

Light WELCOME TO THE Night

We are so glad you are here. No matter how dark the time might feel, the stories and sights you are about to experience will give you hope, light and love. You might even discover something more: strength to keep going and a connection to a community that loves and cares for you.

Enjoy your time.

DIRECTIONS:

- Please check in at the event entrance and enjoy strolling through the exhibition at your own pace, keeping proper social distancing in mind and wearing your mask at all times.
- Keep scrolling below to read the Stories of Hope, paired with each tree. Each tree is marked with a numbered white ornament that will correspond with the same story number in this document.



SHARE YOUR HOPE

- Go ahead & take photos and share them on social media, tagging Faith Community Church and using **#fcclightthenight**.
- Consider sharing your own 6-word Story of Hope with a selfie at the Photo Booth.

Here are some examples of 6-word stories of hope:

- *Light pushes back the darkness always*
- *Family and friends give us hope*
- *This is still our Father's World*

TREE 1: HOPE THROUGH CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

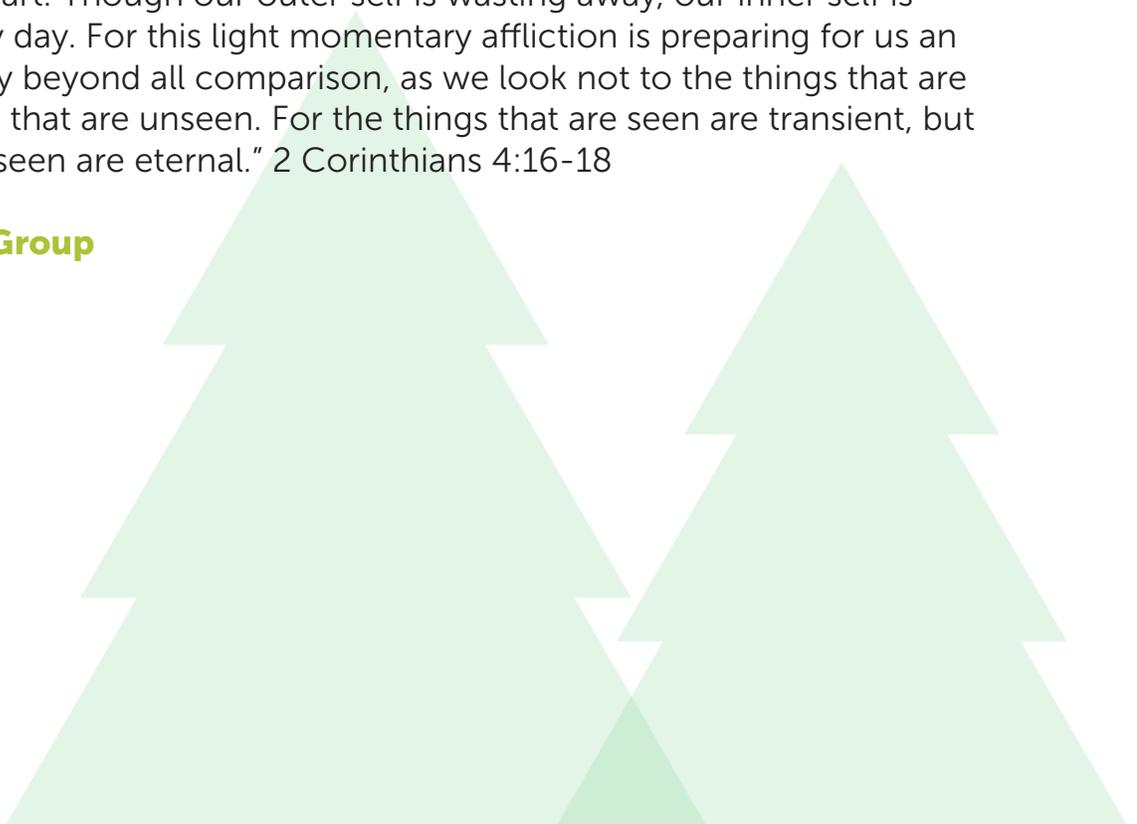
Sometimes I find that it's easy to slip into conversation about what is not going well in life. People seem to find comfort when we commiserate. And 2020 has given us much to commiserate over.

After the Covid-19 quarantine began, our faith group struggled. Our spirits were low; we were sometimes even despondent. We each experienced the shut down in different ways. One of us was a frontline worker, several of us switched to working remotely from home, and a few of us had to find new work during this time. Some of us had ill family members and friends. Some of us had young adults living with us. Some of us experienced other losses.

Our faith group leader suggested that we meet over the summer with little to no agenda besides sharing and prayer. I was hesitant, but joined in. We met each week and we talked about our work lives, family lives, and challenges. In the moments when we met, I am not sure I felt better, but we took those fears to God in prayer at the end of each get-together. This experience reminded me again how through sharing, we don't have to simply commiserate, but we can invite Jesus in. As we progressed through this time, we began to share more than just our fears, but also our successes in overcoming little and big challenges. We were strengthened by each other's experiences and perseverance. We found ourselves laughing together over our petty troubles and encouraging each other through our serious troubles. We felt validated and heard, cared for and loved. And that gave us hope.

