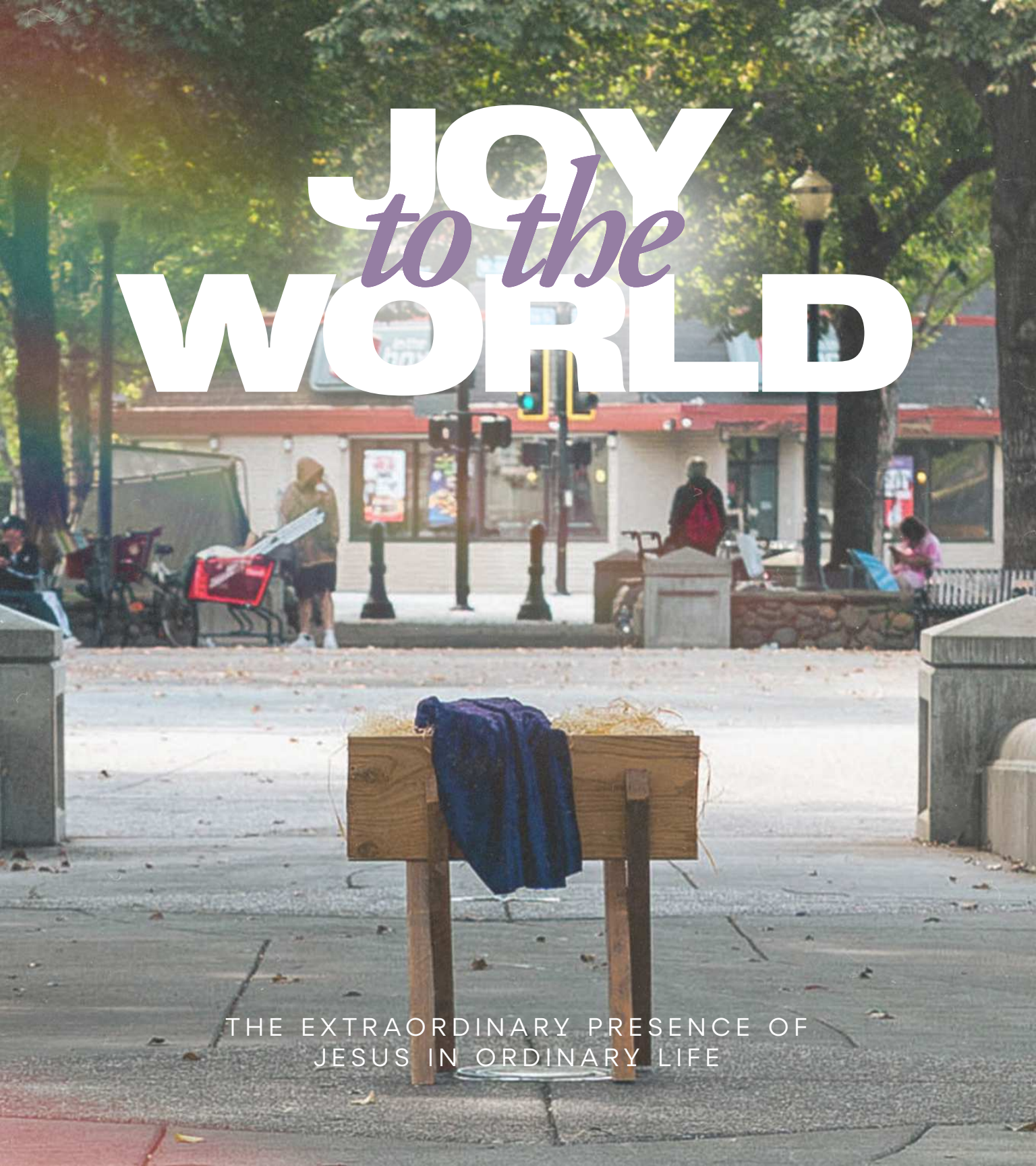

JOY
to the
WORLD
THE EXTRAORDINARY PRESENCE OF
JESUS IN ORDINARY LIFE

# CHRISTMAS
## *at efcc*

DIFFERENT GATHERINGS. ONE REASON TO CELEBRATE.




A CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION FOR THE
WHOLE FAMILY




CELEBRATE THE
WONDER OF CHRISTMAS




A SPACE FOR LIFE.
A PLACE FOR HOPE.




A SUNDAY
FILLED WITH JOY

# JOY *to the* WORLD

THE EXTRAORDINARY PRESENCE OF
JESUS IN ORDINARY LIFE

ADVENT 2026


"Lord I Need You"
Barbara Wilson – Organist

# Contents

Welcome

A Word from the Pastors

The Manger

How to Use This Book

Week One - Hope

Week Two - Love

Week Three - Joy

Week Four - Peace

Christmas Eve

Christmas Day - Into Our World

Here With Us Closing

When the Manger Is Gone


CATERPILLAR

# *Welcome*

**CHRISTMAS IS THE EXTRAORDINARY STORY OF GOD ENTERING THE ORDINARY. THE ETERNAL SON OF GOD DID NOT ARRIVE SURROUNDED BY POWER, COMFORT, OR SPECTACLE. JESUS ENTERED THE WORLD IN HUMILITY. HE WAS BORN INTO AN ORDINARY FAMILY, PLACED IN A MANGER, AND STEPPED FULLY INTO HUMAN LIFE.**

That is what makes Christmas so astonishing. God came here. He entered a world filled with work and rest, relationships and loneliness, celebration and grief, noise and quiet. He did not remain at a safe distance from human life.

He made His dwelling among us. And that changes the way we look at our own lives. Because if Jesus was willing to enter ordinary human existence, maybe the ordinary parts of our lives are not as insignificant as we sometimes think.

