



Home for Christmas

Part 1 – Hope for Your Home

Pastor Ted Cunningham

We're starting our Christmas series today called *Home for Christmas*. Today, we're talking about this great word and everybody said... Hope! It's the word *hope*. We're grateful that you're here. I love Christmas, I love getting ready for Christmas, I loved getting ready for Christmas as a child. I had parents who thought Christmas Day was a day off, so they would sleep in. How many of you think you should sleep in on Christmas Day?

How many of you opened presents on Christmas Eve? Okay, that's not Christian, I'm just telling you right now. That is not of the Lord. That is something of another... How many of you open them on Christmas Day? That's right! My brother and I would sit on the top stair at 24 Leisure Lane, Oswego, Illinois, with my parents sleeping, and we would start coughing. How many of you used the coughing technique to wake your parents up? At five years old, I was coughing like I'd been smoking for 20 years. I was going to get my parents up out of bed. I can't wait for that day! I can't wait for Christmas!

We've entered in the season of Advent. Here's what Advent simply means – **expectant waiting and preparation**. It's not just waiting, but expectant waiting. Today we want to be reminded, as the people of God, that we are an expectant people. We are waiting on the Lord always. We're celebrating the season of the expectation of the coming Messiah, his first coming, but we in the church age... We looked at this when we studied *The Creed* earlier this year in that he now sits at the right hand of the Father Almighty from whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. We've been waiting for thousands of years for the Second Coming of Christ. We are an expectant people, we are a waiting people. We are people who prepare as well. We don't just sit idle, but we wait and we prepare.

We put this little waiting room up here on stage this morning. This is the Jiffy Lube waiting room. It's not a doctor's waiting room; that's a pretty small practice if this is all he has. How many of you drive a beater? In case you don't want to call your car that, how many of you drive a car with over 100,000 miles on it? Okay, it's the whole congregation, so welcome. Sorry for the car dealers in town.

I hate getting the oil changed. I think my car has about 120,000 miles on it. I hate getting an oil change. Why? It's because they never bring me good news. Everybody else in there has a beater because we weren't allowed to stay in our car while they worked on it – it's way too detailed – so we have to sit in this waiting room. You're looking out at them and you see them looking under the hood. They're pulling things out and they are gathering their props. Does anybody know the anxiety I'm feeling? Has anybody been there where you know they're not going to come in and go, "Everything looks great! Your car's doing good." No. "It's going to be \$4,200 to get you back on the road, Mr. Cunningham."

I always love when they walk in with their little cardboard... I don't want to rip on.... I know we have people that work at the lube places and they're really going to give it to me the next time I go in. But, they walk out with their piece of paper and they'll go, "Mr. Cunningham." I walk over to them and I'm just dejected and I'm broken down and I'm just going, "Yeah, what do you need? What's it going take to get this car back on the road?" They'll go, "We just want to show you some things." I know exactly what show me some things means. It's major things. It's not little things. They'll says, "Do you see this pink fluid right here? That's normal transmission fluid. Do you see this mud-like substance over here with shards of metal in it? That's your transmission." Some of you've been here and you're like "Every time I'm in a place like this – the doctor's office, the Jiffy Lube place, wherever – I never get good news."

Here's what we're excited about with expectant waiting and preparation: everybody leaves here with good news. We get waiting. We're a waiting town. If you've driven in the City of Branson, Missouri, you're a waiting person. You're an expectant person. You've waiting in line, you've waited in traffic. You've waiting for a phone call from a job interview. Some of you are waiting for that next job.

Some of you are waiting for the phone to ring so someone will ask you out on a date. If that's you, would you raise your hand? Stand up and let it be known. Seriously, at our church, just let it be known. In the first service, a guy stood up. I said, "This is the problem with our culture. You shouldn't be waiting around for a woman to call you and ask you out!" Can I get an amen on that? Pick up the phone and call a woman and ask her out. This young lady raised her hand. First of all, how old are you? Fifteen? Don't call her. Mom is sitting down there going... But, you're waiting.

Some of you are sitting in the waiting room with a guy that you've been dating for anywhere between one and seven years. You feel like this is the one. "Six years of dating... I'm saying I'm with you." You're waiting for him to pull out a ring and get down on one knee and pop the question. If that's you would you stand... No, no, don't stand; stay seated.

