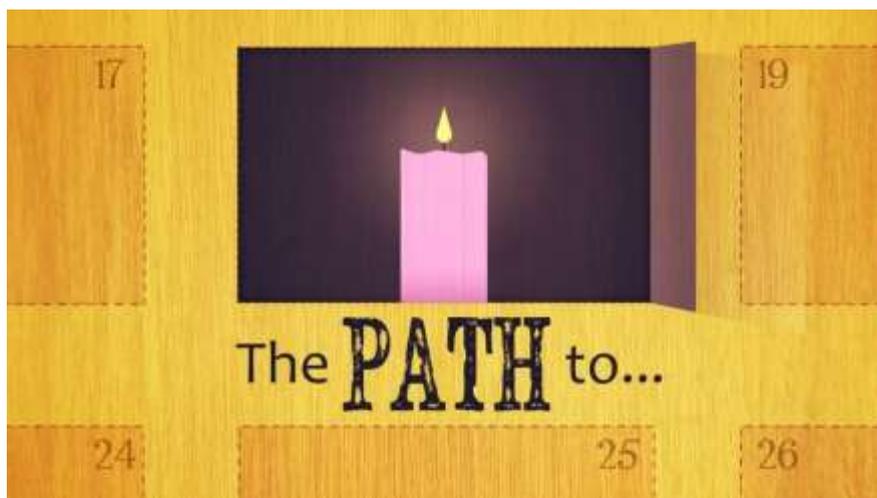


Daily Devotional

Booklet



Week 2 : The Path of Hope

DAY 1 : EMMANUEL!

Writer : Dcn Quinton De Beer

Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16 NIV

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. ‘In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior.’”

Advent, the beginning of a season that holds a wonderful reminder of “Emmanuel” God with us!

This season of Advent we will be focusing on the decisions that needed to be made in the Christmas narrative. I guess some things stay the same! Anyone never had to make a decision before?

Decisions that are centred on Christ lead to hope, peace, love, joy and are ultimately a Christ-like life.

In a world that is groaning under the strain and grief and loss of a Pandemic are we hearing the words of the Prophet Jeremiah “He will do what is just and right”. Living In hope and choosing the path to hope is trusting that God is with us!

Hope! Everyday we use that small, magical word—hope. It's tough to live—or even make it through one day—without hope. What is hope and what is The Path to Hope? Perhaps a helpful definition of hope is a vision for better tomorrow that we can decide in the present.

Hope is a vision for a brighter tomorrow!

The Shepherds in the Christmas narrative needed to make decision, do they go and see this thing that has happened or stay where they are, perhaps hopeless and unhappy.

This Advent are we prepared to make a decision that leads us down The Path to Hope?

Prayer: O God of Advent, we come to you today looking for hope. Be the candle that burns do us in our hopelessness and be the sunlight that blooms for us. Amen

Week 1 : The Path of Hope
DAY 2 : HOPE CHANGES US
Writer : Dcn :Quinton De Beer

Reading: Luke 2:8-12 NIV

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Have you ever been faced with an opportunity that would change your life as you know it?

A path that would mean everything will be changed. And then nothing did. For a moment can you place yourself in the narrative of the Shepherds. They have just had an Angel of the Lord appear to them, I can imagine trumpets and heavenly song telling them about the Christ Child. What an incredible life changing moment!

They were had to decide on a Path that would lead them to Hope. A decision that can change them forever. Scripture tells us that they made the right choice and went to see what this sign was all about. And then we all was said and done, the shepherds went back to work. They returned. I guess they didn't go back dragging their feet. They must have been full of cheer and joy and signing and shouting. But they still went back out into the fields, back to being shepherds.

You see the thing with Hope or being Hopeful is that it's not a once of experience! When our lives have been touched by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit the truth is that we can never be the same.

Without a doubt the Shepherds were changed and they became agents of hope to a broken world. The Shepherds and us today are called to live filled with hope and expectation that God's promises would be fulfilled in and through us.

Prayer: O God, we pray that you would uplift and sustain us today and every day. Will us with Hope we pray. Amen

Week 1 : The Path of Hope

DAY 3 : CHOOSE HOPE

Writer : Dcn Quinton De Beer

Reading: Luke 2:13-15 NIV

“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

See I told you so! Familiar words to many a married couple!

Why is it that our human nature so often is to doubt the obvious? We can be presented with all the facts, the reasons, the explanations and still have doubt. I know I have said these words more than once...” Hmm we’ll see, just remember I told you so!”

