



The *Journey*



A CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL

Written by the Colonial Woods Missionary Church Staff

The Journey

Christmas Devotional 2024 by various authors

Colonial Woods Missionary Church

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The Journey

The story of Christmas is a story of journeys—physical, spiritual, and transformative.

We usually first think of the the journey of Mary and Joseph, two humble souls traveling to Bethlehem. They were uncertain of the future but obedient to God's call. Their obedience was the backdrop for the miraculous birth of Jesus—God's ultimate journey to be with us.

King Herod embarked on a different path driven by fear and power, blind to the truth unfolding before him, while the shepherds, ordinary men in the fields, responded to a heavenly invitation to come and witness the birth of the Savior. And from the distant East, Magi set out on a long and treacherous journey, led by a star, seeking to honor the King who was born for all people.

Each journey—whether in obedience, fear, worship, or wonder—points to the greatest journey of all: God's love incarnate, coming to meet us where we are.

Just as Mary, Joseph, Herod, the shepherds, and the Magi each responded to the call of Christ in different ways, we too are invited to embark on a journey of faith, hope, and transformation. As we reflect on the journeys and stories shared by our staff in this devotional, may we find ourselves drawn closer to the Savior whose birth changed the course of history—and embrace the God whose love continues to lead us today.

This devotional includes entries for twenty days. Some like to read through an entry every day, some like to read through five entries a week. Choose whatever plan works best for you as we read our way to Christmas Day and reflect on where we each are at on the journey.

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Divine Detours

by Pastor Phil Whetstone • Scripture — Philippians 2:5-11

"...Christ Jesus: Who, being the very nature God, did not see equality with God something to be grasped; but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness..."

Year's ago Tammy and I went with some friends to Chicago for an overnight dinner and theater experience. As we were preparing to head back to northern Indiana an ice storm hit and traffic was jammed for hours. Finally, we realized we were not going to be making it home that day. We pulled into a little town, nothing was open, and no rooms were available, so we finally decided to call churches in town to see if we could possibly find lodging for the night. It so happened that a Methodist pastor and his wife answered the call, invited us to their home which was also without power, and offered a wonderful night of hospitality. Upon meeting them, we found they had actually pastored in our hometown of Nappanee, and he knew one of my childhood friends very well. What we thought was a terrible intrusion, became a memory of Divine Detour and God's Grace.

I'm amazed at how our journey can take unexpected turns. Sometimes they are painful, sometimes they are frustrating, often they are uncomfortable. I am also amazed at how God shows up in the most unexpected ways to remind us He sees us, and that nothing we are facing is taking Him by surprise.

I would imagine, even with that positive ending, most of us wouldn't choose to be detoured like that. However, in today's scripture, we see the beautiful truth that Christ willingly gave up the comfort and glory of heaven to meet us where we are. Scripture said, "He humbled himself..." No matter where you are in the journey, Christ sees you, understands you...and wants to meet you.

That's our focus this month. We recognize that all of us are on a Journey and no matter where you are on your Journey, Jesus Christ is the master of meeting you where you are... and bringing you to where He wants you to be. I invite you to be open to where He may want to lead you this Christmas Season.

Down By the Sea

by Pastor Ann Harrington • Scripture — Matthew 15:21-39

For me, the word journey has become almost a life word. The word I turn to when picturing this life I am living. I love the imagery - a path through the woods, a steep climb up a mountain, footprints on the sand along the shore.

In my 20s, I felt God call me to begin a journey that would take me around the world and back, many times over. I felt called to leave the job that I had spent four years of college preparing for, to step into an unknown path in missions with the organization Youth With a Mission. Following this call meant leaving behind financial stability and the comfort of home, to follow Him across continents - from Australia to India, Nepal, Mongolia, Thailand, and China.

While living in Australia, I was far from family and friends, and the life I had always known. Three years away brought both exhilarating adventures and moments of profound loneliness. Yet looking back, I can see how those highs and lows were essential steps as God prepared me for the dreams He had in store for my life.

One of the best habits I formed during that time was to hop in my beat-up 1980 Toyota surf wagon and drive to the sea. I'd stop at a fish and chip stand, pop up the back hatch, and sit and eat lunch with Jesus. He didn't eat much, but in those quiet moments by the shore, He had a lot to say. So many lunches, watching the waves crash as I poured out my hopes, fears, and dreams - as I asked Him what He thought of them all. It was in those times that I realized He had some hopes and dreams for my life too-dreams far grander and more beautiful than those I had imagined. I often think about how Jesus would retreat, climb a mountain, or walk by the sea-spending time in prayer with His Father, reorienting his perspective and seeking wisdom and encouragement for the journey ahead.

When was the last time you set aside a moment to sit by the lake or wander through the woods? To climb a mountain and take in the world around you? When was the last time you slowed down and let God speak to you about everything swirling in your mind? If you choose to take a moment, or even share lunch with Jesus, you might be surprised by what He has to say.