I've sat in a lot of waiting rooms and there are a lot of other waiting rooms, if we can get serious for a moment here. Some of you have done everything the doctor said to do. You have taken every test, you've done every treatment, yet you still are not pregnant and you want to have a baby. And you wait.

Some of you have filled out every form, you've taken every interview and you've been dreaming about the "gotcha" day and you're ready for this adoption to come through. You've been dreaming about it, but you wait.

Some of you, just in the last week, you went to a bigger waiting room than this and you took all the tests and you were told it was going to take seven to ten days to get he results back. Some of you, at this very moment, are waiting for the results back on tests.

There are some of you who are waiting for a wayward spouse. You're waiting for a husband, you're waiting for a wife to come back. The paperwork has been filed, you've separated, maybe you've even divorced, and you're waiting without dating. You're not giving your heart or affection to another man or to another woman. You're waiting because you truly do believe Jesus breathes live into dead people and Jesus breathes life into dead marriages. And you wait.

This is kind of the culture we live in: “Ted, I’ve been waiting and I’ve been waiting. I think it’s been like six or seven... days. I’ve been waiting and still nothing.” This is kids, right? Like my son, “Dad, can I ask you something?” And if you’re in the middle of something, you ask your kids to give you a minute. They take you literally. They stand there for 60 seconds. You’re like, “No, no, the minute I’m talking about is the minute I’m referring to when we’re trying to get everybody in the car and you respond with, ‘I’ll be there in a minute.’ That’s the minute I’m asking for right now. The minute with the extra zero.” How many parents know exactly what I’m talking about? Yeah, that’s the minute I want.

We get that way. We are supposed to be an expectant people, but we are an impatient people. Have you ever prayed, “God, I’ve waited long enough. I’ve waited long enough for this. I have prayed, I have prayed, I have prayed; when are you going to come through?”

If you’ve never studied the Bible, here’s what you need to know about the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, it’s a lot of waiting. The scripture breaks down into two bigger chunks – the Old Testament and the New Testament. In between the Old Testament and the New Testament, scholars call that the intertestamental period or the silent years. It’s 400 years between the two from the time God stopped speaking through the prophet Malachi until it picks up in the New Testament with Matthew. Between that time was 400 years, but it’s not just 400 years, it’s also what we refer to as the silent years. God is not speaking and yet, so much was said in the Old Testament about seeking and looking forward to and anticipating and expectantly waiting for the coming Messiah. We think in terms of days, week, months, and years; let’s start thinking in terms of centuries when it comes to studying our Bibles.

Around 700 years before Jesus came upon this earth at his First Coming, the Prophet Isaiah said this, ***For to us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government will be on his shoulders***, I hope when you read Isaiah 9: 6-7, you see excitement, anticipation, joy. It’s a birth announcement as though Jesus is born that day. It’s a birth announcement as though Jesus is here. If it’s not right now, it’s going to be in just the next little bit, yet it’s 700 years before it actually takes place.

Then you get these four double names and it’s combining the humanity and the deity of the Christ Child. ***And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God... or Mighty Warrior, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace***. And then Verse 7... If you’ve seen it in the news this week, I love when all of the world’s attention again focuses on one city and that city is Jerusalem. ***Of the greatness of his government... If you’re brand new to the Bible, we’re talking about Jesus Christ here. This is a prophecy of the Messiah. ...and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.***

Do you know there were so many in that 700 years and 400 years of silence that knew this; that knew and were waiting for the Messiah. They were waiting for the Messiah in their lifetime and those are the two characters we want to look at today in scripture.

If you have your Bibles, you can turn to Luke 2. We’re going to look at Simeon and Anna, two people that don’t get a lot of press with the Christmas story. You don’t see them as part of the Nativity, but,

boy, you want to talk about people who were waiting? Then they got to fix their eyes on Jesus. They got to see the Messiah, the Christ Child.

We're going to start in Luke 2: 25 and start with Simeon. **25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel...** For the comfort of Israel, for this one that was going to bring peace, for this one who was going to reign, for this one who was going to rule in peace. He was waiting for this and looking forward to it and anticipating it.

...and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. He would go through his whole lifetime knowing the Messiah was coming and now when is it? He's waiting and waiting and expecting and expecting.

