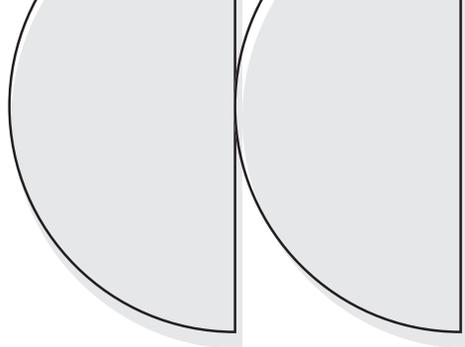


DAY 6

And so, Lord, where do I put my hope? My only hope is in you. Psalm 39:7 NLT

It's an awful feeling when someone lets you down. Whether it's your parent forgetting to pick you up, a friend cancelling on you, or your sibling not having your back, it hurts when you hope that someone will come through for you and they don't. But God has a perfect record of coming through for us. And that's the incredible thing about God! When you count on God, you can know that God loves you unconditionally, always looks out for you, and will always come through.

Write down the ways you've seen God be present in your life and use that as a reminder to put your hope in God!



DAY 7

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6 NLT

When we think about Christmas, sometimes we see it as the end of the story. But really, the birth of Jesus was only the beginning. God sent Jesus to Earth to make a way to have a relationship with us. And one of the ways that relationship can grow and continue is through learning about Jesus in God's Word. So, as you think about Jesus this Christmas season, make it a goal to memorize this verse to grow in your understanding of Him.

And make it fun! Write three Christmas cards to friends or family members this week and include this verse in the note. Each time you write it, try to do more of it from memory!

DAILY DEVOTIONAL

FOR AN
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COUNTDOWN TO CHRISTMAS / WEEK 1

MIDDLE SCHOOL

DAY 1

Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."

John 8:12 NLT

Have you ever tried to find your way around a dark room? You can't see anything, and that makes the risk of things like getting injured or harmed pretty big. Life can sometimes feel a lot like that, can't it? You're wandering around in what seems like a difficult or uncertain time, and it feels like any hope for things to get better is small. The truth is that Jesus is the light of the world. When we follow Him, Jesus leads the way for us no matter what we're walking through.

Today, notice the lights around you—the sun, a flashlight, the lights in your home. When you do, thank God for providing you with the light of Jesus no matter what you're going through.

DAY 2

But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.

Romans 8:25 NLT

Waiting is one of the hardest things to do! It's so difficult to sit around or try to distract yourself while you wait for something you want in life. And if we're honest, waiting can also make it really hard to have hope that whatever it is we want will happen. It can be so tough to find the courage to look forward to something when you just aren't sure how it will turn out. Well, the key to having hope no matter what is confidence! When we put our hope in God, we can be confident that God is with us no matter what. That makes waiting worth it!

Today, write the word "CONFIDENT" somewhere you'll see it often to remind you of the confident hope you can have in God.

DAY 3

But I will keep on hoping for your help; I will praise you more and more.

Psalm 71:14 NLT

Have you ever been in need of help? If you have, then you know the way it feels. Your stomach clenches up, your heart starts beating fast, your hands get sweaty. And when the help finally comes? Well, there's nothing like that feeling of relief! But did you know that in between those feelings of helplessness and relief, you can insert something very important: hope. When your hope is in God, you can trust that help is going to come. You can trust that God will come through, even when you're in the middle of waiting and looking for help.

What situation in your life could use a little hope between the helplessness and the relief? Read today's verse and use it as a reminder that God's Word promises us help.

DAY 4

Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.

Hebrews 11:1 NLT

Faith is a tough concept to grasp. We can put our faith in God, but what does that actually mean? Faith is really a result. It's the end product of what you believed would happen all along. Faith is the action of living as if what you hope for is going to happen. When you sit in a chair, it shows you have faith in the result—that the chair will hold you up. The same can be true when we put our faith in God. We can live as though we know the result—that all God has promised will be true for our lives.