Breakfast before school. Coffee in a quiet house. Walking across campus. Putting a child to bed. Going to work. Sitting with a neighbor. Walking through Bidwell Park. Caring for someone. Laughing. Waiting. Grieving. Resting. These are not the moments between the important parts of life. These are the places where we actually live. Advent invites us to pay attention to the extraordinary presence of Jesus right in the middle of the ordinary.

# A WORD FROM THE PASTORS

## *Dear Church Family*

As we enter this Advent season, we want to invite you to slow down and rediscover the wonder of Christmas. In the middle of busy schedules, family gatherings, celebrations, and even the challenges life brings, it's easy to lose sight of what makes this season so extraordinary. The God who created everything chose to come near to us through Jesus. He entered our world, experienced ordinary human life, and made His dwelling among us. And that incredible truth is worth taking time to reflect on.

Our hope is that this devotional will help you recognize the presence of Jesus in the everyday moments of your life. Over these four weeks, we'll walk together through the themes of hope, love, joy, and peace, remembering that God is at work even in the places we might overlook. Whether you're reading this on your own, with your family, or alongside friends, we encourage you to make space for God's Word, reflect honestly, and look for opportunities to share His love with the people around you. You don't have to have a perfect Christmas season to experience the presence of Jesus.

As a church family, we have the incredible opportunity to carry the joy of Christmas beyond our homes and into the community around us. Our prayer is that this season would not only draw you closer to Jesus but also inspire you to love and serve our neighbors throughout Chico.

May the people around us see His hope, love, joy, and peace through the way we live. Thank you for being part of what God is doing in and through our church family. We're grateful to be walking this journey of faith together.

With love and prayers,
Your Pastors
Rick Asche & Jordan Fox
EFCC

**HE CAME**

*into this world.*

**HE MADE**

*His dwelling among us.*

**HE IS HERE**

*with us*

**HIS PRESENCE**

*is the story.*



# HOW *to use* THIS DEVOTIONAL

Each week has five readings. You do not need to rush through them. Use the two extra days to catch up, return to something that stayed with you, spend time with the week's Scripture, or simply create some quiet.

Each devotional follows the same simple rhythm:

## READ

Start with Scripture

## REFLECT

Slow down and consider what the passage reveals about Jesus and the life you are actually living.

## SIT WITH THIS

Do not rush to the 'right' answer. Some questions are meant to stay with you.

## LIVE IT

Each devotional ends with a simple response - not another task to accomplish, but a way to carry what you have read into ordinary life

## PRAY

Talk honestly with God. The goal is not to have a perfect Advent. The goal is to become more awake to the presence of Jesus.




HOPE
in the
WAITING

# *Week one*

Hope in the God who keeps His promises. Before there was a manger, there was a promise. God's people waited generations for the Messiah. That makes waiting part of the Christmas story. Not the polished kind of waiting where you know exactly how everything turns out. Real waiting. Uncertainty. Disappointment. Loneliness. Questions. Unanswered prayer.

Advent gives us permission to admit that some things are still unknown to us. Christian hope does not require us to pretend everything is okay. Hope rests in the character of the God who keeps His promises.

*Day one*

# A PROMISE IN THE DARKNESS

**READ** *Isaiah 9:2-7*

## REFLECT

Darkness changes your perspective. Think about walking through your house after the lights are off. You know the room. You have walked through it hundreds of times. But suddenly, you move differently. You slow down. You reach for things. Shapes seem unfamiliar.

A little bit of darkness changes the way you interpret everything around you. Life can do that too. One diagnosis. One phone call. One broken relationship. One season that lasts longer than you expected. One unanswered prayer. Suddenly, the thing in front of you starts feeling like the whole story.

Isaiah speaks to people who knew darkness. And God's response is interesting. He does not pretend the darkness is not real. He gives them a promise. A child is coming. A King is coming. Light is coming. Nothing had changed yet. But, something had been promised. That is different from optimism. Optimism says, 'I think things will probably get better.' Hope says, 'I know who God is, even when I don't know what happens next.' Some of us are moving towards Christmas with things we wish were different. Advent does not ask you to minimize them. It asks whether you believe darkness gets the final word.

Christmas says it does not.

## SIT WITH THIS

What problem has become so large in your mind that it has started to feel like the whole story?

Can you acknowledge that it is real, without allowing it to define everything else that is true?

## LIVE IT

Write down the thing weighing on you most. Underneath it, write: This is real. But this is not the whole story.

## PRAY

God, some things in my life still feel dark. Help me be honest about them without losing sight of You. Teach me to hope in who You are before I know how everything will turn out. Amen.

*Day two*

# WHEN GOD FEELS SILENT

**READ** *Psalm 13*

## REFLECT

'How long?' That is a surprisingly honest prayer. And Scripture leaves it in. David does not edit himself into something more spiritual. He does not pretend that waiting feels fine. He asks God where He is. Most of us have prayers like that. How long until this gets easier? How long until my child changes? How long until the grief stops feeling so sharp? How long until I know what to do? How long until You answer? Sometimes the hardest part of waiting is not the problem itself. It is wondering what God's silence means.

We can begin interpreting silence as absence. Maybe He is disappointed in me. Maybe I missed something. Maybe He does not care. Maybe nothing is happening.

Advent pushes against that assumption. For generations, God's people waited. From their perspective, the promise may have seemed incredibly quiet. But God had not abandoned the story. Advent reminds us that silence and absence are not the same thing. You do not have to fake confidence while you wait. You can tell God the truth. The important thing is not whether you ever ask, 'How long?' The important thing is that you keep bringing the question to Him.

## SIT WITH THIS

What prayer have you grown tired of praying?