The Journey, The Blessing

by Todd Perkins • Scripture — Luke 2:7

"And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." -Luke 2:7

In 1983, a Christian band, Petra, released an album Not of this World. The song lyrics include the following: We are pilgrims in a strange land. We are so far from our homeland. With each passing day, it seems so clear. This world will never want us here. We're not welcome in this world of wrong. We are foreigners who don't belong. (Chorus) We are strangers, we are aliens. We are not of this world.

These lyrics are so simple, yet so profound. As followers of Jesus, we often struggle with the world's pull and punch, wanting us to do things for others, but keep quiet about our Savior. We hear the opinions, voices, and reasons why we live in a broken and hurt world, but we are not supposed to speak up because we might offend someone or cause more problems. There is often no welcome for those who love Jesus. We often find ourselves looking for a place to escape, be engaged, encouraged, and equipped to continue living a missional life by sharing the Good News of Jesus with our world.

Joseph and Mary experienced the long 70-mile journey to Bethlehem. Mary was at the end of her pregnancy which could have made this trip 4-7 days long...on the back of a donkey facing hazards such as lions, bears, wild boars, bandits, etc. Then, once they arrived they were told there was no place for them, with the exception of a stable or cave. The journey provided no comfort, no hospitality, no welcome. They were outsiders in Joseph's hometown. They were looking for a place to simply rest.

Here is a woman who experienced rejection and pain, yet saw God through everything they had been through. Mary had shepherds sharing about angels that filled the sky and directed them to where they were. Mary didn't ask for anything, she thought deeply about everything that was taking place and how she was the mother of the Messiah.

That journey led to the greatest blessing humanity will ever know, our only Hope! That is why the world should hear His voice in our story and through a life that honors Him. That is why we of all people should rejoice at the story of His coming and share the joy with all who will listen about the Journey that holds the blessing and hope of Jesus, the Savior of the world.

Journeys Within the Journey

by Lisa Henry • Scripture — Joshua 4:1-9

I love journeys with my family. I love the excitement and anticipation of what we're planning to do and hoping to enjoy. Of course, on these travels, there are stops along the way. Many are needed and welcomed. But sometimes there are unexpected stops or detours that seemingly change the plan. And, if I lose my focus, it is during these times that I might miss the purpose of those journeys within the journey. The focus is to **remember**.

As a young adult called to ministry, I looked forward to that journey with great anticipation and I had ideas on how it might happen. But, while following His plan, I **remember** thinking that God was leading me on a path that didn't make sense and was messing up my plan to serve Him. I **remember** finally surrendering to His will. I **remember** while on that path becoming fully aware that I was absolutely right where He planned for me to be and to serve. That path brought me deeply impactful times of growth and learning. Those years were precious and necessary.

As a wife hoping to become a mother, walking through uncertainty and loss, I **remember** thinking and choosing to declare and sing that His plan, IT, is well with my soul. The God who makes the impossible possible will also comfort and be alongside us in the storm and when thorns are not removed. Those years were hard, yet overflowing with joy and inexplicable peace.

In Joshua 4, the Israelites built an altar of remembrance as a story starter to be shared with future generations. It is a testimony of God's faithfulness in that stop along the way, a reminder of their heritage.

What memories from our lives can we build as altars of remembrance and a testimony to God's faithfulness? What stories can we share from God's Word and our own experiences that tell of God's goodness and love in our lives?

As we continue our journey we will face stops along the way, uncomfortable paths whose ends we cannot see. Let's **remember** to mark the stops like stone altars of remembrance, telling stories of how our Father, with overflowing love, endless forgiveness, and constant patience, promises to lead and teach us through those journeys within the journey.

Pride Goes Before the Fall

by Pastor Jayson Tuckey • Scripture — Proverbs 16:18

"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

In 2020, Kaitlyn and I had the idea of going on a fairly short-notice road trip to Yellowstone National Park for about a two-week trip. We packed up a car with everything we needed to camp for more than a week, and we hit the road. We ended up making the trip, stopping over 3 days to explore places like Sioux Falls, Mount Rushmore, and the Black Hills, to relax and sleep. We had such a great time while we were there that we came back almost reluctantly. But as much as I may love taking my time getting to my destination during a vacation, I hate taking too long to get home. Once I am ready to get home, I want to be home. So we had a 26-hour return journey that we were planning on cutting in half before our stop. But by 11 p.m., after driving for 16 hours, I was feeling good. At that moment, I had a great idea! "Why don't we drive all the way through and save the money that we would have spent on a hotel room?"

What I didn't realize is that driving for that long, mixed with staying awake long after you'd normally go to sleep, has some strange effects on the brain and body. I began to notice that we had left the hilly part of Minnesota and into flat lands, but my brain still thought I was driving downhill for hours. I quickly became more and more delirious, and eventually, I had to wake Kaitlyn up and have her drive. I picked back up after a few hours of sleep, but I never did completely shake the dizziness. Although we got home earlier than anticipated, I actually ended up getting sick for several days afterward, ruining the great feeling of getting home early.