Today, reach out to an adult you trust and ask them about a time when they chose to have hope even when they didn't know what the result would be.

DAY 5

Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.

Hebrews 10:23 NLT

Written by Bella, age 17 from Sugar Hill, Georgia, USA

Christmas typically brings around a certain spark of joy and excitement that is different than the rest of the year. It is a time of family and joy. But, for some, Christmas can be hard. Especially if you've lost someone. For my family and I, Christmas is hard. My brother passed away about a year ago. When a holiday comes around, we are reminded even more that he is not here with us. There is an empty seat at our table, and it can't be filled. Through my first Christmas without my brother, I learned something really valuable though: with Jesus there is always hope.

Last Christmas Eve, we went to see my brother's grave. On the way home, as the snow was falling, it hit me. Christmas isn't a celebration that depends on the things we have; it is the celebration of hope coming into the world. And the hope we celebrate is

Jesus! With Jesus comes God's promise of life to the full, forgiveness, and love. Because Jesus came to save us. To save you. To save me. Knowing that doesn't take away the fact that my brother isn't with us right now. But it does help me see it differently.

Last Christmas Eve on the way home, I began to celebrate hope. The hope that Jesus brings. The hope of seeing my brother again. Because life with Jesus brings hope, even if things feel hopeless. And with hope comes joy and peace.

Is there anything that feels hopeless in your life this Christmas season?

Today, ask God to help you celebrate the hope you have in Jesus this Christmas, even when things might feel hopeless.

Then, ask someone you trust to remind you of this often.

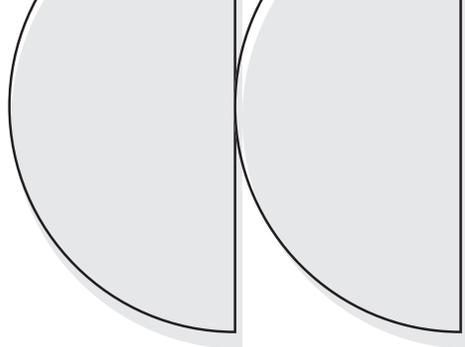
DAY 6

The Lord gives his people strength. The Lord blesses them with peace.

Psalm 29:11 NLT

Right now, it's the gift-giving season! People give and receive all kinds of gifts around Christmas. And the truth is, God does the same! God gives us the gift of strength to handle tough situations and the gift of peace in the middle of difficult circumstances. Often, God gives us these gifts through other people in our lives who can help us when times are tough. And sometimes, God uses us to be that gift in the lives of others!

Who in your life is going through a tough time right now? Today, think of one way you can show them God's strength and peace. Then, do that thing to be a gift to them today.



DAY 7

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6 NLT

A counselor isn't just someone that helps talk you through tough times. They are also a person who speaks and fights for you when you might not be able to on your own. Knowing Jesus is a Wonderful Counselor for us means that we can have peace, knowing He speaks and fights for us when we need it. So, memorize this verse this week to help you find peace in knowing Jesus is your Helper and Counselor.

Write the verse on a mirror in dry-erase marker and erase various words to test your memorization skills!

DAILY DEVOTIONAL

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COUNTDOWN TO CHRISTMAS / WEEK 2

MIDDLE SCHOOL

DAY 1

I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13 NLT

Hope, joy, and peace are all words we see everywhere during the Christmas season. But when was the last time you stopped to think about why those words show up so much? What do they actually mean for us? As this verse reminds us, hope, joy, and peace are all things we can have when we trust in God. Why? Because God is actually the Creator of all those things!

Where in your life do you feel like you need more hope, joy, or peace? Memorize this verse, inserting your own name where you see the word "you."

Then, pray it that way, asking God to completely fill you up with the hope, joy, and peace promised to us.

DAY 2

Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Romans 5:1 NLT

It can be hard to stay motivated to try and connect with God, especially when you feel like you've made a bunch of mistakes. When you feel like you've messed up, you can even wonder if all the things God says are true. You can wonder if things like peace can be possible when we're not always living the way God wants us to live. The great thing about God though, is that we don't have to do anything for God to love or accept us. We can confidently know that because of Jesus, God accepts us when we seek forgiveness. That's where we can find peace.