Have you started interpreting God's silence as something about His character?

## LIVE IT

Pray without cleaning up your words today. Start here: God, what I really want to say is...

## PRAY

God, when I cannot see what You are doing, I am tempted to fill in the silence myself. Help me trust that You are still present. Give me the courage to keep talking to You honestly. Amen.

*Day three*

# GOD HAS NOT FORGOTTEN

**READ** *Luke 1:5 -25*

## REFLECT

Zechariah and Elizabeth had waited a long time. Not a few weeks. Not a frustrating year. Long enough that what they wanted no longer seemed possible.

That kind of waiting changes you. At first, you pray expectantly. Then cautiously. Then sometimes you stop mentioning it altogether because disappointment starts costing too much.

And right there, at the beginning of the Christmas story, Luke introduces us to two people whose lives did not turn out exactly the way they had expected.

Then God moves. This passage is not promising that everyone eventually receives exactly what they have been waiting for. Life does not work that neatly.

But it reveals something about God. He had not forgotten them. Waiting often tempts us to confuse two different things: God has not answered the way I hoped. and God has forgotten me. Those are not the same statement. There may be something in your life that still has no clear resolution. Christmas does not give us easy explanations for every unanswered prayer. It gives us Jesus. And Jesus is evidence that God has not forgotten His people.

## SIT WITH THIS

Where has disappointment started shaping what you believe about God?

Can you separate what you wish God would do from what you know to be true about Him?

## LIVE IT

Tell someone you trust about something you are still waiting for. Do not ask them to fix it. Simply stop carrying it alone.

## PRAY

God, waiting makes me wonder if You see me. Remind me that unanswered questions are not proof of Your absence. Help me trust Your character while I wait. Amen.


PASS

*Day four*

# HOPE FOR THE WEARY

**READ** *Isaiah 40:27-31*

## REFLECT

Sometimes nothing is dramatically wrong. You are just tired. Tired of making decisions. Tired of carrying responsibility. Tired of helping. Tired of worrying. Tired of trying to stay positive. Tired of being the dependable one. There are seasons when exhaustion itself starts changing how we see everything. Small problems feel enormous. Conversations feel harder. Faith feels weaker. Patience disappears faster.

Isaiah speaks directly to people who feel overlooked and worn down. And notice God's response. He does not shame tired people. He reminds them who He is. God does not run out of strength. We do. That sounds obvious, but most of us spend a lot of energy pretending otherwise. We live as if the entire world depends on us continuing to function. Maybe part of hope is accepting that you are not God. You have limits. You need rest. You need other people. You will eventually reach the end of yourself.

And according to Isaiah, that is not where God's strength ends.

## SIT WITH THIS

Where are you genuinely tired right now?

And where are you pretending not to be?

## LIVE IT

Remove one unnecessary thing from your schedule this week. Not because you are quitting. Because you are human.

## PRAY

God, I am not limitless. Thank You that You are. Meet me in the places where I have run out of strength, and help me receive rather than constantly try to push through. Amen.

*Day five*

**READ** *Matthew 1:18-23*

# THE PROMISE OF HIS PRESENCE

## REFLECT

Joseph's life becomes complicated quickly. He has a plan. Then, suddenly, he does not. There are decisions to make. Questions he cannot answer. A future that no longer looks the way he imagined.

And into all of that comes one of the names at the center of Christmas: Emmanuel. God with us. Notice what the promise is not. God does not promise Joseph a simple life. He promises presence. That might matter more than we realize. A lot of our prayers ask God to remove us from difficult places. Fix this. Change that. Give me an answer. Make this easier. Sometimes He does. But Christmas reminds us that God's deepest answer to the brokenness of human life was not an explanation. It was Himself. He came here. Maybe hope is not always believing tomorrow will be easier. Maybe sometimes hope is knowing that whatever tomorrow contains, we will not enter it alone.

## SIT WITH THIS

Where are you asking God primarily for an answer?

What would it mean if His presence became more important than getting the

## LIVE IT

Remove one unnecessary thing from your schedule this week. Not because you are quitting. Because you are human.

## PRAY

God, I am not limitless. Thank You that You are. Meet me in the places where I have run out of strength, and help me receive rather than constantly try to push through. Amen.


LOVE
made
VISIBLE

## *Week two*

The love of God revealed in Jesus and made visible through His people. God does not love humanity from a distance. He sends His Son. Jesus comes near. And people who have received that love are called to live in such a way that love becomes visible again.

Not because we somehow replace Jesus. We do not. The Incarnation belongs uniquely to Him. But His followers bear witness to Him through lives of hospitality, generosity, mercy, service, forgiveness, and presence.

And that means Advent eventually moves beyond our homes. Into our neighborhoods. Onto campus. Into downtown. Into workplaces. Into Chico. The city is not simply the backdrop to our church.

These are the places where our neighbors actually live their lives.

*Day one*

# THIS IS LOVE

**READ** *1 John 4:7-12*

## REFLECT

We use the word love for almost everything. We love food. We love music. We love a show. We love a vacation. Then John points to Jesus and says: This is what love looks like. God moved toward us. Love became action. That immediately makes love less sentimental. Real love eventually costs something. Time. Comfort. Money. Attention. Pride. Convenience.

Most of us are pretty good at loving people when love fits our schedule. The harder question is what happens when someone needs us at the wrong time. When a friend calls and you are tired. When your spouse is having a difficult day, and you are too. When an aging parent needs more from you than they used to. When forgiveness costs you the satisfaction of holding onto resentment.

Advent is God refusing to love from a distance. And if His love has changed us, eventually distance becomes harder for us too.

## SIT WITH THIS

Who do you say you love, but regularly keep at a comfortable distance?

