

LIVING
IT OUT



**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

Move Toward What You Want - This Christmas

December 14, 2020

*Find today's **Family Advent Activity** at the bottom of today's reading.*

Today, we take another step into our series, *This Christmas*. In his weekend message, Lead Pastor Ben Snyder spoke clearly about one human dilemma—we are way too focused on where we don't want to be and what we don't like. It is so easy to find ourselves in that place; it takes absolutely no effort at all. Many (me included) pitch a tent and camp out in this vast place—where we do not want to be—spending (*wasting*) valuable time in a place we detest. The lies spoken/listened to while we're there cause many to remain too long.

As Christmas approaches, you may find yourself here, focusing on negativity, and in danger of missing the nativity. If we are not careful, we won't see the truth—that Christmas is unchanged. Consequently, we will also miss God's goodness to everyone: his son. The cycle of negativity spinning in our hearts and minds prevents us from moving toward what we want because our focus is on what we don't. It is a vicious cycle—one in desperate need of being broken.

In [Week 1](#) of our series, Ben spoke about John the Baptist, who was preparing the way for Jesus. John told people to repent and turn away from roadblocks in their lives to make room for Jesus. This week, we get another glimpse of John's mission through the angel, Gabriel. Gabriel appeared to Zechariah, John's dad, and told him the impact John would have on the world.

Luke 1:11-17

¹¹ While Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. ¹² Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. ¹³ But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. ¹⁴ You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. ¹⁶ And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly."

Gabriel said John the Baptist would help people grow, help them move toward life-giving things that matter—turn toward God, turn toward others, and turn toward a purpose. There is no better place to be!

As we prepare for this Christmas season, know that this message is still life giving today. Choosing to step into John's message will break the cycle of negativity. MOVING TOWARD what you WANT keeps you from focusing ON WHAT YOU DON'T.

Questions:

What keeps you from moving toward what you want? What obstacles do you need to destroy to allow you to turn your focus from what you don't want? Do you need to move on relationally to break free from negativity? Do you need to speak up and confront repeated offenses against you?

Next Steps:

Identify the thing(s) keeping you from moving toward what you want. Identify obstacles you need to destroy. Establish healthy relational boundaries to break free from negativity. Choose to speak up and confront repeated offenses against you.

Prayer:

Heavenly father, this holy season reminds me (again) how great your love is for me and others. Your unfailing love causes me to choose to turn away from negativity and negative people. This day, I choose to move toward you, toward others, and toward my purpose—with all the glory going to you and you alone. May your love flow through me into the lives of others through spoken words and acts of kindness. In Jesus' name, amen.

Family Advent Activity:

Family Connection - Use the following prompt to have some meaningful family conversations.

Read [Luke 1:26-33](#).

An angel visited Mary to tell her that she would be the mother of God's son, Jesus. What amazing news! How do you think Mary responded? You can have joy because God has a plan for you.

For more family fun, check out the [monthly advent calendar](#) full of seasonal activities.

This post was written by Karen Peck, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.

Keep the Main Thing ... the Main Thing - This Christmas

December 15, 2020

Find today's Family Advent Activity at the bottom of today's reading.

In 1963, I was 8. There was a fashion phenomenon called “GoGo Boots.” They were beautiful, flat-soled, calf-high, white boots. That was all I thought about for Christmas. (That, and opening another “door” on the Advent calendar.) After what felt like *forever*, Christmas finally arrived, but it was very different than it had ever been before.

It began on Christmas Eve—while hanging ornaments on our 10-foot tree, my brother fell off the ladder and knocked it over. Reboot. Later that evening, after my dad took the “big kids” to midnight service, our next-door neighbor came to the door to tell us our house was on fire (I slept through that.) Finally, Christmas morning arrived, and we were all so happy!

My mom told me to turn the oven on to warm up the baked breakfast goods. She failed to mention they were in cardboard boxes in the oven and that, no, the broil setting wasn't what she meant. Ten minutes later, I paused my present-opening to check the oven. The boxes of goodies were on fire!