Today, go somewhere that brings you peace as a reminder that with God, peace is always possible.

DAY 3

And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. Colossians 3:15 NLT

Peace is one of those words you hear a lot at Christmas. It's a big part of the holiday season. But peace isn't just a feeling we're supposed to have because decorations are up and Christmas music is blaring everywhere you go. Peace is something we're meant to experience every day with the people around us. Of course, that's not easy! Parents, siblings, teachers, friends, teammates—conflict can happen in all of these relationships. Yet it's our job to work at living in peace with all of them. And the only way we can do that successfully is if we ask Jesus to help us. Jesus makes peace possible in all places.

Today, talk to a friend or your small group leader about one way you can work to live at peace with someone in your life this week.

DAY 4

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. 1 Peter 5:7 NLT

Think about the top three things you worry about in life. For some, it's family, or grades, or your friend group. For others, it's the health of a family member, or your parents' financial situation, or not making the team this year. Whatever worries you, God wants you to be able to feel peace instead of anxiety in those places. How? By trusting God to take care of the people or things you care about most. It can be hard to know what giving God your worries actually looks like, but it can be as simple as talking about them. Tell God your top three worries. Pray about them. Say, "God, I'm going to trust that You will take care of my worries."

Today, any time you think of one of your worries, repeat those words in your mind and practice giving them to God.

DAY 5

Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased. Luke 2:14 NLT

Written by Halyn, age 15 from Orange City, Florida, USA

Peace can be so hard to find in our day-to-day life, especially during the Christmas season, right? From figuring out what to give someone in your family for Christmas, or having lots of projects or Christmas concerts at school in the weeks leading up to Christmas, this time can be really overwhelming and anything but peaceful.

The truth is that our circumstances are not what actually give us peace though. We can find peace in Jesus! Jesus is the One that allows us to experience lasting peace. Jesus is the One who can give us a sense of relief and a sense of comfort. With Jesus, you have peace inside of you even when there is not peace around you. We don't have to wonder when we will experience peace again, especially during the Christmas season. We can experience true, lasting peace right now because of Jesus!

What's one thing in your life that doesn't feel peaceful right now?

Ask God for the wisdom and strength to help you find peace in Jesus this week, even if what's happening around you doesn't feel peaceful.

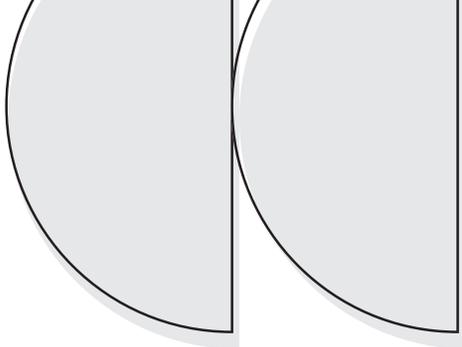
Then, talk to a friend, parent, or adult you trust about it!

DAY 6

Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!
Philippians 4:4 NLT

Joy is a feeling that we can all have. Joy doesn't depend on circumstances or even on whether you're in a good mood or not. Joy is something that's available to you always when you are in relationship with Jesus. Our relationship with Jesus gives us the ability to experience joy in all situations. When you remember how much Jesus loves you and that Jesus is with you in every situation, that's when you can find joy.

Spend a minute praying that you would be reminded of the joy Jesus gives no matter what.



DAY 7

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Isaiah 9:6 NLT

One of the things God gives us to help us have joy is the Bible. God's Word is meant to help fill our hearts and minds with joy that can only come from God. Having a verse like this one memorized is a simple way to remember joy when you need it!

So, make this verse the lock screen on one of your devices this week. Each time you pick it up to use it, read the verse first. Try to work toward saying it from memory the more you look at it on your lock screen each day.