The shepherds contextually were not regarded highly in society, they were the dirty, loner types that nobody wanted to mingle with. Our God has a habit of surprising us! He chooses the unsuspecting so often in scripture, and often the hopeless. The Angels had left them and gone to heaven. The reading doesn’t include a long pause but would imagine there must have been a long awkward silence. What do we do know?

As with human nature there must have been that one shepherd that doubted. That was going to say “I told you so”. The Shepherds chose the path to hope. It was a step of faith and absolute obedience in God who chose them. There was and is no space for “I told you so”.

Are we ready this Advent to be obedient to God, when the Angels in our lives come to us and say “Glory to God in the highest heaven” this reminder that Hope is found in a God that is with us!

<p><i>Prayer : O Christ, we proclaim today that you are the hope in our lives. Amen</i></p>
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Week 1 : The Path of Hope

DAY 4 : AGENTS OF HOPE

Writer : Dcn Quinton De Beer

Reading: Luke 2:16-20 NIV

“So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told”

I love the description of Mary’s response. She treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart!

Being reminded about hope when all feels lost is probably one of the most uplifting feelings we can experience in this life. Mary would not have expected to be receive a message of hope from Shepherds. I am sure there were many other people she may have expected but never shepherds. This message that they shared must having lifter her spirits, the decision to obedient to God and take The Path to Hope has brought great news that God is at work in their lives.

Mary has endured a trying journey to this moment of Birth. Mary has been told she is pregnant and carrying the Son of God. She has needed to explain this all to Joseph, travel to be part of a census in her hometown only to be told that there is nowhere for them to stay. Mary would never have planned to give birth to a baby in a stable. Think of her state of mental health at this point. It was probably not filled with Hope, until God sends a message with the Shepherds!

Has your life been touched by someone you never thought would be used by God to bring you Hope and a message of comfort? We are encouraged like the Shepherds this Advent to spread the Good News we have heard.

Prayer : O Christ, Thank you for those agents of Hope that you send into my life. Amen

Week 1 : The Path of Hope

DAY 5 : GOD IS HOPE

Writer : Dcn Quinton De Beer

Reading: Luke 2:8-12 MSG

“There were shepherds camping in the neighbourhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God’s angel stood among them and God’s glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, “Don’t be afraid. I’m here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Saviour has just been born in David’s town, a Saviour who is Messiah and Master. This is what you’re to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger.”

Hope, Faith and Love is all that will remain. These are the words that Paul share with us and to the people of Corinth.

I want us in this devotion today to consider the Path of God that was all about Hope, Faith and love. Christ came into world and left Heaven with all its beauty; He left the riches and glory of Heaven to be born, taking on humanity. Not only did He give up the praises of the Heavenly host and the glory of it to take on humanity, He chose to be with animals and shepherds as his first companions.

This step taken for you and for me is worthy of unending praise! Hope was born in a manger and the Angels have asked us to share this message with everyone we can or to use Eugene Petersons message translation, the “Neighbourhood”.

Hope and the decision to embrace it or ignore it is something that we are faced with every day. We are living in a world where so many around us are without hope. As much as we need to consider the Path to Hope we need to advocate to others where the path of Christ ultimately leads to.

Prayer : Hope O God, is a gift offered by you! We depend on it as we face the realities of our messy world. Don’t give up of the hopeless God. Amen

Week 1 : The Path of Hope

DAY 6 : POEM OF HOPE

Poem of hope By “Luke Schumann”

This is the season
we are in need of most
at the moment, for now
is at last the time when
Hope seeps in and sticks out
like an unmatched sock.

This is when our theology
can be found in its purist
form, for it is preached not as
fact or stat or system, but
instead as its true identity:
metaphor, art, narrative, and
poetry, in prophecy of the
coming Savior; the One who
restores and turns all our
tragic stories into songs of
redemption.

And when hatred, violence,
and oppression are
seemingly the only things
that are tangible in this world,
Hope yet steps in as a most-
welcome guest, as a most-
welcome guest, as a
considerate concept,
as an abstract thought
still finding its form,
as a familiarity we still
have yet to meet.

And yet we know
in our deepest fibers that this
is not some unfounded

hypothesis; Hope is not
something we merely long
for, a hypothetical idea that
has the potential to plot-twist.

Hope is instead a stronghold.
Hope is real and living,
breathing life into
our next day, sustaining us in
our brokenness,
greeting our despair
with a knowing grin. Hope
is more real than the
suffering in this world—
even if it’s much less
prominent— and Hope is
what enables us
to long and strive for more
than what we have in front of
us.

A world where all are loved
and cared for. A world where
peace endures and the line is
blurred between enemy and
brother.