When love costs you something, do you tend to move closer or pull away?

## LIVE IT

Give someone something you normally guard closely: your time, your attention, your patience.

## PRAY

God, thank You that Your love moved toward me. Teach me to love in ways that can actually be experienced, not just described. Amen.

*Day two*

**READ** *Luke 14:12-14*

# AN OPEN DOOR AN OPEN TABLE

## REFLECT

Somewhere along the way, hospitality became a show. The house should be clean. The meal should be impressive. The timing should be right. The people should be people we already enjoy.

Jesus makes hospitality much more uncomfortable than that. He points toward people who cannot repay us. People outside the normal circle. People who are easy to overlook.

Hospitality is not primarily about having the right house. It is about making room. That matters because you can have a beautiful home and never really welcome anyone into your life. You can also have a tiny apartment, a messy kitchen, cheap coffee, and make someone feel deeply seen.

Think about the manger. God enters humanity without waiting for ideal conditions. Maybe our homes and lives do not need to be more impressive before they can become places of grace.

Maybe we just need to open them.

## SIT WITH THIS

Who gets invited into your life because you genuinely enjoy them?

Who might never get invited unless you intentionally make room? explanation you want?

## LIVE IT

Invite someone into something ordinary: dinner, coffee, a walk, sitting on the porch. Do not wait until it can be impressive.

## PRAY

Jesus, You made room for me. Make my life a place where people who feel overlooked discover that they are welcome. Amen.

*Day three*

**READ** *Luke 10:25-37*

# OUR NEIGHBOR RIGHT HERE

## REFLECT

It is possible to care deeply about humanity and remain completely unavailable to the person standing in front of you.

Jesus brings love down to street level. Someone is hurt. Someone notices. Someone stops. That is where love becomes real. We can spend a lot of time asking what our church should do for Chico. That matters. But eventually 'Chico' becomes a person. The person next door. The student sitting alone. The coworker going through a divorce. The person sleeping outside. The exhausted parent. The older neighbor whose world has gotten smaller. The  cashier you see every week. You cannot meet every need in the city. You are not supposed to. But sometimes our inability to do everything becomes an excuse to do nothing. The Samaritan cannot fix the whole road. He helps the person on it.

## SIT WITH THIS

Where has disappointment started shaping what you believe about God?

Can you separate what you wish God would do from what you know to be true about Him?

## LIVE IT

Tell someone you trust about something you are still waiting for. Do not ask them to fix it. Simply stop carrying it alone.

## PRAY

God, waiting makes me wonder if You see me. Remind me that unanswered questions are not proof of Your absence. Help me trust Your character while I wait. Amen.


PAY TO PARK
E. 4th
ZONE 959287

*Day four*

**READ** *John 13:34-35*

# THE LOVE THEY CAN SEE

## REFLECT

Jesus says people should be able to recognize His followers by how they love each other. That is a pretty serious statement. Because it means our relationships say something about Him. The way Christians disagree says something. The way husbands and wives speak to each other says something. The way we talk about people who frustrate us says something. The way we treat people who serve us says something. The way we repair relationships after we hurt someone says something.

Our lives are always communicating. This is one of the ideas behind what we have called the 5th Gospel. There are people in Chico who may never read Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. But they will meet us. They will work beside us. Live next door. Go to school with us. Stand behind us in line. Sit across a table from us.

And whether we intend to or not, they will draw conclusions about Jesus from the way His people live.

That should humble us. It should also give ordinary life enormous significance.

## SIT WITH THIS

If someone formed their entire impression of Jesus from the way you treated people this week, what would they assume He is like?

Where does the way you live contradict the Jesus you want people to see? would they assume He is like? Where does the way you live contradict the Jesus you want people to see?

## LIVE IT

Repair one thing. Apologize. Send the message. Own your part. Forgive. Do not wait for the other person to go first.

## PRAY

God, I am not limitless. Thank You that You are. Meet me in the places where I have run out of strength, and help me receive rather than constantly try to push through. Amen.

*Day five*

**READ** *Jeremiah 29:4-7*

# FOR THE GOOD OF OUR CITY

## REFLECT

Sometimes Christians talk about cities mostly in terms of what is wrong with them. The problems. The politics. The schools.The homelessness. The culture. The things we wish would change.

Jeremiah tells God's people to do something different. Seek the good of the place where you live. Build there. Plant there. Raise families there. Pray for it. Care what happens to it. That means Chico is not simply the location of our church building. Chico is filled with people God loves. Students walking across Chico State. Families spending an afternoon in Bidwell Park. People working downtown. Teachers. Business owners. Nurses. First responders. People who are lonely. People who are doing fine. People who are barely holding things together. People who disagree with us. People who may never walk through our doors. If Jesus is the joy of the world, then His church should not merely be located in Chico. We should be for Chico. Not because we are trying to advertise ourselves. Because God loves our neighbors.

## SIT WITH THIS

If our church disappeared from Chico tomorrow, who outside our church would feel the loss?

What would it look like for the place where you spend most of your week to be better because you follow Jesus there?

## LIVE IT

Pray for one specific part of Chico. Then ask: Is there any way I can participate in the answer?

## PRAY

God, thank You for planting us here. Give us love for our city that becomes more than words. Make us people who genuinely seek the good of our neighbors. Amen.


JOY
in the midst
OF IT ALL

## *Week three*

Joy is the presence of Jesus in ordinary life. The joy of Advent is deeper than holiday happiness. Happiness is often connected to how the day went. Joy has a deeper foundation. Jesus is present. Because of that, joy can show up in surprising places. In laughter. In work. In exhaustion. In friendship. In a quiet house. In grief. In rest. This week is about learning to recognize joy in the life happening around us. The manger stays. What changes is the life happening around it.

