

TO INFORM & INSPIRE

Connection

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER | GRACE FELLOWSHIP | DECEMBER 2024

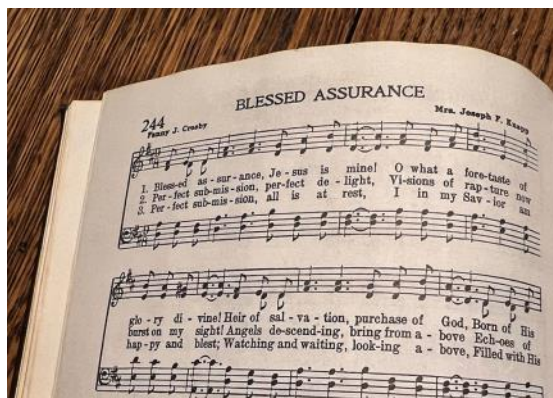


Blessed Assurance

~Pastor Mark Johnson

Ever feel like you've worked so hard and come so far only to be reminded that you still have a long way to go? These moments can be humbling. I was recently reminded by someone close to me that I was underperforming in an area of our relationship. My initial response was defense and anger at what I felt was an unjust characterization.

My fragile ego had been triggered and I was struggling to choose the path of maturity and humility. Then came the verbal reminder, "You always say growth is so important to you. I want you to know that when you [insert unhelpful action], I feel [insert painful emotion]." I had been called out.



In these difficult conversations, shame is never far beneath the surface. My inner critic screams, "You are such a fraud, you will never be enough!" While I may not be able to completely silence that voice, I CAN quiet it with the truth:

"I may never be enough, but that's okay. I am accepted and deeply loved."

The source of this acceptance and deep love? Jesus. I have come to believe this truth and let it sink deep down into my

bones. It is in this felt truth that I can cry out to Jesus in these vulnerable moments for help and assurance that I am not rejected or abandoned due to underperformance. In this truth I can turn off the alarm bells in my head and

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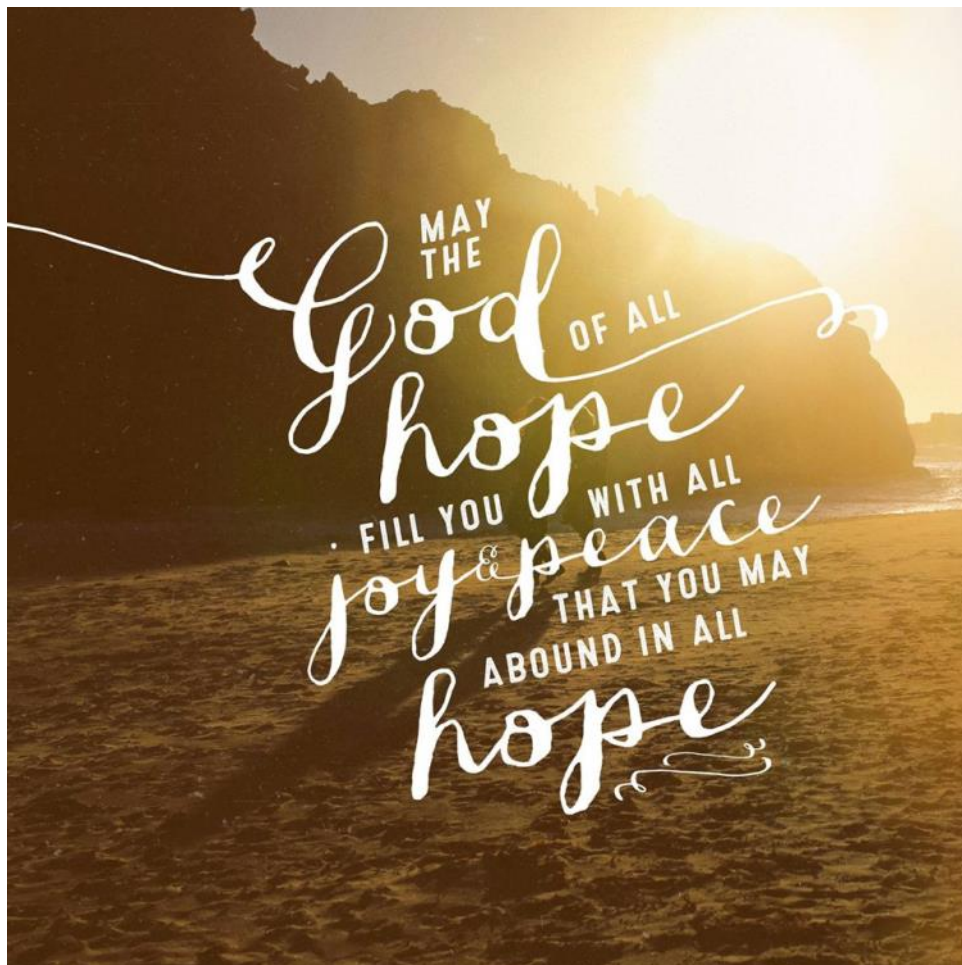
soothe my flooded emotions.
Breathe in. Breathe out. Repeat.