A world where joy is at the
forefront of our fixtures. This
is what hope does.
This is what hope promises.
This is what hope ignites.

Prayer : O Holy Spirit, your hope ignites and sets our lives and hearts ablaze. Amen

Group Notes

Welcome:

Share a moment from this week where you have felt Hopeful

Worship:

Hope Has A Name - River Valley Worship - YouTube

Prayer:

Father God, every word in scripture points to the gift of hope that we have because of Christ Jesus. The Christmas story wasn't the beginning of that message of hope because the old testament is full of glimpses of your plan to redeem your people and restore them into a relationship with you, but we are able to truly begin to see and understand just how great your love for us is when we read the story of Jesus' birth in scripture.

Help us to see that you are with us. Nothing is too difficult, too messy, or too dirty for you. Jesus came to give us the gift of eternal life through the salvation that only you, our Heavenly Father, can give when we believe on your Son, repent of our sins, and confess Jesus as our Lord and Saviour.

That first Christmas, you gave us the gift of hope wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. Thank you, Father, for your immeasurable gift. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.

Word: Jeremiah 33:14-16 NIV and Luke 2:8-20 NIV / MSG

Questions:

1. What's symbolic about God announcing Jesus' birth to some of the lowliest members of society and the Path they had to choose?
2. As Jews, the shepherds probably knew a little something about the coming Messiah. What might they have thought about the mixed messages of "Savior" and "in a feeding trough"?
3. What are some tangible expressions of this kind of hope you might practice this week: At your workplace? In your home? With your friends?

Work: Spend this week asking the Spirit of God to help you choose the Path of Hope in your daily living.

Week 2: Path to Peace

DAY 1: Peace confronts Cruelty in the Community

Writer: Rev Zukisa Fumba

Read Luke 3:1 “In the fifteenth year of the rule of the emperor Tiberius – when Pontius Pilate was governor over Judea and Herod was ruler over Galilee, his brother Philip was ruler over Iturea over Abilene.

In the text above people had power and authority over people’s lives, from the emperor to the lowest ruler then the nations – it was a time when the rulers were very interested in ensuring that their territories were not threatened by anyone or anything for that matter. When it was announced by Magi that a new King is to be born in Judea, Herod was not happy – hence he never wanted Jesus to survive. Sadly, for Herod, he didn’t now that he was dealing with God, so his plan never worked out. It’s now that Jesus Christ survived for many years from his birth days the death as a young boy from the decree of Herod the Great king of Judea, who ordered for the execution of all male children two years old and under in the vicinity of Bethlehem (Matthew 2: 16-18). Rulers at the time of arrival of the Saviour of the world could not be content because they knew that they were not ruling in faithfulness to God’s desire that all people are made in his image and should be loved. The rulers of the time now and even then, refuse in their leadership to be leaders of righteousness.

As people in our respective communities where we reside, we ought to know that real peace has no other business in our communities but to confront cruelty that the community rulers construct for the sake of exalting themselves. It is very clear from Christ Jesus, that as the one who is the absolute peace, makes the unfaithful and unrighteous rulers to be unsettled by his presence. Therefore, unless the peace we bring to the world confronts the cruelty in communities (incl. kidnapping of young people for money or for anything, abuse of children, abuse of women, corruption, discrimination, abuse of power) it’s not the real peace of life to humanity.

Prayer: Heavenly God, we bring unto you all those in position of rule to be faithful and attempt for righteous living in all they do. Forgive us all for denying your peace for our communities, in the Name of Christ Jesus, we pray now and forevermore. Amen!

Week 2: Path to Peace

DAY 2: Peace confronts cruelty in the Church

Writer: Rev Zukisa Fumba

Read Luke 3:2 “ during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas – God’s word came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness”

The behaviour of the community rulers and of those who are in the temple of God showed no difference in the longingness of the high priest of wanting to be more important than everyone else. The season of the rule of the Caesars of the time then together with the priesthood in the temple shared similar desires of being better than the masses at the expense of the crowd. This character of these leaders at the time of Jesus Christ, is not contested for leaders of our time as the same mark of unfaithful leaders. All these leaders mentioned by Luke in this passage are enemies of John and Jesus, consequently, enemies of peace for the world. Jesus’s time of arrival and beginning of His ministry was clouded by faith leaders who rejected Christ and anyone who would be able to disturb their pattern of self-enriching leadership.