*Day one*

**READ** *Luke 2:8-20*

# GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY

## REFLECT

The first announcement of Jesus' birth comes to people at work. Shepherds are outside doing what they normally do. Watching sheep. Working a night shift. Then, suddenly, ordinary life is interrupted by extraordinary news. The Savior has come! They go see Him. And then, something interesting happens. They go back. Back to work. Back to the fields. Back to ordinary life. Their circumstances are not dramatically upgraded. They still have sheep. They still have work. But now they know Jesus has come. Maybe that tells us something about joy. We often imagine that joy requires escaping ordinary life. A vacation. A better season. More money. Less stress. A different job. A quieter house. But the shepherds return to the same place with a different understanding of reality. Jesus is here! Joy does not change where you are. It changes the way you see where you are.

## SIT WITH THIS

What part of your life have you decided is too ordinary to matter spiritually?

What if Jesus is already present there?

## LIVE IT

Choose your most routine task today. Before you begin, simply say: Jesus, meet me here.

## PRAY

Jesus, wake me up to Your presence in the parts of my life I usually rush through. Amen.

*Day two*

**READ** *Colossians 3:16-17*

# JOY IN THE ORDINARY

## REFLECT

'Whatever you do.' That is an enormous phrase. Because 'whatever' includes a lot of things we do not normally think of as spiritual. Work. Laundry. School. Email. Driving. Cooking. Cleaning. Caring for someone. Paying bills. Running errands. Making another meal. Having another conversation. We often divide life into important moments and filler. Paul does not seem interested in that distinction. Whatever you do can be lived in relationship with Jesus. That does not mean every task becomes exciting. Some ordinary things are genuinely boring. But boring and meaningless are not the same thing. The Son of God spent most of His earthly life outside the public ministry we read about in the Gospels.

Gospels. Years of ordinary human life. Family. Work. Neighbors. Meals. Routine. Apparently, God does not have the same view on ordinary life that we do.

## SIT WITH THIS

What part of your life are you trying to hurry through?

What if this season is not merely something to survive before 'real life' starts?

## LIVE IT

Slow one routine down today. Pay attention to what you normally miss.

## PRAY

Jesus, keep me from missing the life You have actually given me because I am waiting for a more exciting one. Amen.

*Day three*

**READ** *Mark 6:30-32*

# WHEN LIFE IS LOUD

## REFLECT

IThere is almost a funny detail in this passage. Jesus and the disciples are so surrounded by people that they do not even have time to eat. That sounds familiar. December can be like that. Work. Shopping. School. Parties. Travel. Church. Family expectations. Texts. Deadlines. Christmas can become so full of Christmas that we barely notice Jesus. And when the disciples are exhausted, Jesus does not congratulate them for how busy they are. He invites them away. Rest. That can be hard for people who have learned to measure value by productivity. Stopping can make us feel guilty. Sometimes we even enjoy being needed. But rest exposes an important truth: The world keeps moving when you stop. God remains God while you sleep. Your limitations are not a moral failure. They are part of being human.

## SIT WITH THIS

What is your current pace doing to the people around you?

Does your inability to stop come from responsibility - or from believing everything depends on you?

## LIVE IT

Take thirty quiet minutes somewhere this week. No screen. No task. No productivity.

## PRAY

Jesus, help me resist the urge to fill every empty space. Teach me how to rest in Your presence, without feeling that I need to accomplish something first. Amen.


THE RAWBAR
RESTAURANT & SUSHI
25 Years and Still Rollin'
THANKS CHICO!

*Day four*

**READ** *John 16:20-22*

# JOY THAT HOLDS THROUGH SORROW

## REFLECT

There is almost a funny detail in this passage. Jesus and the disciples are so surrounded by people that they do not even have time to eat. That sounds familiar. December can be like that. Work. Shopping. School. Parties. Travel. Church. Family expectations. Texts. Deadlines. Christmas can become so full of Christmas that we barely notice Jesus. And when the disciples are exhausted, Jesus does not congratulate them for how busy they are. He invites them away. Rest. That can be hard for people who have learned to measure value by productivity. Stopping can make us feel guilty. Sometimes we even enjoy being needed. But rest exposes an important truth: The world keeps moving when you stop. God remains God while you sleep. Your limitations are not a moral failure. They are part of being human.

## SIT WITH THIS

What are you grieving this Christmas?

Have you given yourself permission to be honest about it?

## LIVE IT

Name what you miss. If it is a person, say their name. Remember something good. Let gratitude and grief exist in the same space.

## PRAY

Jesus, help me resist the urge to fill every empty space. Teach me how to rest in Your presence, without feeling that I need to accomplish something first. Amen.

*Day five*

**READ** *Romans 12:9-16*

# THE GIFT OF BEING TOGETHER

## REFLECT

Paul's picture of community is remarkably ordinary. Love each other. Honor each other. Share. Welcome people. Celebrate together. Cry together. Stay close.

No complicated strategy. Just people actually sharing life. Most of us know many people. That does not mean many people know us. It is possible to attend church every week and remain almost completely unknown. You can smile. Make conversation. Serve. Leave. And nobody realizes you are carrying something heavy. The opposite can also happen. God can use another person's ordinary presence to remind you that you are not alone. A meal. A text. A friend sitting beside you. Someone asking the second question. Someone remembering.

Community is one of the places where the presence of Jesus becomes tangible. But it requires something from us. We have to let people close enough to know what is actually happening in our lives.

## SIT WITH THIS

Are you known - or merely surrounded?

What part of your life do you keep hidden because you are used to being the strong one?

## LIVE IT

Tell one safe person something real. Let them into the part of the story you normally edit out.