What I realized after the fact is that I almost let my own stubbornness and pride in my own strength put my family in danger. I'm not saying God couldn't and didn't protect us from my stupidity, but often there are consequences to our decisions. This also made me realize something about my own faith in the process too. I have often viewed my Christian journey through the lens of what I am able to do. My own self-worth as a Christian can easily be determined by how much I can do and what I am capable of. But it couldn't be any further from the truth. If you trace sin back to its source in our lives, you'll eventually find pride at the center of it. It's only because of what Christ has done for me that I am saved. I need to let go of my pride regularly, and as Paul says, *"I delight in my weakness...For when I am weak, then I am strong."* (2 Corinthians 12:10)

STEREO

CHRISTMAS

PLAYLIST



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The Perfect Christmas?

by Pastor Tim McCulloch • Scripture — 1 Timothy 6:6

*"Do you want to be truly rich? You already are if you are happy and good."
1 Timothy 6:6 (TLB)*

Reservations and attraction tickets were being finalized. Joann and I had been plotting out the stops that we would make on our first trip together as newlyweds. The plan was to head out to the honeymoon hotspot of Toronto. Knowing we might be a tad tired from the wedding festivities, we did not want to travel the entire way that first night. Joann remembered a hotel that her family had stayed at when she was a kid. Not only did it meet the need for a halfway point, but Joann recalled all the fun things that they did there. There was a waterslide, an arcade, putt-putt, food, and many other things.

The day of our wedding arrived. Vows were said. Pictures were taken. Aside from the melting wedding cake, due to an extra toasty church gymnasium, the reception went off without a hitch. It came time for us to depart the party for a time of relaxation and fun.

Joann and I jumped into our Pontiac Grand Am, crossed the Blue Water Bridge, and set forth on our first married journey. I could not wait. The pool was going to be refreshing. I could already taste the delicious food. Plus, destroying my new wife in a round of putt-putt was going to be so exciting.

As we entered the hotel lobby, many words flooded our minds. Underwhelming, Disrepair, and Dilapidated. Joann and I had such high expectations for this destination, but those expectations did not become a reality. What a letdown! Have you ever had a similar experience?

The Christmas season can lend itself to unrealistic expectations. Our mind says that we must have the perfect tree, an amazing turkey meal, the cutest presents to give . . . the list goes on and on. Once one of those goals is missed, you become deflated. The true meaning of the season is lost.

Let's rework our expectations for this upcoming season. Strive to find contentment in the countless blessings you have instead of the expectations that are impossible to grasp. Besides, why do you think you can conjure the perfect gift when it was already given? That gift was Jesus.

I Stood in Awe

by Pastor Katie (Johnson) Powell • Scripture — Psalm 104:1-35 (NLT)

"Let all that I am praise the LORD. O LORD my God, how great you are!" -Psalm 104:1

A few summers ago, I had the opportunity to go on a tour of the Upper Peninsula with some friends. Having lived in Michigan for a bit at that point and never traveled "Up North", my friends and I decided it was time that I got a little Michigan culture. We went to Mackinaw Island, Sault St. Marie, Tahquamenon Falls, Pictured Rocks, the Porcupine Mountains, Bond Falls, Kitch-iti-kipi, and a few more stops along the way. It was an amazing trip! We had so much fun laughing together, working hard each day to set up and tear down the pop-up camper as we moved to our next destination, trying to keep up with that one friend who's so much quicker than you on hikes, and more!

If you have never been to the UP, it is absolutely beautiful. Like, take your breath away beautiful! And not just because you just got done hiking a little bit of a rocky terrain and you are WAY out of shape take your breath away! The colors, sounds, air, quiet, peace, everything makes you stop in your tracks and just be for a minute! Numerous times, I stood in complete awe of God, the Creator of everything that surrounded me. I'm sure that I looked like a kid walking into a toy store for the very first time. Jaw-dropped, eyes wide just taking it all in.

The author of Psalm 104 writes a song about creation. I think it helps encompass what I was feeling while on this trip. Take some time to read through Psalm 104 today. And as you do here are some interesting takeaways. There are a ton of parallels to the creation story found in Genesis 1. The author switches between "you" and "he" to talk about God, who is both seen in creation and known personally by the author. And finally, Psalm 104 expresses the forever greatness and majesty of God, while also seeing God provide for the earth through transformations, provisions, and renewal.

As I stood in awe of my Creator in the UP, I couldn't help but also think of my favorite hymn, "How Great Thou Art" (maybe listen to that today too). That trip is one that I will never forget! And not just because of how much fun I had with my friends, but because God stopped me in my tracks, and all I could do was stand in awe of Him, the Creator of everything!