27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required... It was required at that time that Jesus come and be dedicated. All children at that time were to be dedicated unto the Lord. **28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God...** We can't put enough emphasis on that right there. The emotion that Simeon must have been feeling. *I am not holding the Messiah, the one who we've been talking about.*

When I say talking about it, you understand that even people that had known the words of the Prophet Isaiah when Jesus came onto the scene... They knew the words whether they believed or not. They knew about the coming Messiah, they knew about the Prophet Isaiah. And now, Simeon is holding the Christ Child and begins praising God. I kind of get this tone from Simeon when he begins praising God; it's kind of like the Apostle Paul. "I've done enough. I've seen enough. I've run my race. I'm being poured out like a drink offering; it is time for me to go home." Look at what he says...

... saying: 29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. "I have laid eyes on the Christ Child as you told me I would; I'm good."

I love the story also of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist. They had given up hope on having a child and then Gabriel meets Zechariah in the temple and he begins telling him they are going to have a baby. The scripture says that he was old, and his wife was "advanced in years." I love how scripture does that. Men are old and women are advanced in years.

Then, when John the Baptist starts his ministry.... I love this because he's now baptizing people. Remember, John the Baptist, according to Isaiah 40: 3, is the messenger. He's the one that's preparing the way for the Lord. He's the one that's going to turn the hearts of the parents back to the children, and the children back to the parents. When the leaders come to him, what is this guy, John the Baptist, doing? They suspect that he could be the Messiah, so they ask him, "Are you the Messiah?" He says, "No." "Are you Elijah?" "No." Gabriel said he'll come in the spirit and the power of Elijah. They said, "Are you a prophet?" "No." Again, Malachi foretold... If you read Chapter 3 and even into Chapter 4 of Malachi, you know that John the Baptist was the one that was to prepare the way for the Lord.

And then in Chapter 1 of John, everything stops and in one sentence, John sums up God's entire redemptive plan for all of history. He says, **29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"** Right there.

When the Old Testament stops, there are 400 years of silence and the New Testament begins, we get this concept and it's called pleroma and pleroma simply means the *fullness of time*. We understand that when Jesus shows up on this earth, the God-man, now the fullness of time is made known. In other words, everything about time, everything about history is now in this one man, Jesus. And John says, "Look, take your eyes off me and look right there; that is the man we are to be worshiping. That is the man that will take away the sin of the world."

Going back to the birth of Jesus, Simeon is now holding the child. **30 "For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."**

33 The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother... This is very important. Now he's not just talking to the parents, but he's speaking specifically to Mary. **"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising..."** This child will be the fall of many – those who don't place faith in him, those who don't trust him, those who don't believe he is the God-man, those who don't believe that he is the Son of God, those who don't believe he can take away the sin of the world – it's those who will fall. But, it's the rising of many because many will place faith in Jesus. **"...of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against..."** meaning he will face opposition. **35 "so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed."**

This pales in comparison, but when we put our daughter in school this year, they simply said to us, "Your child is going to struggle; let them." I started applauding because that's my heart in that, but I told Amy today, "I think sometimes we forget our child is going to struggle and we'll let them and, at times, it's going to be very painful to watch."

Simeon is telling Mary, the mother of Jesus, he will face opposition and she is going to see it and it's going to be very difficult. What this child experiences is he, the Lamb of God, the sacrifice once and for all, for all, dies on a cross to take away the sin of the world. She's still a mom and this is the word picture Simeon uses to share with her, **"And a sword will pierce your own soul too."** "That's the pain you will experience as you watch your son, The Lamb of God, take away the sin of the world."

One more person that was anticipating... In this, we really get a picture of waiting from the scripture. We go on in Luke 2 to this Prophet named Anna. **36 There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old** (advanced in years) ... This is important because sometimes we read over this in the scripture, but we have to understand why the writer puts this in. We need to understand why this is added because the detail is very important for understanding the story. **...she had lived with her husband seven years...** Now we're getting numbers. **...after her marriage, 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four.** Most believed she, like most in that day, got married as a teenager and her husband died in her 20s and now, until the age of 87... I just want you to know, if you're not 87, that's a long life. Seventy years you have upon this earth, eighty if you're strong.

This woman was waiting a long time. ***She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 38 Coming up to them at that very moment...*** Just put yourself in the story. The Christ Child is here, coming up to them at that very moment when he's being presented, being dedicated to the Lord, ***...she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.***

They waited for long periods of time. Again, if you're brand new to the faith, expectant waiting is part of what we do. As we wait, we don't give up. As we wait, we don't quit on God. As we wait, we trust, we hope, we obey, we are an expectant people who go, "This isn't turning out like I thought it would; I'm not where I thought I would be, but I will continue to place my hope in the Lord because he's got it." And it may mean waiting for a very long time.