## PRAY

God, thank You that we were not designed to follow You alone. Help me become someone who is willing to know others and willing to be known. Amen.


PEACE
into our
WORLD

## *Week four*

Peace through the God who made His home among us. The story is moving toward arrival. The Creator enters creation. The eternal Son becomes human. Heaven enters the messiness, vulnerability, beauty, and limitations of ordinary human life. This is what makes the manger more than Christmas decoration. It represents the astonishing humility of Jesus.

God did not stay above the mess. He entered it.

*Day one*

**READ** *John 1:1-14*

# THE WORD BECAME FLESH

## REFLECT

John begins the Christmas story somewhere completely unexpected. Not Bethlehem. Not Mary. Not Joseph. Before creation. Jesus already is. The Word is with God. The Word is God. Everything exists through Him. Then John says: "The Word became flesh."

We hear that phrase often enough that it can stop sounding strange. It should sound strange. The Creator becomes part of creation. The eternal enters time. The One who made human bodies takes one on. Jesus does not simply visit humanity. He becomes human. God does not shout love at us from a distance. He comes near enough to be touched. Christmas therefore tells us something fundamental about God's posture toward us. He moves toward broken people. He enters broken places. He comes near.

## SIT WITH THIS

When you imagine God looking at your life, do you picture Him leaning toward you or pulling away?

What does Jesus becoming flesh say about that picture?

## LIVE IT

Read John 1:14 again. Slowly. Sit with the phrase: 'Made his dwelling (Tabernacle) among us.'

## PRAY

Jesus, I have heard this story many times. Make it surprising again. Help me understand what it means that You came all the way here. Amen.

*Day two*

**READ** *Luke 2:1-7*

# NO ORDINARY ARRIVAL

## REFLECT

If we were planning the arrival of God, we would probably improve the production value. A palace. A crowd. Some important people. A better room. Jesus gets a feeding trough to lay in. The contrast is almost absurd. The most important arrival in human history happens in circumstances most people would overlook.

That should challenge the way we measure significance. We tend to notice big things. Visible things. Successful things. Impressive things. God seems perfectly comfortable working through small ones. That means your life does not need to become impressive before it matters. Some of the most important things you will ever do may never be public. Keeping your word. Caring for someone who cannot repay you. Doing your work well. Raising children. Being faithful in a difficult marriage. Sitting with a friend. Serving quietly. Showing up again.

The manger tells us God does not confuse visibility with value. Maybe we should stop doing it too.

## SIT WITH THIS

Where have you started believing that your life matters less because fewer people notice it?

Would faithfulness still be enough if nobody applauded it?

## LIVE IT

Do one good thing today that nobody needs to know about.

## PRAY

Jesus, free me from needing ordinary faithfulness to become impressive before I believe it matters. Amen.

*Day three*

**READ** *Hebrews 4:14-16*

# THE GOD WHO KNOWS OUR LIVES

## REFLECT

There are times when 'God understands' sounds almost too easy. But Christmas gives that statement weight. Jesus knows human life. Not theoretically. Personally. He knows fatigue. Hunger. Pressure. Rejection. Grief. Friendship. Pain. Temptation. The Incarnation means God entered the experience of being human. And Hebrews draws a conclusion from that: Come close.

That is interesting because our instinct is often the opposite. When we struggle, we hide. We think: I should be further along than this. I should not still feel this way. I should have more faith. I should be stronger. And because we are embarrassed by weakness, we create distance from the very One who invites weak people near.

Grace does not say: Come back when you have fixed it. Grace says: Come now.

## SIT WITH THIS

What are you embarrassed to admit you are struggling with?

What if weakness is not the thing keeping you from Jesus, but the very reason to come closer?

## LIVE IT

Tell Jesus plainly where you are struggling. Do not promise to do better first.

## PRAY

Jesus, thank You that You know human weakness from the inside. Help me move toward You instead of hiding when I need grace most. Amen.


MAXIMUM OCCUPANCY
660

*Day four*

**READ** *Luke 2:8-14*

# PEACE IN A UNCERTIAN WORLD

## REFLECT

The angels announce peace. But look at the world around them. Rome still rules. Herod is still dangerous. People still struggle. Violence has not disappeared. Uncertainty remains. Clearly the angels are not announcing that everyone's circumstances will suddenly become peaceful.

The peace Jesus brings runs deeper. God has come near. The Savior has arrived. The story is moving somewhere. And one day, everything broken will be made right.

Until then, peace is often found before circumstances change. That is difficult for those of us who try to create peace through control. We tell ourselves: I will relax once I know what happens. Once the doctor calls. Once the kids are okay. Once the money is settled. Once I know the plan. But there is always another uncertainty. Maybe peace cannot depend on knowing everything. Maybe peace begins when we stop demanding control and begin trusting the God who entered our uncertain world.

## SIT WITH THIS

What future outcome are you trying hardest to control?

If you knew Jesus would be present no matter what happened, would that change the way you carried it?

## LIVE IT

Open your hands. Name the thing you cannot control. Say: This belongs to Jesus.

## PRAY

Prince of Peace, I keep trying to build peace out of certainty. Teach me instead to rest in Your presence when life remains uncertain. Amen.

*Day five*

**READ** *Colossians 3:16-17*

# HE MADE HIS HOME AMOUNG US

## REFLECT

A manger on a lawn. A manger in a bedroom. A manger near the breakfast table. A manger downtown. A manger at Chico State. The image feels strange because a manger does not belong in those places. And yet that is the whole point. The Christmas story itself feels out of place. God in human flesh. The eternal Son in a small town. The Creator sleeping. The Savior lying in a feeding trough. God enters ordinary life. And because He does, ordinary life can never again be dismissed as meaningless. That is where this Advent journey has been taking us. Jesus is not only present in the sanctuary. He is present while you make dinner. While you work. While you care for someone. While you sit alone. While you walk through the city. While you laugh. While you grieve. While you rest. And if we really believe He is present in those places, then our ordinary lives become the places where we respond to Him.