Trust and Obedience

by Luke Heid • Scripture — Matthew 6:33-34

A little over a year ago, I came to a crossroads in life: I had to choose between keeping a stable, full-time job with good benefits, great coworkers, and a great working environment, or leaving for two part-time positions that would pay less combined and leave a lot of question marks. While the full-time job was certainly not what I wanted to be doing for my whole life, I had grown somewhat comfortable in that situation. I showed up from 9-5, worked hard, and a direct deposit would hit my account every other Tuesday. Additionally, I was actually good at that job.

I did what we are taught to do as Christians: pray and listen to God's guidance. I did, and I felt that I should take the new opportunities presented to me. One small problem: It made no sense to me to leave a perfectly "good" job. My brain and my heart both had different ideas about what I needed to do (the fancy description for these feelings is cognitive dissonance). I knew that these new opportunities were the ones God wanted me to pursue, but I wanted to feel in control of the situation. I was anxious about giving up control to God and simply being obedient to His calling.

I went to a passage that I come back to the most: The Sermon on the Mount (which is found in Matthew Chapters 5-7). Here, Jesus addresses anxiety and worry head-on, asking a simple rhetorical question in Matthew 6:27: *"Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"* the obvious answer... NO! He continues in verse 31, *"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'"* We are clearly told to not worry, but what should we do instead?

Jesus gives us the answer in Matthew 6:33-34: *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."* God is in control, so stop worrying about what could happen. He is the creator of the universe, and He clearly takes care of others; taking care of you is no sweat. Put him first, and he will take care of YOU! Side note: If I had not trusted God, I wouldn't have taken the part-time position here at CW (which has since turned into a full-time position). God takes care of us when we trust him and put him first.

All Alone

by Pastor Jacob Falk • Scripture — Lamentations 3:19-24

Fall semester of 2021, I woke up one morning at 6 AM to get ready to head to my college class to observe elementary music. Then it hit me, I needed to change my major. Why wait? Just do it. So I logged in to my.bethel and requested a major change. I was no longer a music education major but now an intercultural studies major, and man I wish it was that easy of a transition. What followed was a series of remarks, "Why did you change your major? Don't you know pastors don't make any money? You were going to be a great educator!" I know these people cared about me; they wanted me to have a successful life; but it was hard for me to hear negative comments after following what I thought God was directing me to. Now it wasn't all negative, I remember my father later that week saying to me, "Jacob, I am so proud of you for following God's calling on your life and pursuing ministry." That was a great boost when I was going through a lot of doubt.

Unfortunately, the hard times did not stop there. The following semester my best friend left for South Africa to study abroad. He was the one I would go to when times were hard. He would offer good advice and a helping hand when needed, but now that helping hand was 8,000 miles away. On top of that, classes became harder, friends were not getting along, and the negative comments started coming back. I was slowly starting to become depressed. I tried the "Elijah method" of eating a snack and taking a nap but that didn't help, I just felt even more isolated. One Sunday I stumbled into Lamentations. In the middle of this depressing book, the lamenter cried out to the Lord with a small statement that took me by surprise. *"My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness"* (3:22-23). That is exactly what I needed, a reminder that God never leaves us, God has never abandoned us. His mercies are new every morning.

Those words became my daily reminder: great is **HIS** faithfulness. When people around us seem to drag us down, great is **HIS** faithfulness. When the world looks scary and hopeless, great is HIS faithfulness. When you feel all alone and have no one to help you, great is HIS faithfulness. Read it again from the Message Paraphrase: *"But there's one other thing I remember, and remembering, I keep a grip on hope: God's loyal love couldn't have run out, his merciful love couldn't have dried up. They're created new every morning. How great your faithfulness! I'm sticking with God (I say it over and over). He's all I've got left."* (Lam. 3:21-24 MSG).

Trusting God's Plan

by Pastor Bruce Ake • Scripture — Matthew 1:18-25

"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

I cannot imagine the emotions Joseph must have felt when Mary first told him she was pregnant. He loved her and was ready to start their life together, only to be hit with news that must have caused serious disappointment and confusion. But even with all the turmoil, Joseph trusted that God had a plan for them. Sherry and I had experienced similar frustrations where we needed to trust God's plan.

We both had good stable jobs and things were going great. About four years after graduating high school, I felt the leading of the Lord to attain a college degree in Biblical Ministries. Sherry and I were both newly married and just starting out in life, so we had VERY little money to think that we could quit our jobs and pay for life and add the expenses of college tuition.

I took a trip to Indiana on my own and by faith, I acquired a small apartment to rent. Now, we both needed to find employment to pay for housing and the huge added expense to attend college. I talked with the Vice President of Bethel College and he thought he may be able to put in a good word for me at United Parcel Service. So, I called their office, and I scheduled an interview.

In faith, we made the plans to move – quit our jobs and started packing. The huge disappointment and frustration came when I received a call stating that my interview with UPS had to be canceled due to an accident with a UPS truck on the interstate. As the days went by, we continued to pack our stuff anyway. We were finishing up packing the trailer and we were sweeping up the floor when the phone rang - It was the lady from the UPS Center. She talked with me for a couple of minutes and told me that she was hiring me.