I just want to turn you on to a Christmas devotion. I don't think it was intended to be a Christmas devotional, but it's one I very much enjoy. I've probably read it maybe half a dozen times over the last couple of years. It's by Pastor John Ortberg at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in California. It's simply called *In Between Despair and Joy*. If you get a chance, Google this, download it. At your family table between now and Christmas, read it because as we talk the manger, we need to be talking about the cross and the tomb.

He talks about despair and joy and he says so much has been written and shared on the day Jesus died, Friday (despair). So much has been talked about and written on joy, Sunday, the day Jesus was resurrected from the dead. But, what we don't talk a lot about is Saturday. Saturday is the in between day. It's the day we don't like to talk about because it's a silent day. It's day we don't have a lot of information on; it's between despair and joy. It's a day of waiting. Can you imagine what the disciples talked about that day? After all they heard Jesus share, after walking with him, watching his life and hearing his words and his teachings, now their Savior is dead. Between despair and joy.

If I can go to the waiting room for just a second, I just want to share some of what Pastor John shares. He says, *This isn't Sunday. This isn't Friday. This is Saturday.* For many of you in here right now, this is Saturday, this is a silent period of time in your life of waiting. He says, *The day after this but the day before that. The day after a prayer gets prayed but there is no answer on the way. The day after a soul gets crushed way down, but there's no promise of ever getting up off the mat. It's a strange day, this in-between day. In between despair and joy. In between confusion and clarity. In between bad news and good news. In between darkness and light. Saturday is the day your dream died. You wake up and you're still alive.* And you're trying to figure out why. You're trying to figure out what's the purpose? It's the day after a door closes and not only does the door close, it's slammed in your face and it's bolted and double bolted and you're just sitting there hearing all of the locks.

We love these memes and these Christian quotes. Don't allow Instagram to become your faith, can I just encourage you with that, please. We say a lot of bad things, sometimes, with good intentions. Has anybody ever told you, "When one door closes, another opens." You may be in a season right now where the door closed and the other door ain't open and you're in Saturday. You're between the two. Maybe you let that door close or maybe that door was slammed in your face, and now you wait.

You're like, "Yeah, but I've read the stuff on Facebook, it's bound to open. It should open the day after. I've given it days!" And you wait.

Your prayer becomes this, "Hear me, God, listen to me, respond to me, do something, say something, rescue me." And nothing. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become. Maybe you don't even have to download this; I'm pretty much sharing with you. *You lose a job. You lose a friend. You lose your health. You have a dream for your child. And on Friday, it dies. What do you do on Saturday?*

You can choose despair or you can wait; you can wait with expectation, with a word we love to use called hope. You can remain hopeful. *Work with God even when He feels far away.* These are his words. Pastor John says that in that season of waiting, you have permission to do this: *Rest. Ask. Whine. Complain. Trust.* And even whine? What? We call them lament psalms. Out of all the psalms, the lament psalm that we have is the Saturday psalm. It's the silent psalm.

Here's what the psalmist is feeling: *God, I am hurting. The enemy is winning. God, for some reason, you don't seem to care.* I love when that psalm always comes back to a confession of trust that he is still God. *You are still God. You are still over all and in all and in you I will place my trust, even when it's a silent Saturday and I don't know what to do or where to take this.*

Some of you, right now, are in a season of waiting and anticipating. We kind of get that; that's why we're celebrating Christmas, anticipating Christmas day, not Christmas Eve. Are we clear on this? We do the presents with a major celebration Christmas Morning.

We have something even more than that. As expectant people, we wait and long. That's what we love about singing the old hymns. Hymns had one eye here on earth and one eye fixed on heaven. Yes, we are here and we are living, but we want to be clear that we know where we will be one day. We long for that day and it's okay to long for that day. This is why I promise you that at your funeral... Here's my commitment to you. When you die and if you get buried here in this town, we will preach 1 Thessalonians 4 over you. It's the Apostle Paul telling the church of Thessalonica we don't want anybody to be ignorant about those who have fallen asleep because we believe those who have fallen asleep, which is a word picture for death... If you've fallen asleep in Christ, if you have placed faith in Jesus, we believe that you will return again with him one day.