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COUNTDOWN TO CHRISTMAS / WEEK 3

MIDDLE SCHOOL

DAY 1

The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.
Psalm 126:3 NIV

How many things do you say are great? Is it great to have fun with friends? Would you say your favorite meal is great? Or getting Christmas presents and having winter break are great? We usually think things are great because they bring us joy. Well, we can be filled with joy because of the great things that God has done for us. There is no greater joy than that!

What great things has God done in your life? Take a moment to write a few down and think about how they've brought joy to your life.

Then, thank God for bringing you joy through those great things in your life.

DAY 2

For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.
Zephaniah 3:17 NLT

Have you ever heard someone say that it's the "little things" in life that make them happy? Things like ice cream on a hot day, an unexpected thunderstorm, a good grade on a pop quiz, or listening to your favorite song on repeat. Little things like that can bring us a lot of joy. But have you ever thought about what brings God joy? God gets the greatest joy out of each one of us! God delights in us. In other words, to God, we're like ice cream on a hot day!

Think of all the things about you that might bring God joy. Then, celebrate those things!

DAY 3

Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.

Luke 2:9-10 NLT

There's usually a limit to the way good news works. Think about it! A cupcake brings joy to the person eating it. A surprise vacation brings joy to the people traveling. And a snow day brings joy to an entire school district. During the first Christmas, though, an angel brought good news that was different. It was good news that had the potential to bring great joy to all people—the good news of Jesus. That means your family, friends, and even strangers you see on the street can all be impacted by the good news of Jesus.

Who is one person you know that could use some good news in their life this week? Find a way to share the good news of Christmas with that person.

DAY 4

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."

John 14:6 NLT

There can be a lot of loud, confusing, and frustrating stuff that comes with the Christmas season. And all of that can make Christmas feel anything but joyful, right? Thankfully, Jesus told us what Christmas was all about when He told us who He truly is. When we celebrate Christmas, we celebrate the fact that Jesus provides a way for us to connect with God, our Heavenly Father. Jesus is the way toward all truth and life in this world, and that's definitely something worth celebrating! That's the real reason we can have joy no matter what else is happening around us this Christmas season.

Work on memorizing this verse as a reminder of what Jesus came to give us all.

DAY 5

Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying.

Romans 12:12 NLT

Written by Chloe, age 14 from Lilburn, Georgia, USA

The Christmas season is full of songs, TV shows, and movies that talk ALL about joy. But sometimes, the Christmas season feels anything but joyful. When we are sad, or feel upset, or hurt, it's probably really hard to experience joy.

One day around Christmas, my friends and I were outside playing. We were riding bikes when a tree collapsed and hit the power line next to us. That caused electrical wires to swing all about and struck my friend and I in the face. Fortunately, that was all and there were no major injuries. It was one of the scariest things that's ever happened! And even though we were scared and felt anything but joyful in the moment, we were able to look for joy in this scary situation afterward. We found joy in knowing we were safe and that nobody was hurt!

What I learned that day was that no matter what you go through, whether it's scary or sad, or even really great, you can find joy. And God wants to help you experience the joy that Jesus brings, especially during the Christmas season! No matter what you're going through, you can find the joy that is found in Jesus. All you have to do is look for it!

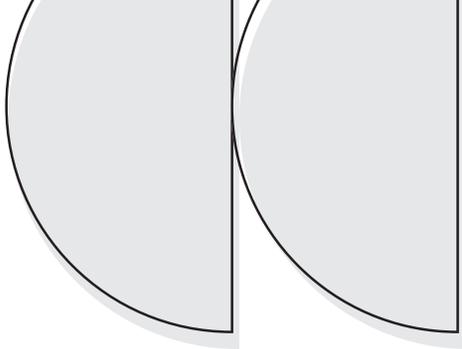
So today, look around you. Where do you see joy? Write it down. Take a picture of something that represents it. Text what you observe to a friend, parent, or adult you trust. Keep a list this week of all the ways you see joy around you, and then thank God for them.