Annas and Caiaphas as high priests at the time, had so much power and authority to direct people to do anything. So Luke tells us about these high priests who would eventually have a standing voice at the time when Jesus Christ was charged. These two high priests are too critical in the life of people’s spiritualities as they have the power and authority to direct social lives too. Therefore, God’s peace will confront cruelty leadership in the Church.

In your experiences in Church, please list anything(s) that you believe require peace?

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Prayer: Ever-creating God, help your servants who are leaders in your Church to be faithful to the servanthood call you have given to them in your Church. Amen!

Week 2: Path to Peace

DAY 3: Peace crosses all streets!

Writer: Rev Zukisa Fumba

Read Luke 3:3 “John went throughout the region of the Jordan River, calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins“

If the peace can be in the streets of communities where leaders are situated and be in the places of worship to confront those who are given the privilege to lead God’s people. Then peace in its nature, must be everywhere because it must find the people where they are.

In this time of prayer, I invite you to allow peace to cross over to the other side of the street. For the sake of God’s kingdom, we have only one option – that is to carry peace across the street in spite of what has happened. This is one of the difficulty paths of peace, is that the one who is the victim or the one who have been done wrong by the other one across the street – has a duty to move the peace, has a responsibility to move kindness and grace across the street. Though, those who are robbers of peace have a duty to return the peace across the street. I am convinced that we all placed with a duty of being selfless in sharing the peace in all households.

How much effort have you made in your life to move peace (i.e.: love) across your street? Have you moved peace to the other side of your street? (why not or why did you move peace?)

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Prayer: Merciful God, help us all to take peace across our streets, in the Name of Christ Jesus. Amen

Week 2: Path to Peace

DAY 4: Peace the fulfilment of God’s promise

Writer: Rev Zukisa Fumba

Read Luke3:5(a) “This is just as it was written in the scroll of the words of Isaiah the prophet”

Peace is not an accident, peace is not an act by chance, peace is not luck. Peace is the promise of God for humanity as part of His plan to reconcile us as His people back to him.

God whispered to many prophets about his intention to bring back His people (Us) to His own ways in 400 years before this time of the arrival and ministry of Christ that is about to happen in the bible when reading the very first parts of the Gospel of Luke in chapter 3.

Therefore, it should never be taken lightly when us and /or people we know get reconciled to each, because God promised us that we will be made right with His will by His own ways of peace making.

Also, for people who refuse to be at true peace with others – it can only mean that anyone who refuses to share peace is rejecting the will of God. I am not talking about acts of cheapening peace; but peace must be sincere and genuine.

We are in the season of waiting for the celebration of the birth of Christ Jesus! It’s time again to renew peace with ourselves and others.

In what ways for you, is peace a fulfilment of God’s pronouncement of Peace for humanity? Can you think of your life experiences?

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Prayer: Prince of Peace, you shine upon us and empower us again to breathe peace to others. Lord, hear us we pray. Amen.

Week 2: Path to Peace

DAY 5: Prepare yourself to receive peace

Writer: Rev Zukisa Fumba

Read Luke 3:4(b)” A voice crying out in the wilderness:” Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight”.

No one has the power on his or her own power to be at peace and to share peace with others unless s/he has been inspired by the power of the Holy Spirit. To have peace in you, is not by any own works, but because of the grace of God who longs for us to be whole. Now, John the Baptist who have been blessed to receive peace before many people – invited all people who claimed to be followers of the Way to make a public declaration to deny anything in their lives that undermine who God is, by declaration Lord as King in receiving the baptism as a path that moves us to receive God’s peace not in the standards of the world.

The path to true and everlasting peace – demands us to reject some of the habits (like jealous, selfishness, hatred, discrimination, etc..) that would prevent us to prepare our hearts, minds, and social lives to receive the peace that was bought at price of Christ’s life.

Are you experiencing peace in your life now? How are you experiencing peace? If not, why?

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Prayer: Lord of mystery, you know too well our heart’s desires. Help us to prepare ourselves for your peace that knows know boundaries. In the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Week 2: Path to Peace

DAY 6: Nothing will be excused from peace

Writer: Rev Zukisa Fumba

Read Luke 3:5 “Every valley will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be levelled. The crooked will be made straight, and the rough places made smooth.”

My dear sister and brother in faith, hear this good news for the world - that in the path of peace for the whole creation, nothing and no one will be excused from peace. The word of God through prophet Isaiah warns us all that even the empty parts of creation will not escape the wholeness of life through Jesus the Peace to the entire world. These words of God as stated in the above verse gives so much hope for entire universe that though we are troubled by the lack of love and grace, by the lack of peace and harmony amongst people – God assures us that not even a stone that is on the path of peace will be left unturned.