Then he presents the gospel. We believe Jesus died and rose again, so we don't mourn like the rest of men. There are only two ways to mourn. The human condition is very simple. Everybody mourns, but there are two ways to mourn: you either mourn without hope or you mourn with hope. An expectant people who believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of Almighty God, we mourn with hope because we know we will see our loved ones again one day.

There are many of you in here that your waiting room is longing for that day, to see that loved one that you lost in Christ. But, boy do we meet this person all the time. **You're waiting and you started doubting.** You're questioning everything about the wait, but not just the wait, you're starting to question everything about God.

One of the reasons Woodland Hills Family Church got started years and years ago was because we wanted to make sure we welcome those who are unchurched, those who are dechurched, those who are burned out by the church. We want to make sure we are always a welcoming place for that because some of you have found your way back to church. I say that very carefully. You found your way back to going to a church on Sunday, but you've not found your way back to the Lord. You may believe, but as a small child something happened to you throughout the course of your life. You feel God didn't show up so you started doubting. You gave up on God.

That would be the last one. **Waiting and giving up** altogether. What happened is you said, "You know I've seen it for them, but I've not seen it for me." You've started to believe, "He hasn't done this for me," and you've translated that into "He can't do this for me or he won't do this for me." We're a passionate church about helping people who are sitting in the waiting room, waiting on a spouse to return. We pray for the reconciliation of marriages around here all the time.

I told a friend of mine, after the first service, that I usually don't hand pick people to craft parts of the sermon around, but today I did and it was him. He said he kind of felt that. I said, "You may be at a place where you start giving up on a miracle for your marriage and the reconciliation of your marriage. There is nothing you can say to me right now that will cause me to give up on your marriage." That's when the reasons start coming, but I just want my friend to know this is a church that when you give up, we won't. This is a church when you lose hope...

This is what I love about the National Institute of Marriage. It's now called Focus on the Family Retreat Center, and the marriage intensive program has been renamed Hope Restored. I love that program because they have an 87% success rate with marriages that have divorced, separated, or filed the paperwork. Success is not a couple staying together; it's a couple staying together, reporting higher levels of marital satisfaction than they ever dreamed possible.

Do you know how it works? Every person that works there is a person of hope. Every person that works there is expectant upon the Lord. They don't look at people and go, "Oh boy, I've heard that." "Oh, no that will never happen because of you..." They don't focus on the people in the waiting room or in the intensive room; they focus upon the Lord, knowing he still does miracles. That's why they ask the question. You can't even come to a marriage intensive at Hope Restored until you answer the question: "Are you open to a miracle?" That's the only question you have to answer. Are you open to a miracle? If both and husband and wife say yes and they're not medicating with drugs or alcohol, they're invited to Branson.

I remember I talked to Dr. Bob Paul years ago, maybe four or five or six years ago. The program was really picking up steam. They had higher demand than they had the supply. They didn't have enough therapists to run all these couples through the intensive program.

I was with him on a trip and I said, "So tell me, how long do people have to wait for the marriage intensive?"

He goes, "We're up to close to nine months."

I freaked out on him. I said, "Nine months! You guys call yourselves the emergency room for marriage. If I cut my arm off I have go to the emergency room and they tell me come back in a couple of months? No, I need it right now!"

He shared with me, "Do you know what we've noticed? Couples who wait..."

Because that's what we get. We get the phone call, "The marriage is falling apart. She left me today. Need the intensive tomorrow." We say, "You can wait." They say, "No, we need it right now." That's how we get. We're an impatient people, not an expectant people.

He said, "Ted, we see marriages change by the time they show up for the intensive." In some couples, they notice marked improvement because couples put something on the calendar. They didn't even know fully what was going to take place there. They just knew that was place where miracles happen. They knew that was a place were miracles happen so they put it on the calendar, committed to that, and stopped fighting. They wait and see what can happen.

Some of you have given up on that. You've waited so long. You've stopped doubting altogether and now you're giving up. "It's not going to happen for me." We are here to tell you the longer the wait the louder the silence, yes, we get that, but here's how faith works.