DAY 6

**And do everything with love.
1 Corinthians 16:14 NLT**

Everyone has different reasons for why they do the things they do. Maybe you make your bed, so you don't get yelled at by your parent. Or you watch your friend's favorite movie for the millionth time to make them happy. Or you show up at church because you think it's the right thing to do. Everything we do has some sort of reason or motivation behind it, right? Well, what if every action you took was motivated by love? How would that change the way you live your life? How would it impact the people in your life?

Today, keep track of things you do throughout your day. At the end of the day, decide on one thing that you want to be motivated by love the next time you do it.



DAY 7

**For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Isaiah 9:6 NLT**

Loving others isn't always easy. And even loving ourselves can be difficult at times! That's why having God's Word in our minds to remind us of God's love can be so helpful. When we find it hard to love, we can remember the things we've learned about who God is and how God loves. That will help us actually love others and ourselves just like that!

So, wrap up trying to memorize this verse this week. Make it into a game or competition with friends. Challenge one another to memorize it and decide on a prize for the person who does it first!

DAILY DEVOTIONAL

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COUNTDOWN TO CHRISTMAS / WEEK 4

MIDDLE SCHOOL

DAY 1

**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
John 1:14 NIV**

The best kind of friends show up when we need them most. When things don't work out with the person you like, when you find out you're getting new step-siblings, when you don't make the team—that's when friends show up to help you get through and feel better. Christmas is a reminder that in the same way, Jesus showed up to do all that and more for us thousands of years ago. Jesus came to be the friend that loves us all no matter what. And who doesn't need a friend like that?

Today, say a prayer, talking to God just as you would to a friend. Thank God for sending Jesus to Earth and being the friend we all need.

DAY 2

**Give thanks to the God of heaven. His faithful love endures forever.
Psalm 136:26 NLT**

People use the word "forever" to talk about a lot of things: "We've been friends forever," or "That happened forever ago," or "That took forever." But we're never really using that word correctly, are we? Forever means something never ends! And that's exactly what God's love is like. It's a love that goes on with no limits. It's a love that never ends.

Today, make a list of all the things in your world that remind you of God's love for you. What about those things shows you more of God's love?

DAY 3

Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

1 Corinthians 13:7 NLT

Fact: People aren't perfect. Even though they love us, they can still let us down and disappoint us. Sometimes the relationship can go on and move forward, but sometimes, the hurt is too much. At times, it seems like the relationship is completely over. Thankfully, God's love is not like that. God's love for you doesn't give up on you if you mess up. And no matter what happens in your life, God will always love you.

Knowing that is true, write a note to thank God for loving you that much!

DAY 4

We love each other because he loved us first.

1 John 4:19 NLT

Who is the most difficult person in your life to love? What makes them so hard to love at times? Loving others is not always easy. Sometimes we're even the ones who can be a little hard to love. But God loves us all no matter what. On days when we're difficult and on days when we're our best, God's love remains the same. And that's the kind of love we're supposed to have for others. It's not easy, but God can work through us to show that same love to the people around us, too.

Today, ask a friend you trust or your small group leader how they show love to the most difficult people in their lives.

DAY 5

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

1 John 4:9 NLT

Written by Alexander, age 15 from Milledgeville, Georgia, USA

When I was younger, I never really understood the importance of Jesus' life. I didn't understand why Jesus came to Earth or why His birth was that big of a deal! But then one day, it finally clicked for me. God sent Jesus to live on Earth and to die so that we could be forgiven. And Jesus' birth was just the beginning of that! That's what we celebrate at Christmas. We celebrate because it shows us how much God truly loves us. Because God loves us so much and sent Jesus to Earth, we are forgiven for any mistake we'll ever make, and we can have a personal relationship with God. God sending Jesus was one of the greatest gifts to us and that's something worth celebrating this Christmas!

Today, spend some time praying, thanking God for sending Jesus on the very first Christmas and for the love that God showed us by doing that.