In time, I gain the capacity to respond in a manner that is healthy and good. I can acknowledge the felt pain of the one whom I have wronged and muster the courage to humble myself and apologize.

Relationships are messy. I will sometimes respond to adversity with a humble and full heart while many times I may respond out of fear and anger. Two steps forward, one step back. God's grace is sufficient. I am a broken human being, ever reminded of my need for Jesus.

Lord, help me to be patient with myself as you are patient. May your Spirit in me show me that love is kind and patient and keeps no record of wrongs. One day I will see you face to face and will be unhindered by this body filled with contradiction. In the meantime, I long for you and rest in the blessed assurance:

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine
O what a foretaste of glory divine
Heir of salvation, purchase of God
Born of His Spirit, washed in His
Blood.



UNWRAPPING GOD'S GREATEST GIFT

~Pastor Jonathan Casas

Christmas is a season filled with love, joy, and thoughtfulness toward others. We make our lists, buy gifts, wrap them up, and send them off to those we love.

In many ways, this mirrors what God did for us. **He wrapped His Son in human flesh** (John 1:14) and sent Him as the ultimate gift to us.

There is no greater gift! God sent His Son to be our Savior, and He addressed it directly to us: "To You!" The angel declared, "For UNTO YOU is born this day a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). This gift is personal to each one of us. Can you hear God saying to you, "Here is my Son! This gift is FOR YOU!"?



Jesus is for us! Through Him, we are blessed with so many gifts:

- **Belonging** to God's family (Ephesians 2:12).
- **Hope** where there was none (Ephesians 2:12).
- **Direct access to God** where once there was a separation (Hebrews 10:19-21).

- **God's Spirit within us** where once we were without His presence (John 14:16-17).
- **The fruit of the Spirit** (Romans 12:5-8; Galatians 5:22-23).
- **Forgiveness of all our sins** (Ephesians 1:7).

Eternal life where once we only knew death (Romans 6:23). All these gifts are "TO US" from the hand of God! "Every good thing bestowed, and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17). They are undeserved, unexpected and a sign of our Lord's

amazing grace!

But the greatest gift of all is Jesus Christ—God's Son. The Apostle Paul was so overwhelmed by this gift that he didn't know how to express it. He wrote: "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

I know the holiday season can bring about stress, but even in those moments, we are called to trust in God's provision and express thankfulness even though.... Philippians 4:6-7 encourages us: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with

thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

As we enter the new year, remember that **worship is not just about singing in church—it’s about living a life of gratitude.** Every moment of thankfulness is an act of worship. This Christmas let’s give thanks for the true gift—Jesus Christ, whose birth brings unexpected, unexplainable peace and joy.

I’m so thankful for Grace, and I look forward to worshipping with you all this season. May God’s grace, peace, and joy continue to fill our hearts no matter what season we find ourselves in.

Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year!

With gratitude,
Pastor Jonathan





UNWRAP THE GIFTS

~Duke Foster

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. [Matthew 1:21](#)

Oh boy! Pretty darn simple and yet so powerful when we think about that little baby. That little baby Jesus was born just to save us. Remember before you accepted Him? You probably didn't even think about being lost BUT oh what a feeling when you came to the realization of the saving grace of our Lord. Do I hear an amen?

I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. [John 12:46](#)

Have you had one of those days when things are dark? He doesn't want us there. It's at these dark times that we have to turn from what's putting us down and reflect on His birth. He came to keep us out of darkness and He provides the light we need to pull up our boot straps and say to ourselves "He's got this".

And there were shepherds 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. [Luke 2:8-9](#)

Can you imagine being one of those shepherds? I'll be honest, I'd be diving under a rock. It's astonishing enough to see a falling star but how about "the glory of the Lord"? Picture yourself out there in a field when all of a sudden BAM! I'm just putting my hand to my chin and shaking my head. Golly!