So, we moved down there, and I showed up at the UPS center and about 30 other guys were waiting to apply for the single job available that I already knew I was going to acquire. In the meantime, Sherry applied for a job at Bethel College and she became the executive secretary to the President which qualified me for half tuition for the first year and no cost for the remaining three years. Like Joseph, we could have quietly put a stop to these plans and continued on the current path, but it worked out as we trusted God's plan.

COLONIAL WOODS MISSIONARY CHURCH PRESENTS



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CHILDCARE WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR
INFANTS-THREE YEAR OLDS AT THE
FRIDAY + SATURDAY PERFORMANCES

Stay the Course!

by Lester Killion • Scripture — Psalms 127, Job 42:10,16, Isaiah 46:4

"I am he who will sustain you."

The biggest journey I have ever experienced was full of love, happiness, sorrow, joys, and trials. It possessed many different types of adventures, some messy and some easy, while also providing times of rest and peace. This journey had times when sleep couldn't come and times when sleep came under different skies and different times. This journey was called parenthood and I am still on it today.

God blessed my life with the trust of giving me three children to love, teach, support, and discipline as life pressed forward day by day. There were many smiles and laughs along with many tears and disappointments but I stood firm in the knowledge that God knew what He was doing when He dropped these gifts in my lap. Then a new part of the journey came when tragedy took the mother of my children and in the blink of an eye I was on the path of single-parenting. I found the same tears and laughs, the same trials and joys and the same discipline and happiness but now all the love came from one heart instead of two. The journey became much tougher.

I found myself often wondering what God had in store as so many things changed in this plan. Then I was reminded of the one thing that did not change regardless of anything else in life. My Father in Heaven who held me as His child along this journey. Details come and go and change minute by minute; plans are formulated only to be changed by the details; and intentions swing one way or the other regardless of design. But the plans and purpose of God stay the same throughout the ages and His love outweighs any circumstance we encounter.

Fast-forward to the same journey in the present day and I have a new travel partner with two amazing young men to love, He gave me a few more young adults to watch travel through life as my children found helpmates and five grandchildren (so far) and we now get to watch generation after generation grow and journey. God did not leave nor did He veer me off course. His plan was always faithful to my journey to each and every destination. The blessings along the way fill our house with laughs as we remember even the tragedies with a blessing behind them. God is just and faithful and if we accept this journey, we will be in for quite a ride, but we will make it to our destination and the rewards will be beyond our limits. Stay the course!

Fostering Faith

by Sean Hurley • Scripture — Luke 1:38

Christmas reminds us of journeys—both physical and spiritual—that call us to step out in faith. The Advent season invites us to remember the journey of Mary and Joseph, who trusted God's plan despite the unknowns and traveled toward Bethlehem carrying the promise of the Messiah. Their journey was marked by uncertainty, yet each step led them closer to fulfilling God's purpose.

For my family and me, the journey of stepping into foster care has been a journey of faith, one where we've experienced the beauty and challenge of trusting God beyond our comfort zones. We didn't know what to expect, and many questions filled our hearts. How is this going to affect our lives and those around us? Can we be a catalyst for reunification and healing for families? Could we fully love deeply, even knowing we will experience loss? Yet, through prayer, we felt a call to take this step. In each stage—training, preparing our home, and waiting—we have relied on God's strength and guidance, realizing that He has been walking with us every step of the way. This journey to foster care reminds me of the way Mary and Joseph trusted God with their journey. In Luke 1:38, Mary responds to the angel's message with, "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled." She could have been overcome by fear and uncertainty, but instead, she took a step of faith, trusting God's purpose for her life and the life of her child. In the same way, as foster parents, we feel called to embrace this path with trust, knowing that each step matters.

Though we may not know how each part of this journey will unfold, we trust that God has brought us here with a purpose, to love and care for the family in need, even if only for a season. Our journey, like Mary and Joseph's, reminds us that God's plans are often different from our own, but they are always good. And just as God was with them in every step to Bethlehem, He is with us in every decision, every challenge, and every blessing along the way.

This Christmas, let's remember that following God's call often leads us on unexpected journeys. And though the path may be difficult, we can trust that He goes before us, with us, and in us. The story of Christmas is one of hope and trust, a reminder that when we step out in faith, we become part of God's unfolding story of love and redemption.

Finding Home

by Christina Stein • Scripture — 1 Thessalonians 5:11

The first time I came to Colonial Woods I hadn't been to church in a while. I was burnt out, frustrated with experiences at other churches, and spiritually skittish. I never lost my faith in God over that time, but to be totally honest, I was coasting. And just like in every good story, there comes a moment when you can no longer keep coasting along - that was the moment that Rob and I found out we were expecting our first child. We both had grown up going to church and we wanted the same foundation for our child.