Luckily, I had given my dad a cummerbund and tuxedo tie set that year. He ran into the kitchen and managed to beat out the flames with the cummerbund. Everyone laughed!

The best news is, although it sounds like a dreadful Christmas, it wasn't. Why? Because it was Christmas! We'd been opening our Advent calendar one day at a time since Dec. 1. We had put up and played with the manger, lit the Advent candles, and helped wrap presents in anticipation of the best day of the year. I was even given the opportunity to narrate our third-grade rendition of Luke 2:1-20, the birth of Christ. (What an honor not to be a sheep!) When it came time for dessert at Christmas dinner, we sang *Happy Birthday* to Jesus in honor of that most special day.

We didn't care a whit about those so-called disasters because we were focused on the birth of our Savior. Christmas was, and still is, Christmas—the holy day

chosen to celebrate God sending his perfect son to save us and bring us into a holy relationship with him forever. That baby grew up to be the one and only Lamb of God. The only one capable of paying the price for our sins and, thus, making us children of God forever. If only we choose to accept his invitation.

Isaiah 9:6-7 (AMP)

*⁶ For to us a Child shall be born, to us a Son shall be given;
And the government shall be upon His shoulder,
And His name shall be called, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting
Father, Prince of Peace.*

*⁷ There shall be no end to the increase of His government and of peace,
[He shall rule] on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
From that time forward and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.*

So whenever things become unbearably hard, painful, and seem to go on indefinitely, remember it's only temporary and what others meant for your harm, God will use to bless you.

Romans 8:28 AMP

And we know [with great confidence] that God [who is deeply concerned about us] causes all things to work together [as a plan] for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his plan and purpose.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

¹⁷ For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! ¹⁸ So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever."

So like my dad always said, "Keep the main thing, the main thing, and don't sweat the rest."

Questions:

Have you chosen to accept God's gracious invitation of fellowship? Is God your *main thing*? Or are you focusing on your fears and/or disappointments? Does worrying about your troubles change anything? Or is it stealing your joy?

Next Steps:

Read the above Scriptures every day until Christmas, preferably out loud and with your family members. Recall one good thing that happened to you the day before and thank God for it. Pray a prayer of thanksgiving to the one who has saved us all.

Prayer:

My Lord, God, maker of all things that ever were or will be—thank you for being the answer to every painful, seemingly endless horror that occurs in this temporary world. Please, help me to keep my eyes, heart, intentions, words, and actions on you alone—in all things and through all events. In Jesus' powerful name, I pray. Amen

Family Advent Activity:

Family Connection - Use the following prompt to have some meaningful family conversations.

Pick some of your favorite Christmas songs and have a family dance party.

For more family fun, check out the [monthly advent calendar](#) full of seasonal activities.

This post was written by Martha Smith, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.

Move Toward Others - This Christmas

December 16, 2020

*Find today's **Family Advent Activity** at the bottom of today's reading.*

Have you ever been so full of news that you thought you would burst? I know I have! Sometimes, it is the simple things, like a meaningful line in a book or the funny way my siblings say something. Other times, it is something important, like the birth of a baby or a promotion. Whatever it is, there is something in each of us that excites us to share good news.

I imagine that Mary felt similarly. An angel had told her that she was to be the mother of the Messiah, the one she and all of her people had been waiting for. I imagine Mary was in awe, confused, and excited. But I imagine she was also afraid. Not yet married, a young teenager, and unsure of how her fiance would react, Mary had a lot on her mind. She needed someone who would listen to her.

So Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who had also experienced an unbelievable blessing. Despite her old age, she too had been blessed by the Lord and was about to have a baby! But instead of focusing on herself, Elizabeth honored Mary and settled in to listen.

Luke 1:42-43

⁴² Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. ⁴³ Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me?"

Both Mary and Elizabeth were going through something extraordinary, and their presence in each other's life was a gift. The women were blessed with someone they could process and share their emotions with.