In case, you have been attempting to get peace restored in your house, in your entire family, in the space of your friends, in your Church, in your streets where you reside – God promises you today that everything that stands in the way of peace will be placed in the correct place. Peace will fix your struggles; Jesus will fix your troubles....!! Even if it's you who is in the path of peace, our God and your God will not excuse you from embracing peace.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, you can change things that humanity cannot change, yet You remain unchanged and unmoved. Where there is no peace you offer peace, and we ask that you fill the empty souls with Your peace. Lord in your mercy hear us we pray. Amen.

Week 3: Path to Love
DAY 1: The tested path of love

Writer: Rev Zukisa Fumba

Read Matthew 1:18 “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. When Mary his mother was engaged to Joseph, before they were married, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit”

Reading this account of good news on how Jesus Christ was conceived into Mary’s womb – brings into mind a response for any normal man here on earth not only at the time of Joseph but also in nowadays. How on earth, one’s fiancé can get pregnant without going into bed with her fiancé and with no one else for that matter? Luke says that Mary was impregnated by the Holy Spirit. Wow, this God we worship decided to use another mystery to create as compared to the daily human interaction of conceiving.

God can decide to test us, as He tested Joseph’s faith by chosen His future wife to bear the salvation of the world. What a humble person is Joseph, for he never argued with God to allow God’s plan to continue.

Have you ever been tested as a couple in your path to love and path of love? Take time to reflect, and write down for yourself, how did you react to the testing season? Any lessons learnt or any regrets?

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Did you experience God in your season of being tested? How was it?

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Prayer: Talk to God now about your life experienced path to love..... Amen!

Week 3: Path to Love

DAY 2 : Wrestling with a call to love another

Writer: Rev Zukisa Fumba

Read Matthew 1: 19 “Joseph her husband was a righteous man. Because he didn’t want to humiliate her, he decided to call off their engagement quietly.”

The human reaction of Joseph is a kind of reaction that many people here on earth would generally display. Joseph was such a gentle person who wrestled within himself on what to do in situation where his fiancé is pregnant without going to bed with him. Indeed, Joseph was being a normal human being. Joseph was such a special person, truly his reaction must have surely been inspired by God’s love which tame us even at disruptive moments.

Just for once, pretend that you are Joseph – what would be your reaction to your fiancé Mary who is pregnant not from you?

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Prayer: Almighty God make our moments of wrestling with our paths of love and paths to love be transformational. Amen!

Week 3: Path to Love

DAY 3 : God appear in your trouble to love

Writer: Rev Zukisa Fumba

Read Matthew 1:20 “As he was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. “

The Lord’s ears are not to far not hear us when we cry. The words of David in Psalm 23 – are being affirmed now again that God remains with us when we troubled and happy. So when Joseph continued to contemplate about the fact that he should quietly call off the engagement, God showed up to him to tell him what to do! Our God is able to rescue us in times of our troubles, like he did when the Israelites when un able to bear anymore the yoke of Pharoah in Egypt – God showed up to rescue them . In Exodus 3: 7 “Then the Lord said , I’ve clearly seen my people oppressed in Egypt . I’ve heard their cry of injustice because of their slave masters. I know about their pain.” – this was a time when people of Israel were experiencing pain and probably trying all possible plans to rescue themselves from their own heads. Fortunately , God shows up to us at such moments of encounter. God always shows up in our times of trouble, and we need to be aware of Him for He will always come to redeem us and rescue us.

Prayer: Merciful God enable us to see you when we cry and contemplate about things that disturb us from staying in the path to love. Amen.

Week 3: Path to Love
DAY 4: Promise of God

Writer: Rev Zukisa Fumba

Read Matthew 1:21 “ She will give birth to a son , and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins”

In most of the times, troubling situations bring about shame to one’s life and now that Joseph is trouble God promises him of dignity and protection to the family. For many centuries, giving birth to a son was a sign of dignity and honour for the family especially for the man of the house. When a woman gives birth to a son, she will only be honoured for blessing the family with heir. As Joseph was thinking about the embarrassment that he was to experience for the pregnancy of Mary without him – God stopped the contemplated shame to an endless joy and honour.

God has always ordained a plan for all of us to enjoy fruits of the path to love. God showed up to Joseph not just for Joseph but for the entire universe that the world will be saved from dying into sins. In other words, God will walk us to the path of love away from the path to eternal death and that’s the promise of God for creation.

How one reject such a promise of life and love from God? Will you accept this promise of God again? Please say more below about how do you receive such a promise from God now in your life?

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Payer time : make a time now to pray to God !