We had been invited to Colonial Woods a few times by family members, so with our freshly found sense of urgency it seemed like the perfect time to check it out. What appealed to me about Colonial Woods was #1 I knew it had an active children's ministry and #2 was large enough that I could be a face in the crowd. I needed time to check it out, to refresh my soul, to stay off the radar, and just be fed. And that is exactly what I did. I would come in a little late and leave immediately after the service feeling refreshed, checking it off my list for the week. It was a wonderful time to hear God's word like I never heard before, but still, something was missing...

Fast forward to 2 kids and a couple of years of attending CW - my kids were starting to attend Sunday School and I was helping in my son's class. I was no longer a semi-recognizable face in the crowd, I was starting to connect with fellow volunteers and leaders. I loved working with little ones and also getting to know the families they belonged to. I had found my people and our once huge church felt a little smaller and more personal.

My family has been a part of CW for 17 years. I have watched my kids grow here and build relationships. I am forever grateful to the leaders who have poured into me and my kids. People who have laughed, cried, and prayed with and over us during all the twists and turns our journey has taken.

So do you have to go to church to believe in God? No. Can you accept Jesus as your savior anytime? Yes. There is no special ceremony or magic words you have to say to do any of those things. However, I would ask - do you know God? Are you taking the time to try and understand His Word? To hear His plan and purpose for your life? A church is just a building, but the people that make the church are something so much more. We were made to be in a community. To share our faith and encourage each other along the way. When you find that place where you can grow in your relationship with God it's just like finding home.



Sometimes You Don't Need to Know

by Pastor Jayson Tuckey • Scripture — Proverbs 3:5

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."

If you're anything like me, you probably went on a road trip or two as a kid. When you're really young, you can't quite see past your parent's seat, and when it's dark out, all you can see out your side window at night is darkness. Occasionally you might see a street sign or a tree zip past. But despite the near total blindness, there is probably not a time in your life where you feel more safe being in a car knowing someone else knows the way you're supposed to be going. Your faith in your parents, or whoever is driving the car, is so absolute that it never even clicks that you might be lost or in danger.

As you get older, you might be tall enough to start seeing ahead on the road. You might see the headlights on the road and wonder, "How can they even know what's coming?" "How do they even know where we're at right now, because I'm totally lost?" And then eventually you had to drive for the first time. For me, I grew up before people had GPS in their pockets, and I can tell you for sure that I had to call my parents at least once because I wasn't sure how to get to my destination that I had been to hundreds of times before.

The progression we are taught is that we need to go from knowing nothing to eventually gathering enough knowledge and experience that we can handle whatever life throws at us. We need to not only get to our destination, but we need to be able to get there at night, in bad weather, and even if the roads are shut down. This is the expectation in life that the world has taught us.

But in our faith, we are so often called to the opposite of that. Jesus says, *"Truly, I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 18:3). And that can take multiple shapes. For some, that means that you need to be asking questions like so many young children do. For others, it means that you need to trust that your spiritual GPS knows the way. For me, that often means that God is telling me, "You don't need to know the road ahead; you just need to see the part that I've lit in front of you and trust that you don't need to see more than that."

The Gingerbread Journey

by Kylie Niedecken • Scripture — Matthew 28:20; Matthew 11:28-29

"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." -Matthew 28:20

When I think of the word, "journey", I often think about a road trip or a physical journey of some kind. But, there's a specific kind of journey that I embark on every year that is always sure to have a few twists and turns. It's time-consuming, frustrating yet fun, and requires extreme attention to detail—the journey of building a gingerbread house.

I usually set out on my gingerbread journey full of hope and excitement, but it can easily turn into a pile of frosting and disappointment. The gingerbread roof always wants to slide right off the house, the walls want to cave in, and the candy that comes in the pre-made kit is always rock solid, so you're sure to break at least one tooth. As a child, this activity would often lead to many tears and frustration—but I was always able to finish my gingerbread house. Not because I suddenly became really talented at gingerbread architecture, but because I began to realize that I didn't have to build it by myself. I had people willing to help me hold the walls together while we frosted the roof on, made sure the foundation was sturdy and gave me candy that wouldn't break my teeth. What was once a pile of gingerbread, frosting, and tears, quickly became a completed gingerbread house.

As we head into the Christmas season, some of us might be stoked for the season ahead, but some of us might be feeling like the roof is caving in, the walls are falling down, and we've been knocked in the teeth. Jesus tells us in Matthew 11:28-29, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Do not be anxious about what needs to get done but give thanks to God."*

No matter what kind of journey you are on, there are going to be moments where you are thrown for a loop and you aren't going to be able to finish the journey on your own. But this is good news! Sometimes our exhaustion and frustration are a gentle reminder that we were created to find rest in Him. Not only does Jesus provide us with rest, but He also promises to always be with us (Matthew 28: 20). We don't have to go through our journey alone or exhausted, we can find rest today in the presence of Jesus.

CHRISTMAS SWEATER SUNDAY



DECEMBER 22

Join us at Colonial Woods in your
favorite Christmas attire!