It is easy to focus inward, either by keeping to yourself or by only talking about yourself. But these women needed each other. They gifted their attention to each other and truly listened. Mary and Elizabeth set a great example of how to move toward others.

Even in the midst of quarantining and social distancing, it is important for us to draw toward each other—to share our blessings and our burdens.

Galatians 6:2

Share each other's burdens, and in this way fulfill the law of Christ.

Burdens aren't something anyone needs to hide. God's word calls us to share them! God wants us to open up to each other and take the time to listen. Only then can we put our troubles behind us and adjust our focus to what's most important.

In this Christmas season, I have no doubt you are experiencing an array of different emotions. Whatever they may be, don't keep them to yourself. Instead, take a step toward others. Let's share each other's blessings and burdens, and move forward, together.

Questions:

Is there a burden you can share with someone you trust? Are there any blessings you can't wait to tell someone? To whom will you gift your attention—so that they may share their blessings and burdens with you?

Next Steps:

Share a burden with someone, either by telling them about it or helping them through it. If you have good news, share that as well! Take the time to listen to someone else, whether they are sharing a burden or a blessing.

Pray about how you will participate in the upcoming [Winter Group Semester](#).

Prayer:

Father God, thank you for the gift of people in our lives. Please give me the courage to move toward others. Help me to be generous with the time you have given me by genuinely listening to others. Help me to share my burdens and my blessings with those around me. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Family Advent Activity:

Family Connection - Use the following prompt to have some meaningful family conversations.

Read [Luke 1:38](#)

Mary probably had a lot of questions after an angel told her she would be the mother of God's son. But she trusted God. How do you feel when your plans don't happen like you anticipated?

For more family fun, check out the [monthly advent calendar](#) full of seasonal activities.

This post was written by Lydia Snyder, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.

He Has Purpose For You - This Christmas

December 17, 2020

*Find today's **Family Advent Activity** at the bottom of today's reading.*

“Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me” (Luke 1:46-49).

Life is full of surprises. Think of yourself a year ago. There's no way you could have imagined then where you'd be right now—in the midst of a pandemic. But nothing is a surprise to God. I think it's safe to say none of us would have chosen to have 2020 go the way it has. And while our circumstances are out of our control, each of us does have a say in our attitude and outlook.

The above scripture from Luke shows Mary rejoicing with the surprising news of being pregnant with Jesus, God's son. She isn't stuck in the negatives of her extraordinary situation. She isn't dwelling in the stigma that will come with her growing belly. Mary had a choice: focus on all the challenges that come with her pregnancy or step into a life of faith.

She chose to turn toward her purpose. She leaned into her assignment and chose not to focus on the inevitable difficulties and uncertainties that came with it. Mary understood that her pregnancy was not an accident. God chose her. He had a purpose for her.

God has a purpose for you, too. Jesus has an assignment for you based on your unique personality, your past, your passions, your spiritual gifts, and your circumstances. When we recognize our purpose, we show up differently. We bring our newfound motivation with us to work, to school, into our relationships, and even into our prayers.

As we enter what is shaping up to be our most unique Christmas season ever, step into it with an open hand, anxiously awaiting God's plans for your life in this coming year.

1 Corinthians 15:58

So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.

Questions:

Does the concept of living with an open hand to God scare you? Does trusting God come naturally to you, or is it a struggle?

Describe a time you felt purpose-driven. How was your outlook different? Do you feel that purpose now?

Next Steps:

When you read the Bible, specifically look for reasons why Jesus is trustworthy. I think you'll find that even though he is surprising and hardly ever reacts in the way you'd expect, he will lead you in the best direction according to his plan for you. Check out [John 10:1-21](#).

Prayer:

Dear God, when you created me, you had great things in mind. And while my path is seldom straight, you are with me through every turn and every choice I make. Help me to understand that no matter my circumstances, you still have a purpose for me. You still have hope and love for me. Help me to feel that, and help me to seek to know your purpose for me. Let me focus less on my own plans, and more on yours. Your plan is greater than anything. Amen.