Week 3: Path to Love

DAY 5: Love is the fulfilment of God's will

Writer: Rev Zukisa Fumba

Read Matthew 1: 23 “Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will call him, Emmanuel. (Emmanuel means “God is with us”)

Nothing that God says and promises about it falls into the cracks. Our Almighty God is faithful and never disappoints us. God spoke to prophet Isaiah about the birth of Emmanuel. In other words, God promised and is fulfilling the promise He has made that He is with us (Emmanuel). His promise has stood the test of all seasons, maybe sometimes when we are not patient in seeing what God is doing for us to save us – we give up on His promise.

You can always depend on His promise to save us from all kinds of our failures and wrongdoing – just turn to Him with all your being and you will find the fulfilment you need for your life. When you turn to Jesus, you have to remember that no one is without a choice – this how wonderful God is to people.

May you allow your heart to be captured by God's love of fulfilment and I believe that when His love have decided to take over your heart , you have will have not strength to reject the divine purpose. However, I pray that you may not delay that experience of fulfilment in your life , maybe this past season and/or probably current time some parts of your life needs the revival from His love to fulfil your emptiness in you. In the Triune God- the Father – the Son and the Holy Spirit, I bless you now with His fulfilling love. Amen !

Week 3: Path to Love

DAY 6: RISE UP NOW TO LOVE

Writer: Rev Zukisa Fumba

Read Matthew 1: 24 “ When Joseph woke up, he did just as an angel from God commanded and took Mary as his wife.”

When the angel of God has spoken to you, when God has given you signs on what to do either through people you know or even strangers telling you things that you know you should do and you are struggling to accept – Now it's the time for you to bear the yoke of obedience. Maybe you are having difficulty to love your partner for his/her mistakes that s/he has done in your eyes or for that matter a mistake indeed. The story of Joseph is a true mystery and reality of how God continues to be at work, because God prevented Joseph to hurt Mary who is carrying the Saviour of the world by God's will. It's true that when we take time of discernment on any difficulty issue, God shows up to us to direct us on what to do!

I have heard about so many people since March 2020, who have had broken relationships (from family to intimate partner relationships) because of the overwhelming stress of this COVID-19 implicated habits of duress. Maybe you have been a victim of the unkind season and you are happy that your partner lost a job or your child's school interest has disappeared or your family could not visit you when you had severe COVID-19 illnesses or no one at your work understand your COVID-19 after effects or you have not been compassionate to others who been ill in this season or you have taken lightly how others are struggling/have been feeling in this season : I have a TIP for you , stand up now and give that person you have ignored a hug (Ooops!, it's still Covid-19 time, touch his/her elbow if s/he is not family) and reinstate the love in all your engagements. The path to love requires you to stand up and offer love to your neighbour across the streets and inside your house, in your workplace). The path to love is not only for your closer relatives and your friends only, but for the stranger too, your colleagues too, your church people!

May you take the real path to love as given to us by Jesus, in saying to us – we should love our neighbours the way we love ourselves. Therefore, stand up now and bring love where you know and not know you have failed to love! The path to love, require us to walk it with our actions for all people.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, help us to stand up again and love unconditionally. Amen.

Week 4 : Path to Joy

DAY 1 : GOOD NEWS IS A PATH TO JOY

Luke 1:46-48

Writer : Kyleigh Jordan

When Mary received the news from Gabriel that she was to become pregnant with Jesus, the Son of the Most High, there are many paths that lay ahead of her. She could have chosen the path that led to fear, focussing on what people in her community would think when she began to show visible signs of pregnancy before marriage, she could have chosen the path that led to dread, focussing on what Joseph's reaction would be, would he remain true to her and dare believe this miracle? or would he abandon her as she no longer appeared to be a virtuous woman? She could have chosen the path that led to imposter syndrome, thinking to herself, why me?? Surly I am not good enough, surly there is someone else more qualified? I am just a lowly servant girl, this assignment is outside of my ability. She could have taken many paths that would have led to an array of emotions and would have left her feeling helpless and afraid, but Mary chose the path that led to Joy by focussing instead on the good news. *"Mary responded, Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed"-Luke 1:46-48*

As we journey through this season of advent in 2021, we too have many paths that have been presented to us. We are living through a time in our worlds history where we are faced with more uncertainty, fear, grief and dread than ever before! Now more than ever we must be intentional about the path our thoughts are talking! Because our thoughts are powerful. May we be audacious enough to follow in Mary's footsteps, even in a time where the world is in a hopeless frenzy, may we choose the path that leads to joy and focus instead on the Good news. Our Saviour has been born; help has arrived!

