible]

THIS WEEK'S BIBLE VERSES

John 14:25-31

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

Describe the most peaceful vacation you could plan. Where would you go? What would you do? What about this vacation makes you carefree?

Do you currently sense Christ's peace in your life? Are you restless? If so, what area of your life needs the peace of Christ?

How are we in a better situation with the Holy Spirit than Jesus' disciples were in that day?

Where and when do you experience God's presence most? How can you better experience Him in the other areas of your life?

Who is someone in your life that can use the peace of God right now? Are they struggling with something you're willing to share with your Grace Community? Spend time praying for people to come to know and trust in Jesus. Pray for the peace which surpasses all understanding to come into their lives.

[illegible]

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

This Week's Hymn: Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

Do you have any memories tied to this hymn? Share a story with your Grace Community.

Spend time reading the article based on this hymn on page 34. What stands out to you the most?

Which attributes of Jesus are highlighted in this hymn? How can this cause you to worship God better or more fully?

How does this hymn challenge or strengthen your faith?

If you were to ask the author any question, what would it be?

What one thing can you do this week to help you focus on Christ, who He is in your life, and how you can live for Him in this world?

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines across the entire width of the page, providing a guide for writing. The background is a clean, solid white color. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

This Week's Hymn: O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Do you have any memories tied to this hymn? Share a story with your Grace Community.

Spend time reading the article based on this hymn on page 38. What stands out to you the most?

Which attributes of Jesus are highlighted in this hymn? How can this cause you to worship God better or more fully?

How does this hymn challenge or strengthen your faith?

If you were to ask the author any question, what would it be?

What one thing can you do this week to help you focus on Christ, who He is in your life, and how you can live for Him in this world?

[illegible]

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

This Week's Hymn: Joy to the World

Do you have any memories tied to this hymn? Share a story with your Grace Community.

Spend time reading the article based on this hymn on page 42. What stands out to you the most?

Which attributes of Jesus are highlighted in this hymn? How can this cause you to worship God better or more fully?

How does this hymn challenge or strengthen your faith?

If you were to ask the author any question, what would it be?

What one thing can you do this week to help you focus on Christ, who He is in your life, and how you can live for Him in this world?

[illegible]

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

This Week's Hymn: O Holy Night

Do you have any memories tied to this hymn? Share a story with your Grace Community.

Spend time reading the article based on this hymn on page 46. What stands out to you the most?

Which attributes of Jesus are highlighted in this hymn? How can this cause you to worship God better or more fully?

How does this hymn challenge or strengthen your faith?

If you were to ask the author any question, what would it be?

What one thing can you do this week to help you focus on Christ, who He is in your life, and how you can live for Him in this world?

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