Family Advent Activity:

Family Connection - Use the following prompt to have some meaningful family conversations.

Bake Christmas cookies and decorate them with the word "Joy" to remember that the Christmas story brings us great joy.

For more family fun, check out the [monthly advent calendar](#) full of seasonal activities.

This post was written by Ashlee Grosjean, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.

Oh Holy Night - This Christmas

December 18, 2020

*Find today's **Family Advent Activity** at the bottom of today's reading.*

*O holy night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of our dear Saviour's birth.*

So begins one of the most beloved Christmas carols in America. I have vivid memories of singing this song during my church's candlelight Christmas Eve services as a child. When I focus on the lyrics of this song, I am transported to the cold night in Bethlehem when God entered the world in the form of a helpless child.

*Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till He appear'd and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn*

This song found its beginnings in France in 1847. A Catholic priest asked a parishioner and poet, named Placide Cappeau de Roquemaure, to write a poem for the Christmas Eve service. Placide Cappeau was a nominal Catholic at best, but on his way to Paris, he opened the book of Luke and imagined himself under the Bethlehem sky. Once he finished the poem, he asked his friend Adolphe Charles Adams to compose music for it. Adolphe was Jewish.

*Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!
O night divine, O night when Christ was born;
O night divine, O night, O night Divine.*

The song was performed during the Christmas Eve service that Christmas and was immediately embraced by the French Catholic church. Sadly, in the following years, Placide Cappeau walked away from the church, and after finding out about the Jewish ancestry of the composer, the Catholic church in France banned the song.

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.*

Some years later, American writer John Sullivan Dwight found the song. He translated it from its original French and introduced it to the American people. Not only did he love it as a Christmas hymn but also used it to promote his belief that slavery was wrong. It became a popular hymn during the Civil War.

*Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
Let all within us praise His holy name.*

Tradition also has it that in France during the Franco-Prussian War, a French soldier suddenly jumped out of the trenches on Christmas Eve and began singing the song, which resulted in a 24-hour cease-fire.

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

Finally, on Christmas Eve 1906, Reginald Fessende, a university professor and chemist for Thomas Edison, became the first voice to be broadcast over radio waves. He read from Luke 2 and then picked up his violin and played "O Holy Night" to the shock and amazement of all who heard.

This song demonstrates the power of God to use all people for his glory. It was commissioned by a forgotten priest, written by an irreligious poet, composed by a Jewish musician, banned by the church, used for a social and political agenda, and finally, broadcast over radio waves to the ears of an astonished audience.

This Christmas, know that God can use anyone to spread his message, even when you feel insignificant. God's story cannot be silenced by those in this culture or this world. Christ is our King! He is Lord, and his power and glory will be proclaimed forevermore. Amen.

Questions:

Do you believe that God can use your life to glorify his name? What is one way that you can proclaim his power and glory today?

Next Steps:

Close your eyes, listen to your favorite version of “O Holy Night,” and really focus on the song lyrics.

For a more traditional version may I suggest this version: [Celtic Trio and Choir deliver Magical version of O Holy Night](#) or O Holy Night - [Josh Groban](#)

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you that you can use anyone to spread your message of hope to the entire world. Thank you for assuring me that when the day comes for me to leave this world, I will see you face-to-face as my great deliverer. Give me courage to stand up for what is true, even when those around me are falling away. Help me not to be led astray. I proclaim your power and glory forevermore. Amen.

Family Advent Activity:

Family Connection - Use the following prompt to have some meaningful family conversations.

Just like Mary, God has special plans for your life. Do you get excited thinking about the good plans God has for you? Thank him for all He has planned.

Pray – “God, thank you for making me special and for the special plans you have for my life and for our family. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

For more family fun, check out the [monthly advent calendar](#) full of seasonal activities.

This post was written by Julie Mabus, a regular contributor to the LivingitOut.