"Do not be afraid! For behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: Today in the city of David a Saviour has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord!"- Luke 2:10-11

Prayer: Lord God, even when my circumstances dictate otherwise, remind me of your good news!

Week 4 : Path to Joy

DAY 2 : CONNECTION IS A PATH TO JOY

Luke 1:39-40 NLT

Writer : Kyleigh Jordan

“A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth.” Luke 1:39-40.

Just A few days after Mary receiving the incredible news from Gabriel, Mary went to visit her beloved cousin Elizabeth. Scripture paints a clear picture of how she went about this! We read that Mary “hurried”. In the Greek, the word used is “Spoudes”, it means speed, diligence, earnestness, and enthusiasm. Mary was enthusiastic to be in the company of those she loved, she was enthusiastic to be connected and in community.

What is more, her enthusiasm for connection lead to Joy! When arriving at the home of her cousin she is welcomed, celebrated, and encouraged and there is rejoicing! Connection is a path to joy!

We were not created to do this alone! We see this in the creation account; God created everything and proclaimed it was good but in chapter 2, after God created Adam, we read that something is not good, “it is not good for man to be alone”. Solomon echoes this sentiment as he writes in Ecclesiastes, “Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.”

A sure way to divert from the path that leads to joy is to choose isolation, to choose the path of self-reliance, to choose to deal with our news alone. If we are to walk down the path that leads to joy, we must be intentional about connection and community! We must find a safe space where we can share our stories and foster deep friendships, and like Mary, we must do this with haste, diligence, and enthusiasm.

May we know this festive season, that this truth comes with great responsibility, because connection is a path to joy, we have the power, and wonderful privilege to bring joy into peoples lives as we take time, to reach out to those who are lonely. To visit those who are unable to be near to family because of distance and border restrictions and to open our homes to those who have no one to share a Christmas meal with, and, to be mindful of those who have lost loved ones.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the gift of community! May you help me to choose connection this Christmas.

Week 4 : Path to Joy

DAY 3 : THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE PATH TO JOY

Luke 1:41-42

Writer : Kyleigh Jordan

“At the sound of Mary’s greeting, Elizabeth’s child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, “God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed.” Luke 1:41-42

These verses hold the most wonderful truth, that it, a consequence of being filled with the Holy spirit is joy! The very moment Elizabeth comes within the presence of the unborn Saviour, she is filled with the Holy Spirit and the result is that she gives a “glad cry”! Later she goes on to explain that the Moment Mary walked into the room, her baby leaped for joy within her! Scripture is filled with direct connections between the filling of the Holy Spirit and joy. “*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*”- Romans 14:17. In Acts we read that, “*the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*”.

Relationship with the Holy Spirit empowers us to live a lifestyle of consistent joy and it is only through the filling of the Spirit that we have access to deep reservoirs of joy found in the heart of our heavenly Father as His fruit of Joy begins to take route in our lives. That is why the apostle Paul commands us to “*Be filled with the Holy Spirit*”- Eph 5:18 The word filled in this context is in present and continual tense. We must be filled and go on being filled!

May we remember this advent, that the path to true joy is not discovered in buying or receiving the perfect gift, it is not in eating or preparing the perfect meal and it is not in having the perfect Christmas tree or light display. While all those things are wonderful, the happiness they create is temporary. The path to true Joy is found in the Holy Spirit.

May you fight for time and space this Christmas amongst all the shopping and organising and cooking, to spend a moment in the presence of Jesus. May you ask him to fill you with his Spirit, and as you do, may you discover true joy.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, please fill me with your Holy Spirit.

Week 4 : Path to Joy

DAY 4 : TRUST IS A PATH TO JOY

Luke 1:45

Writer : Kyleigh Jordan

One of the things that led to Mary's joy was her unwavering faith and Trust in the word she received from God.

Mary didn't doubt what the angel had said. Mary didn't wait for proof, she didn't wait until she saw visible signs of her pregnancy before she began to celebrate it, instead, Mary took God at His word and was able to experience His joy in the present tense. Elizabeth affirms this wonderful faith in Mary as she exclaims, "*You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said.*" Luke 1:45.

Believing leads to blessing! Trusting in God is a path to joy! The psalmist puts it like this, "*For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name*"- Psalm 33:21

When we choose not to trust Him, we rob ourselves of present tense joy! "*Trust is an indispensable element of a happy life. A suspicious, distrustful soul is like one walking in a fog, chilling, perplexing, distorting.*" - Henry Donald Maurice Spence-Jones

The path to renewed joy in God begins when we evaluate the false securities of our lives and honestly assess whether we are trusting in our all-sufficient and all-trustworthy Christ at His word.