Surrendering Your Journey to God

by Pastor Brian Ake • Scripture — Luke 1:26-38

Whenever I read this story in Luke 1 of the angel appearing to Mary announcing that the birth of Jesus will come through her womb; I am so intrigued by her journey. If you follow her thoughts through you see a progression in this passage. 1. It begins with her being troubled (v27). 2. Then she questions the angel of the events to come (v34). 3. Then finally she surrender (v38) to the will of the Lord. This is a great example for me.

When my wife Cheri and I felt called to Missionary Aviation we embraced the journey with total commitment. We saved our funds for a year and a half to prepare for aviation training; we sold things; we gave things away as well.

After aviation training our journey was progressing perfectly. We were able to graduate debt-free. We signed right away with Mission Aviation Fellowship. We began our support raising. But then; like Mary; our journey was interrupted. While we were raising our financial support our son Andrew took ill with a chronic kidney condition. We prayed and we believed in a miracle for our son. We continued and finished our support raising and started language school in Quebec, Canada. We continued to believe in healing for our son. But, it did not come. We then had to abandon language school and could not continue our journey in missionary aviation at that time.

I began to do the same three steps that Mary did in Luke 1. 1. I was very troubled! 2. I asked so many "Why" questions. Unlike Mary, I was very angry and bitter with the Lord. After all; This was His journey for us; right?

We were fortunate enough to find a place of ministry back here at Colonial Woods as a youth pastor. But, with my bitterness toward the Lord; the youth ministry was not growing; My position at the church was actually in peril.

After many months: I finally did the third step Mary did: I surrendered my circumstances to the Lord. Like Mary in Luke 1:38; I said "May your word (will) to me be fulfilled." I asked the Lord's forgiveness for my bitterness. When I did this my youth ministry flourished. Then the Lord miraculously led us to another organization where we served for years as missionary pilots.

If you are facing a hard journey in your life this Christmas; Remember Mary in Luke 1. It is OK to be troubled; It is OK to ask questions. But, in the end; always do number three; surrender your circumstances to the Lord. God had a special journey for Mary. Are you surrendering your journey to the Lord?

As You Are Going

by Pastor Chelsea Zalewski • Scripture — Matthew 28:16-20

I was seven years old. It was a summer day and I was along for the ride doing errands with my mom. I remember that we had just driven by Lakeside Park in our Blue Toyota Van (which in my childhood mind, I equated with the Mystery Machine from Scooby Doo). It was in that mundane, everyday moment that I asked my mom, "How do I become a Christian?". Looking back, I'm so impressed with my mom. It was as if she was waiting for that question; and as she was driving our van, told me how to ask Jesus in my heart and then led me in prayer. That was the moment I became a Christian, and it happened as we were simply going about our day.

That car ride was a perfect picture of how we are supposed to live as Christians: sharing Jesus along the journey. Our faith isn't just about moments on the mountaintop, no, living out our faith happens most often in the everyday mundane moments of routine. It reminds me of a passage of Scripture known as "The Great Commission" in Matthew 28.

Here's the context: Jesus had come to earth, lived, died on the cross, and rose again. After he came back to life he was on the earth for 40 more days doing more miracles and being seen by hundreds of people. He then gives some final instructions to his disciples before going back to heaven. You should read the whole passage (Matthew 28:16-20) but it boils down to this: "Go and make disciples".

Now people often read this passage and automatically think it means they have to "go" on a mission trip or "go" live in a hut in Africa. But the "go" in this passage could better be translated to say "as you are going".

"As you are going" to the grocery store, make disciples. "As you are going" to your kid's soccer game, make disciples. "As you are going" through all the places life takes you, make disciples. It's not about the location that you go to, it's about what happens along the journey.

So while you might not have a seven year old in your car asking deep theological questions, you do have opportunities wherever you go and whoever you're with, to make disciples and share Jesus along the way.

Not the Gift I Asked For

by Pastor Jacob Falk • Scripture — Ephesians 2:8

Maybe for you, Christmas time brings back memories of going to Santa and telling him what you want for Christmas. Or you would write a letter to Santa telling him what you want and then mail it to the North Pole. My family did not do either of those; we would instead circle what toys we wanted in the catalogs that stores would send back in the day (I may be young, but I know what catalogs are!). We would get some of the things we would circle. I remember getting new video game systems, Legos, and other toys but one thing we would never ask for was socks and underwear. Yet, every year I always seemed to get them. Eventually, it became a running joke. My brother, sister, and I would send in our Christmas lists and my mom would always reply back, "Okay I got it, socks and underwear it is!"