"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

The Clements Faith Group



TREE 2: HOPE IN A GOD WHO KNOWS ME

Just before Christmas, my son saw a toy in a store that he absolutely had to have. It was a small “Thomas the Tank Engine” electric train set. I looked it over and decided that it just didn’t make sense. It was too small to hold his interest, it wasn’t compatible with any of the trains he already had, and it was too expensive. I hoped he’d forget all about it. He didn’t. He put it on his Christmas list. He talked about it constantly. And he completely ignored my “expectation setting” conversations about how it was very unlikely that he was going to get it.

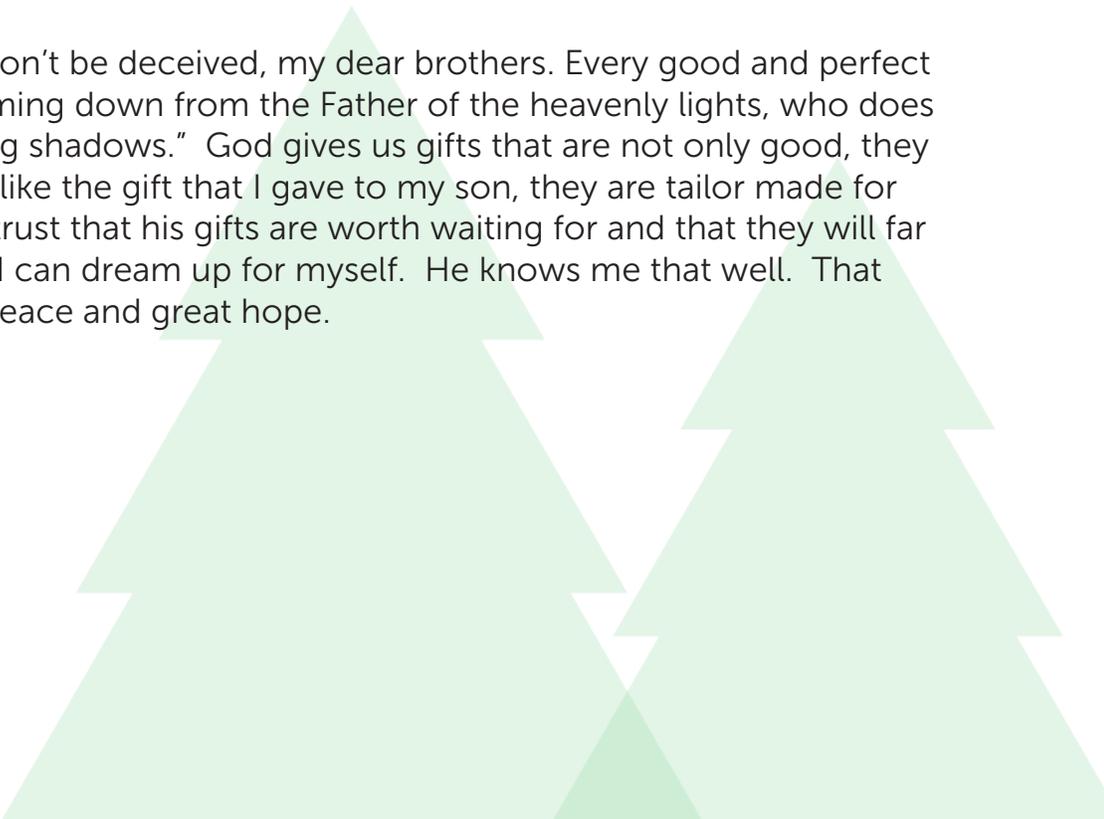
Then I had an epiphany. He had played with a train set at a friend’s house that he had flipped over. It would feed right into his passion and receiving it as a gift would exceed his wildest expectations. But it was too expensive. I wondered if I could get one used and after a few days of searching craigslist.com, I procured that train set for a fraction of its original cost.

One day, my son reminded me about the train set he was still hoping to get. He cried when I said, “You probably won’t get that train set, but can you trust us to get you something very special?” And he replied in all his four year old honesty, “No...I can’t.”

When my son opened the first of five boxes that comprised his Christmas gift, he gasped. The only words he could muster were “Oh my!” He was blown away. And when he was setting that train set up with his dad, there was no thought given to the set he had originally asked for.

James 1:16,17 says, “Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” God gives us gifts that are not only good, they are perfect – and just like the gift that I gave to my son, they are tailor made for each one of us. I can trust that his gifts are worth waiting for and that they will far surpass anything that I can dream up for myself. He knows me that well. That gives me a steadfast peace and great hope.

The Jackson Family



TREE 3: FINDING HOPE THROUGH PURPOSE

Pandemic. What does that mean? What do you mean my kids can't go to school? How do I help them understand something that I don't even understand? What do you mean I can't meet a friend for coffee? Or go in to work? The news is staggering. Politicians are fighting. And people are dying. I feel helpless.