May we know today, that just as with Mary, God has made us many promises! He promises us a future filled with hope! He promises to never leave us nor forsake us, and He promises to weave all things back together for the good of those who love him. God has promised a redemptive end to our stories! May we not wait until the end to have joy!

May we not delay the experience of Gods Joy until there is proof of his promise coming to pass, may we find present tense joy in his word as we trust him, holding on to the truth that "*He who promised is faithful*" Hebrews 10:23 and "*nothing is impossible with God*" Luke 1:37

Prayer: Lord Jesus, Lord, help me surrender my need to understand and choose instead to trust you at your word.

Week 4 : Path to Joy

DAY 5 : GRATITUDE IS A PATH TO JOY

Luke 1:39-55

Writer : Kyleigh Jordan

Perhaps the most profound part of our reading this week is found in Mary's famous song of praise, The Magnificat. Here Mary sings and praises and gives thanks to God and in so doing, points us to another path that leads to joy, Gratitude.

The overflow of gratitude is joy Psalm 126 reveals this, *'When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.'* Psalm 126:1-3

Gratitude is powerful! In fact, studies reveal that people who habitually give thanks experience higher levels of alertness, determination, optimism, energy, and less depression and stress to those who do not. Gratitude can reduce anger, aggression, and resentment. It can even help us sleep better. Some reports state that gratitude improves our self-esteem and reduces comparisons with others. People who give thanks are not controlled by fear, but joy! The realization that we have so much to be thankful for despite life's setbacks creates joy, resilience and inner strength!

Perhaps that is why the bible places such a high emphasis on the subject. "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances." Gratitude is the art of being able to notice what we do have instead of allowing our hearts to be troubled by what we do not, and it opens our spiritual eyes! The more we thank God, the more we see God at work in our lives! Gratitude helps us sense God's presence, His precision, and His perfect timing." *Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.*" -James 1:16-17

"Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow"-Melody Beattie.

May we learn from Mary and choose gratitude.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the blessing of life! May my eyes never be blinded to the good things you are doing.

Week 4 : Path to Joy

DAY 6 : REMEMBRANCE IS A PATH TO JOY

Luke 1:49-51 NLT

Kyleigh Jordan

A sure and certain path to a renewal of Joy is to look back and remember all the good God has done! It is far too easy to be caught up in all the prayers we have not seen answers to and to fix our focus on the areas where we have not seen breakthrough but taking those paths will only lead to despair. The path of Remembrance will ignite our faith and fill us with an effervescent and overflowing joy that we will not be able to contain!

We see this so beautifully in Mary's song of Praise. She remembered all the good things God had done and could not contain the joy it brought her. *"For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me. He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him. His mighty arm has done tremendous things"*- Luke 1:49-51.

If we are to experience this effervescent joy, we too must cultivate the art of remembrance and call to mind moments His love, provision, and power that were prevalent in the past. We must recall our history with God and remember our testimonies! The word testimony comes from the Hebrew word that means to reveal, repeat and do again. When we recall our testimony, we are reminding our weary souls of God's heart for us, God's power within us and God's faithfulness towards us. When we look back and notice the tapestry of God's grace woven throughout our history, we are encouraged to face the future and we are filled with joy. *"Remember the things I have done in the past. For I alone am God..."*-Isaiah 46:9.

Do you remember the good things your father has done for you? When last did you just sit and think back to when God first started to call you close? To the times you have seen His power and His hand at work in your life? To those unexplainable things that happened on your journey that make you smile because you know God was responsible. When last did you think back to the cross where our King our Jesus died for us, sacrificed His life that we may truly live? As we come to the crossroads of joy and despair, may we choose joy by remembering.

Prayer: Lord, when times of trial tempt me into despair, help me remember!

ADVENT: PATH TO JOY

Welcome: Spend a moment sharing some good news with the group

Worship: Joy to the world

Read: Luke 1:39-55

Word:

- 1- Why do you think community and connection can lead us to an experience of joy?
- 2- What are some practical ways you can take time aside from the hustle and bustle of this Christmas season and spend time asking God to fill you with his spirit.?
- 3- Why do you think trust leads to joy? Are there any areas of your life you need to trust God more in?
- 4- What are 3 things you are grateful for at the moment? Spend time in prayer giving thanks to God for all He has done.

Work:

Take a moment in God's presence and ask him to reveal someone who is in need of connection this festive season. How could you reach out to them in a practical way?