I knew it was good for me, but why would I want those? It wasn't until recently that I would look forward to that present. Before I just wanted another toy or game or anything else! Why waste the money on clothes when you could spend it on something fun? This got me thinking about other gifts in life. Ephesians 3:8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,..." God has given us this gift of grace. Great... What is it? We live in a culture of wealth and prosperity. God, an extra \$1,000 would make life a little better now. God, a new car would help me get to my job easier. We all have prayed for it. They are not necessarily bad prayers. But God offers us a greater gift. The difference is what do these gifts do for you? Yes, they will help you at the moment, but eventually, these gifts will fade. The cars will break down, the phones become obsolete, and the money will be gone. But God's gift of eternal life will remain forever. As the Prophet Isaiah declares, "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever" (Isaiah 40:8). The Apostle John writes, "And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

This isn't just a gift with temporary satisfaction. This is a gift that has no lifetime guarantee, it has a beyond the grave guarantee! This "simple" gift of grace is one that God freely gives, one that no one else can give, and one that we all desperately need no matter how much we think we don't. This Christmas, let's embrace that gift!

It's Not Easy to Obey

by Pastor Jayson Tuckey • Scripture — Jeremiah 10:23-24

"Lord, I know that people's lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps. Discipline me, LORD, but only in due measure— not in your anger, or you will reduce me to nothing."

Why is it so hard to be obedient as adults to God? My daughter is now quickly heading towards two years old, and I am watching her go from a very obedient, attentive little girl to a willful, independent toddler. It is amazing to watch because even if it's frustrating to deal with a strong-willed toddler, it's so cool to see her become her own person. It must be a normal progression for humans to go from being completely dependent on our parents to being independent people, capable of living on our own. But isn't there something lost in the process? We see it in teenagers all the time. As much as parents might hate it, it's very natural for a teen to believe they have all the answers in life. And as adults, we may think we know that's not true, even in ourselves, but deep down we still believe we are right most of the time.

And because of that, one of the hardest lessons that God needs to teach us is that we need to be obedient and submit to Him. We need to be obedient, not just when we know what God is trying to teach us and do in our lives, but also when we don't know. Galatians 2:20A says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." Paul is saying that I am no longer in charge of my life; it's only for God to decide anymore. And this has been one of the hardest journeys that the Holy Spirit has led me on.

There have been many times in my life where I wanted to go a certain direction in life and he had to redirect me. When I was a teenager, I knew that God had called me to ministry, but I didn't want to do that at the time. I wanted to go to medical school, but when God puts a call on your life, it's hard to run away. When I finished college, I wanted to stay in the northern Indiana area, work at Bethel, and continue on the path that I had set out. But then Pastor Phil gave me a call and let me know about the opportunity to join the team at CW. Even then I said "no," and it wasn't until later in the summer that God convicted me and set me back on the path he had for my life. When the summer started, I didn't even consider that as an option, but that's the great thing about being obedient to God; when you do live a life of obedience, God will take you to amazing places you never even knew were possible.

No Room in the Comfort Inn

by Pastor Phil Whetstone • Scripture — Luke 2:4-7

"So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

In the days following Christmas 1990, Tammy and I were headed back to our home in University Park, Iowa. Normally it is a 7-hour trip from our northern IN family, but it turned into a 20-hour journey. An ice storm gripped I-80 west of Chicago, and traffic was stopped for miles. We finally decided we needed to just get a room for the night so we got off the exit, and went to the Comfort Inn, only to find out not did they not have any rooms, but there were no rooms in the entire town. They offered us a spot in the lobby, but we decided just to get back on the road. For the next 14 hours, we slept while the traffic was jammed...waking only when the semi behind us would blow his horn. We finally reached home the next day.

We were pretty discouraged when there was no room. I imagine Mary and Joseph were as well. However, just because their accommodations weren't as planned doesn't make the event any less GLORIOUS. God had other plans and provisions they likely never dreamed of. An angel chorus, a private party of farm animals, a humble reception of shepherds, and Heaven cried out at God's beautiful provision for the salvation of humanity. God's provision isn't any less beautiful because we didn't expect it. I don't know where you might be this Christmas, but I can promise you that God already has a plan and provision for you. I want to invite you to reach out to Him...be honest with Him... and invite Him into your journey.

I promise He won't say "No." Scripture declares *"To those who receive Him, to those who believe in His names he gives them the right to be called Children of God."* John 1:12 and Jesus says *"If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."* Rev 3:19.

He's waiting for you this Christmas! No matter where you are at on the journey, won't you invite Him in?



Christmas Eve

❧ CANDLELIGHT SERVICE ❧

Celebrate Christmas Eve with us for one of our four identical services on Sunday, December 24th:

11:00 AM • 3:00 PM • 5:00 PM • 7:00 PM

Childcare available for infants - three year olds during the 11:00 am + 3:00 pm + 5:00 pm services only



Notes

Merry Christmas!

We hope you enjoy this Christmas devotional!

We hope these words from our staff encourage you this holiday season as we each reflect on where we are at on our journey.

If you are looking for a church home, we'd love for you to consider Colonial Woods. Our mission is to develop fully committed disciples of Jesus Christ through **changed lives**.



Scan here to check out all that is happening at Colonial Woods this Christmas season!



www.cwmc.church