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." [Luke 2:13-14](#)

Does His favor rest with and on you? You better believe it! How about us being favored? We've gotta stop and think about that during this Christmas season. We're not just 'run of the mill'. We're HIS! This is something to shout about. Yes!

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his

shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. [Isaiah 9:6](#)

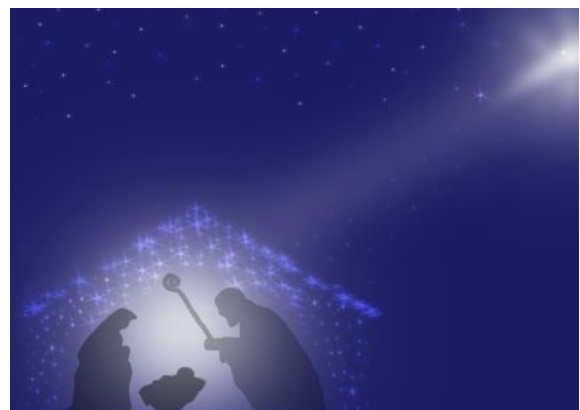
Counselor, God, Father, Prince? Does this tell you something? Talk about gifts! Stop right now and meditate on each one of these. He is all encompassing and wrapped up into one. Talk about joy! He is all there, for us here. We've got to stop beating ourselves up and swallow hard the fact that everything we need now and down the road is found in Him. And – It all started with a child in swaddling clothes. Amazing.

He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth. [Luke 1:14](#)

How about it! Is He a joy and a light to you? This is the season to be joyful. You say ya, ya, ya, especially when we see all those Santa Clauses and Christmas trees in the stores. That joy and delight is there year round for the taking. Are you among the many? Let's do it! Go ahead, start singing Rejoice Rejoice. I bet you know the words.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. [John 1:9-10](#)

Isn't that something? He was and is our all in all. Are we thankful or what, that WE recognize Him? Go ahead and share this incredible gift this year with everyone. Let others know that this baby boy was and is EVERYTHING! Merry Christmas and for sure 'Happy Birthday'!



8th Annual Christmas Boutique



A big thank you from
Women's Ministry





Missions Corner

~ Tammy Jo, New Hope Home

I wanted to share a bit about the amazing time I spent in Ethiopia

back in September and October. The trip was so full of adventure and wonder that I could sit and talk for hours about the beautiful terrain, and the joyful, loving people I encountered. The precious children and the hospitality from people that may be poor and broken but are more than nurturing and kind. But, there is one encounter that stands out more than others and it was a life changing experience where God used my past, my calling here at New Hope Home and my willingness to be used by Him, to bring healing to both myself and to a woman I will refer to as Jamaica.

Jamaica is a participant at a program in Adama Ethiopia called Eliita. This is a program that helps take women and children off of the streets and rescues them from a life of addiction and prostitution. It is a one year program that pays them more than their normal monthly income and teaches them hygiene, working skills, self worth, sobriety, parenting and many other essential things they need to live a full and changed life. The staff encourages and teaches these women how to believe and trust in God and build a relationship with Jesus. This is not an easy task for the staff of believers due

to the amount of trauma and abuse that all of these women and children have endured throughout their lives.

We started out by spending a couple partial days at Eliita building trust and friendships. During this time is when I immediately bonded with Jamaica. When we returned on our last scheduled (but full) day at Eliita, we were there to hold a workshop that educated the women on STD's, self care and of course the love of Jesus.

As we were teaching the class, we took turns giving our testimonies. This opened the door for the Eliita ladies to also begin sharing their stories with us. As Jamaica began to share her testimony she stood angry and disheveled. Sharing that she believed there was no good God. Jamaica wept and unfolded the details surrounding her life and how she had been so tormented, so beaten and lost that she was having a very hard time believing in a "good God" or "Savior" that would make her endure so much loss and pain. A disrupting uprising began to take over the class in a language my team was very limited in understanding. The ladies in the class started yelling at each other and arguing. Our translator Sarone told us that they were telling Jamaica to "shut up", "get out of here", "leave", "don't say those things". Saddened and in shock, I briefly asked God, "what now Lord?" And that was the turning point in which God gave us

all instructions on how to really lead these ladies down a path that went right to the heart of Jesus. Showing them how to witness to each other THROUGH the broken pieces and helping their sister feel God's love so that she can know God's love through all of us. I was able to share parts of my past that I don't normally share. God used this time to bring much healing to myself and to others as we watched His hand move throughout the day.