They also become places where other people may encounter something true about Him through us. That is the 5th Gospel idea at its simplest. Jesus came into ordinary life. Now ordinary people who belong to Jesus carry His extraordinary love into ordinary places.

## SIT WITH THIS

Where do you most naturally recognize Jesus?

Where do you tend to live as though He were absent? If the people around you encountered Jesus only through the way you live in ordinary moments, what would they see?

## LIVE IT

Stand somewhere ordinary today - your kitchen, office, garage, driveway, classroom. Look around and pray: Jesus, You are here too. Then ask: How can someone experience Your love through me here?

## PRAY

Jesus, make me awake to Your presence. Let my ordinary life become a faithful witness to who You are. Amen.

*Christmas Eve*

# A MOMENT TO REMEMBER

**READ** *Luke 2:1-20*

When I think back on Christmas as a kid, one of the memories I hold most dear is my parents gathering us together on Christmas Eve to remember why we were celebrating. We took time as a family to turn our attention toward Jesus. The lights in the house went off, the candles were lit, and we read and sang together as we ushered in the celebration of the coming King.

All these years later, I still look back on those moments with gratitude. Something my parents chose to make time for became something that stayed with me. It's a tradition I have passed on to my family and, this Christmas, I want to invite you to share a moment like that with the people you love.

That's part of the heart behind gathering as a church on December 23 this year. I'm looking forward to celebrating Jesus' birth with our church family, and I'm excited about the opportunity that gives us the following evening. On Christmas Eve, I'd love for you to take a few minutes at home to open the Bible, remember the good news of Jesus' birth, and respond together in your homes.

In Luke 2, the angel announces that a Savior has been born. That's the heart of Christmas. God saw our sin, our brokenness, and our need, and he sent his Son. The baby lying in the manger came to rescue us...to give his life for us and rise again so that we could be forgiven and brought into a relationship with God. Whatever this Christmas looks like for your family, that is good news worth pausing to remember.

**Slow Down.**
The Christmas season is meticulously designed to speed you up, and your kids are the main target. Just know that they probably wont love the intentionality behind this evening...I didn't appreciate it as a child either...but now, as an adult, it is one of my most cherished memories with my family. Put the phones away, turn the Christmas movies off, and spend this time together as a family. The rest of the world can wait.

**Read the story.**
Gather somewhere comfortable and read Luke 2:1–20 aloud. Around the tree, at the dinner table, or before bed. Choose a moment that works for your household. If someone else wants to help read, invite them to! It was always my Dad growing up, but if little Timmy wants to flex those reading skills...let him do it!

**Talk about it.**
Ask, "What stands out to you in this story?" Give everyone time to answer. Then ask, "The angel calls Jesus a Savior. What did he come to save us from?" You don't need a

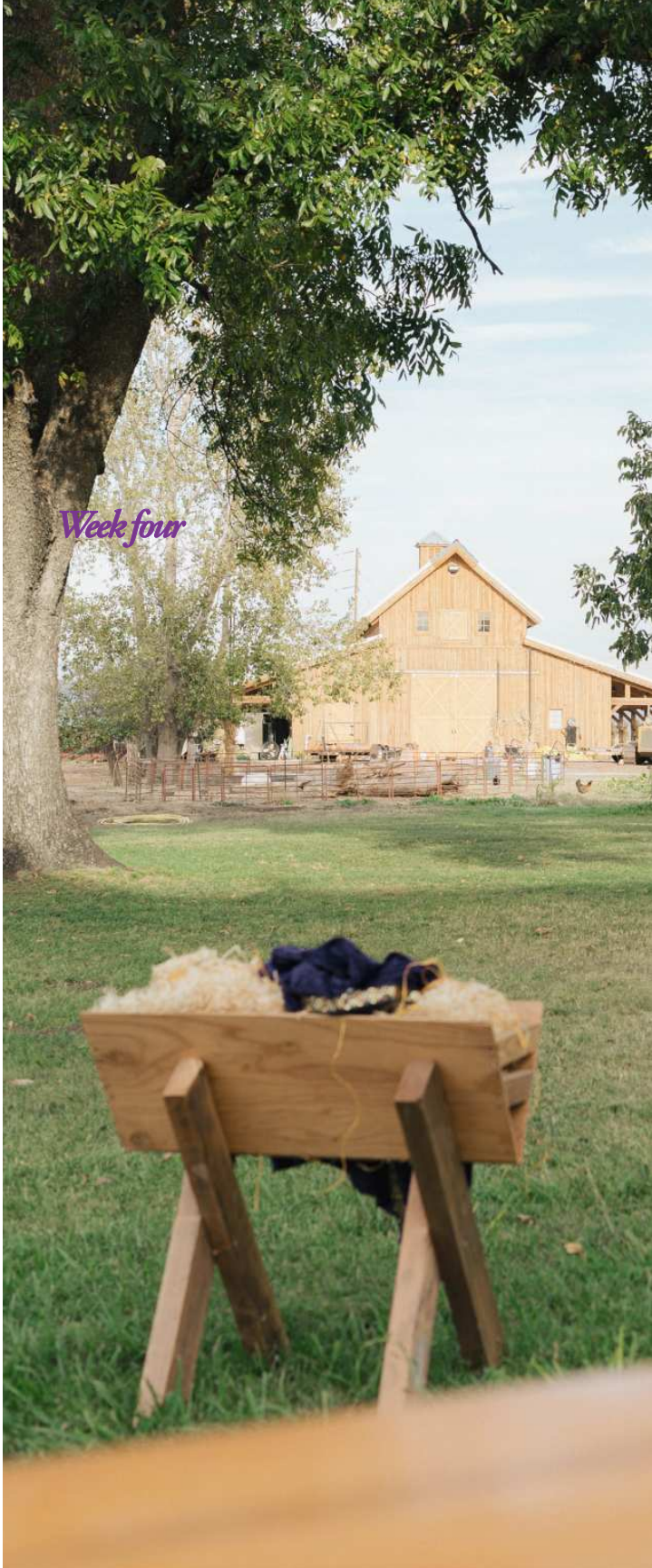
polished explanation. You can simply share that we all need forgiveness, and Jesus came because God loves us and wants to bring us back to him.