Your faith is tested when God has you wait longer than you intended. I want it now. I want to get through the red route, blue route, yellow route now. Get me through this. I can't believe I have to wait three lights, three lights! Normal people, normal towns don't have to wait..." Our time schedule in God has you wait. And it's hard because you're waiting in silence. It's as simple as this. **Don't give up on God as you wait on God.** Continue to be an expectant person.

G. K. Chesterton puts it this way. I think it's one of the greatest quotes on hope I've ever read. *Hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all... As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength.*

If you're new to Woodland Hills, here's what we want you to know about your child, about your grandchild, about your husband, about your wife, about your family, as we talk about *Home for Christmas*, as we talk about maybe the empty seat at your table this year because you have a child that wants nothing to do with the family or an empty seat at your table this year because a spouse is no longer there or a daughter-in-law or a son-in-law or maybe a father-in-law or a mother-in-law and there's this empty space and you're thinking you're too far gone. We don't believe that here. We don't teach that here. Here's what we believe: **No person or situation is hopeless.**

A lot of you amened when I said Jesus breathes life into dead people and Jesus breathes life into dead families. You amened that; you were agreeing to this. No person or situation is hopeless. You can bring you all your reasons, but the problem we have in the waiting room is we sit there and we get all of our eyes fixed on everybody in the room, all of the waiting. We look at the situation, the circumstances, the

people, and all our eyes are there, but if I could take you back to what John the Baptist said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” In one sentence, it’s all summed up for us. Take your eyes off the waiting room and the people that are in it and the places and the things and put them on... As you sit in the waiting room, you can sit there with your eyes on Jesus. We don’t believe anything is hopeless.

Grandma, Grandpa, I know your thinking, *but we’ve prayed for this one*. I had somebody come tell me after the first service “Prayed for my brother to come to know the Lord for 30 years. And after praying for him for 30 years, one day, some guy shared something with him and he looked at him and said, ‘You, know my sister’s been trying to tell me that for years.’ And at that moment, he became a born again follower of Jesus Christ.”

I asked this lady, “Did you ever stop praying? Where there moments? “

She said, “I never stopped praying for my brother, but I did change the way I prayed. Instead of ‘Lord, just give me wisdom,’ at some point, I started praying ‘Lord, will you send everyone across his path, in his way to just share you love with him? And one day, it was some simple statement that was said that took everything else, brought it into perspective.” And about six years later, her brother went to be with the Lord.

Don’t give up on the grandson. Don’t give up on your granddaughter. Don’t give up on your son. Don’t give up on your daughter. Don’t give up on your dad. Don’t give up on your mom. No hopeless situation. Whatever your Christmastime involves, I want to encourage you... There will be a lot going on and fun stuff happening. Let this season begin and end and all throughout the year with eyes and thoughts fixed on Jesus, the Messiah, the one who still breathes life into the situations that seem hopeless, into the families that seem hopeless, into the children that seem hopeless. Stop giving up on people. Never bet against hope; it’s a terrible bet. For some of you, that means waiting, waiting, waiting.

So, for some today, it’s just shifting from this “I’ve waited days and weeks,” to “Lord I’m willing to wait. I’m not going to quit on you while I wait. I’m not going to lose hope. I’m not going to doubt. I’m not going to give up. I’m going to keep going.”

For some that have been waiting for years and years and years, you need that prayer of endurance. Keep going. Keep sharing. Keep preparing. Keep longing for. As we shared in the series of *The Creed*, he sits at the right hand of the Father Almighty from whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. Until the Lord returns or we lay you into the arms of Jesus at your death, don’t quit. Stay hopeful. Be an expectant follower of Jesus.

Father, it’s in the name of Jesus that we thank you for this season of expectant waiting and preparation. In all of the different waiting rooms represented in here this morning, I pray for eyes and thoughts fixed on you, not on a 20-year behavior pattern in a spouse or ten years of bad decisions of a young person. They can get us thinking, *hopeless, never going to change, can’t work here*. For the one who has stopped praying, I pray that it would be as simple today as them coming back and being expectant and

waiting on you and praying, pleading with you for the one they love, for the situation that seems hopeless. Whatever the waiting room may be, I pray that thee don't give up on you as they wait on you.

Father, we're grateful for this season. We always love this time of year, celebrating Christmas as a church family. For all of our guests who are here in Branson, we hope they feel very welcomed and enjoy all the hard work that this town pours into this season that they would be a welcomed guest of this town and today, of this church. For that we are grateful.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said... Amen.