As we prepared to leave, the Elilta ladies began to sing a song to us. It was a song of redemption. The sound was like nothing I had ever heard before as their voices echoed off of the concrete walls. Although I didn't know the words, my heart was full and I couldn't stop the tears from flooding my face. Lifting my hands and crying out in praise as we jumped for joy and danced in reverence to the Most High screaming "Hallelujah!" Then a voice began to scream "AMASE GENUELUH XAVIER!!!" (THANK YOU LORD) over and over again. Some of the women went to Jamaica and hugged her and started praying over her as she cried and embraced a member of Elilta's staff. It was then, she started declaring her belief in a God that just a few hours prior, had denied He even existed. I went to her and placed my name tag in her hand. I reminded her of the sister she has on the other side of the world that will always be with her through the hope we share and always praying for her. As she kissed my cheek and I turned to leave, several of the other ladies in the program came to me and began to place their name tags on my shirt and reminded me of the sisters that I have in Ethiopia who will be with

me in hope and prayer also. There was a reason God made me wait for this trip. There was a reason it took two years to finally go. It was all for these specific connections and His always perfect timing. From the team members He chose, to the Ethiopian partners we worked with and certainly the people we got to connect with and serve, God had a beautiful plan for it all. There isn't a single thing I would have changed about it, well, except for having to listen to the creepy hyenas scream at night outside our Dorm. I wouldn't have been able to do it without God or the support of all of you.

Thank you all again so much for being a part of such a miraculous event.

Love Always Wins,

Tammy Jo.



December 2024



Happy Birthday

- 1st: Rosemary Jordan
- 1st: Harry Richardson
- 4th: Julianne Allen
- 4th: Andy Deherrera
- 5th: Artina Parkyn
- 6th: Timothy Bowman
- 7th: Josh Pera
- 8th: Case Cazadd
- 8th: Kathy Hall
- 12th: Denise Ancar
- 13th: JoAnn Richard
- 13th: Carlene Garrison
- 14th: Brent Roberts
- 15th: Betty Wolchow
- 17th: Benjamin Kinne
- 17th: Letitia Sexton
- 19th: Nik Smith
- 20th: Marlene Throssel
- 22nd: David Riley
- 24th: Judy Ferrell
- 24th: Vincent Rodriguez
- 28th: Nathan Wiebe
- 29th: Robert Parkyn

Happy Anniversary

- 6—Jim & Kathleen Fuente
- 7—Robert & Claudia Coats
- 9—Andre & Elke Pieterse
- 31—Sam & Kim Aronovsky



*O come, all ye faithful
 Joyful and triumphant
 O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem
 Come and behold Him
 Born the King of Angels!*

*O come, let us adore Him
 O come, let us adore Him
 O come, let us adore Him
 Christ the Lord*





December 2024



| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|------------------------------------|--|--|---|---|---|
| 1 9am Adult Sunday School 10:30am Worship Srv 10:30am Worship Srv | 2 | 3 9:30am Men's Bible Study 6-8pm Living Your Best Life @ Nancy Johnson's | 4 6:15-Weds Night Church Prayer Meeting | 5 7am Men's Bible Study @ Duke Foster's 3pm Tea @ Martha's | 6 6:30am Men's Prayer Meeting 6pm Men's Ministry Dinner & Tool Exchange | 7 6pm Las Posadas Sutter Creek |
| 8 9am Adult Sunday School 10:30am Worship Srv Membership Sunday 12:30pm Prime Timer's Luncheon | 9 | 10 9:30am Men's Bible Study | 11 6:15-Weds Night Church Prayer Meeting | 12 7am Men's Bible Study @ Duke Foster's 3pm Tea @ Martha's | 13 6:30am Men's Prayer Meeting Church Banquet @ Grace Doors open @ 5pm | 14 |
| 15 9am Adult Sunday School 10:30am Worship Srv Children's Ministry Christmas Program | 16 | 17 9:30am Men's Bible Study | 18 10am Rest Home Ministry 6:15-Weds Night Church Prayer Meeting | 19 7am Men's Bible Study @ Duke Foster's 3pm Tea @ Martha's | 20 6:30am Men's Prayer Meeting | 21 |
| 22 10:30am Worship Srv | 23 ACUSD Christmas Break | 24 7pm Christmas Eve Candlelight Service | 25 Merry Christmas! | 26 | 27 6:30am Men's Prayer Meeting | 28 |
| 29 10:30am Worship Srv | 30 | 31 | | | | |