**Sing Together.**
Break out the hymnals (print them out... nobody has a hymnal at their house anymore) and sing a few classic Christmas songs. We often forget the rich and worthwhile doctrinal truth that lies within the pages of our hymnals. This is a great opportunity to teach your kids that these songs carry more worth than their catchy tune.

**Pray together.**
Invite everyone to share something they want to thank Jesus for. Then close with a simple prayer: "Jesus, thank you for coming to rescue us. Thank you for loving us and making a way for us to know you. Help us trust you and share your love with others. Amen."

If leading something like this feels unfamiliar, start small. Read the passage, ask a question, and see where the conversation goes. There's room for restless kids, unexpected questions, and a little laughter. You can grow into this. Whether you're with children, extended family, or a few friends, my hope is that you'll make time to remember Jesus together. My parents couldn't have known how much those moments would mean to me years later. I'm grateful they made room for them. Thanks, Mom and Dad.

Merry Christmas,
Pastor Jordan




HERE
with
US

**READ** *Revelation 21:1-5*

# *Christmas Day*

## CHRISTMAS REMEMBERS THAT GOD CAME TO DWELL AMONG US IN JESUS. BUT THE MANGER POINTS FORWARD TOO. ADVENT LOOKS IN TWO DIRECTIONS. WE REMEMBER HIS FIRST COMING. WE WAIT FOR HIS RETURN.

And between those two Advents, we live as people who know His presence. Revelation gives us a glimpse of where the story is going. God dwelling with His people. Everything broken made new. No more death. No more grief. No more pain. The presence we know now will one day be complete. That means Christmas is not an escape from the real world. It is a promise about where the real world is heading. So today, enjoy what is in front of you. The meal. The people. The quiet. The noise. The gifts. The traditions. The memories. If today is joyful, receive that joy. If today carries grief, you do not have to pretend otherwise. Jesus endured both. And somewhere in the middle of this very ordinary Christmas Day, remember: God did not love humanity from a distance. He entered our world. He made His dwelling among us. He is here with us. And He will come again.

### SIT WITH THIS

Where did you notice Jesus differently this Advent?

What ordinary part of your life do you want to become more awake to in the coming year? If Jesus is really present in the places where you live your life, what needs to change about the way you live there?

### LIVE IT

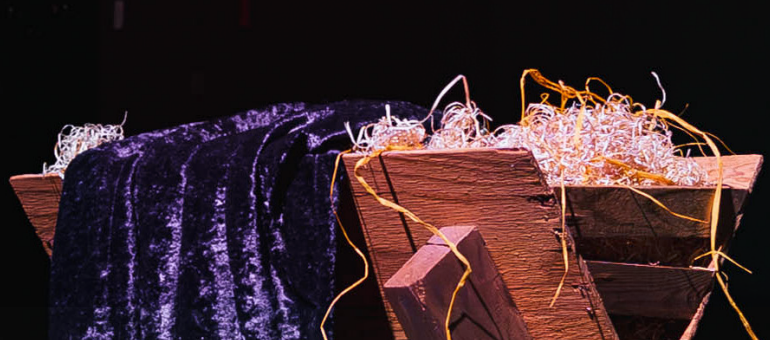
Read John 1:14 aloud sometime today. Then name one place where you want to live more intentionally aware of Jesus in the coming year.

### PRAY

Jesus, thank You for coming into our world. Thank You for meeting us in homes and streets, in work and rest, in community and loneliness, in laughter and grief. Make us people who recognize Your presence. And make us people through whom our neighbors can recognize something true about You.

# *When the* MANGER *is* GONE

Soon, the manger will be put away. Christmas decorations will come down. The songs will disappear. Schedules will return to normal. But Jesus does not leave with the decorations. That may be one of the most important things Advent can teach us. We spend four weeks deliberately looking for Him. Then we return to the same ordinary life we had before. The same job. The same street. The same family. The same city. The same responsibilities. But maybe we see them differently. Because these are the places where Jesus meets us. And these are also the places where other people encounter us. When you walk across campus: He is here. When you sit with a neighbor: He is here. When you drink coffee alone: He is here. When your house is full: He is here. When it feels empty: He is here. When you serve your city: He is here. When you are waiting: He is here. When you are celebrating: He is here. When you are grieving: He is here. When you are working: He is here. When you are resting: He is here. And because Jesus is here, our ordinary lives can point beyond themselves. The people around us may not see a manger. They may not walk into a church. They may not read a Gospel. But they will see us. May they see Hope, Love, Joy, Peace Not because we are trying to look impressive. But because we have been with Jesus.



# JOIN US

*Sunday Gatherings @ 10am*
*Kids Check In @ 8am*

**YTH GATHERING**
*Wednesdays @ 6pm*

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# JOY *to the* WORLD

THE EXTRAORDINARY PRESENCE OF
JESUS IN ORDINARY LIFE

ADVENT 2026