And then an email comes in from a friend. She's a coach who helps others identify and cultivate their strengths. She's reaching out to remind clients of their unique strengths and how they might tap into them during this time when we feel so helpless. It strikes a chord in me. I am reminded of a verse from the Bible – Ephesians 2:10 – “For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”

It's a timely reminder that we are each gifted by God – to do his work in the world – even in a pandemic. It's a spark of hope. I may not know how to explain this pandemic to my kids, but I do know how to bring people together around a common goal. I can't save a life or rescue people from impending financial struggle, but I can see the way that God has gifted others uniquely and find ways to help them engage those gifts.

In this dark and confusing time, God has given me work to do, and in it, I have found purpose. He made me tap into my own gifts, and rely on the unique gifts of others. He gathered us together to figure out how to round up PPE, gather groceries for families in need, reach out to neighbors in our communities, and bring hope to others - through the lights and stories in these trees.

It amazes me as I consider how he orchestrates it all; how he gifts us each so differently -- and when we share our gifts with one another and learn to lean into one another's gifting – we can find HOPE. We are not helpless. Even in a pandemic.

A Faith Community Staff Member



TREE 4: HOPE AND JOY

The theme of my tree is hope and joy. During these trying times, in the midst of so much false hope and disappointment, I worry about my ability to discern worthwhile goals and sustain the hope to see them through with joy. I worry about my faith wavering. Attending church in person and worshiping God through song has always renewed my faith. Although I mourn the loss of this communal experience, I am thankful to be a part of the Light the Night event and hope that it is a joyous experience for all. I hope that everyone who attends Light the Night feels renewed in their faith to walk with Jesus out of the darkness and into the light and continues to find new ways to renew their faith so as to not fall victim to the false hope and disappointment of faithlessness.

Katie Towner



TREE 5: THREE GENERATIONS OF HOPE

Joanne Davidson, Cristy's Mom and Shelby's Gram:

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. John 1:4

To me, this Bible passage means that the Lord is the light of my life. He is illuminating the pathway to hope. He lights our way out of sadness and darkness for wherever there is light, there is always hope. We have all been raised in our family to live with hope in our hearts. In spite of sorrow, tragedy and illness, with the love of our Lord, there is always light at the end of the tunnel and hope.

Cristy Rosenhahn, Joanne's daughter and Shelby's Mom:

When I was a junior in college, my world was rocked when my maternal Grandmother was diagnosed with a brain tumor. I questioned both my faith and God. Why did He allow this? My Gram was a Christian – an honest, faithful servant. I was bitter and angry and full of pain. My mother somehow leaned on her faith. She had a strong faith group, many of her friends from her faith group 60 years ago are still her friends today. I had grown up in the same church but, as a child of divorce, never felt included. Perhaps my experience caused me to blame God rather than turn to him during this time. For some reason though, when my mom and Gram needed more support than our minister could give, I suggested Mom reach out to another minister for guidance. Even with all my anger, I had hope. It surprised me when Pastor Gary came to the hospital the next day for Gram's surgery even though we had not yet attended his church! He stayed the entire 15 hours through her surgery with us. He spoke to me about my anger toward God and reminded me of Psalm 43 "Why, my soul, are you down cast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God." Rev. Gary helped me gain a strong faith in God. From that moment on, I have been faithful and hopeful even in difficult times. Many years later, when I suffered a miscarriage, I did not lash out at God. Instead, I turned to Him with hope for a family of our own and he blessed us with our wonderful daughter. My Hope is restored through God's steadfast love and faithfulness. "Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love." Joel 2:13. Even in despair and darkness, you can find the light and hope in God.

Shelby Rosenhahn, Cristy's Daughter and Joanne's Granddaughter:

Like my Gram and Mom, I grew up in the church, attending Sunday School and our teen faith group. God's light brings me hope. When I was little and went to winter camp with Faith Community, I went forward many times during the worship time to accept Jesus as my personal savior. Back then I didn't really understand what that meant. Now as a teenager, I understand by accepting Christ I always have hope. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13 and "Everything is possible for one who believes." Mark 9:23. God is my light and with Him, I know everything is possible. There is always hope.

TREE 6: THE ART OF KINTSUGI AND THE HOPE OF JESUS' WORK IN OUR LIVES

Life is tough. It scars us and breaks us even as we find ways to enjoy it and thrive. This year has been tougher than most, yet, in our toughest moments, even when we feel broken, Jesus does amazing work. He takes our broken pieces and reforms them into master pieces of art. Our tree is inspired by this work captured in the amazing Japanese art form of kintsugi – a form of art where broken pottery is mended using lacquer mixed with silver, platinum, or gold. The beautiful metals fill the cracks. Instead of hiding the flaws, kintsugi displays them in a new way, preserving the breakage as a part of the piece's history. Its history becomes part of its beauty.

This gives us hope because no matter how much life may break us, Jesus can restore. His light shines like golden threads putting us back together in beautiful pieces of art reflecting his glory and love. Our tree is decorated with broken pieces of pottery showing the damage life brings, golden decorations revealing the transforming work of Christ and the white light of hope that puts it all together in a beautiful piece of art.

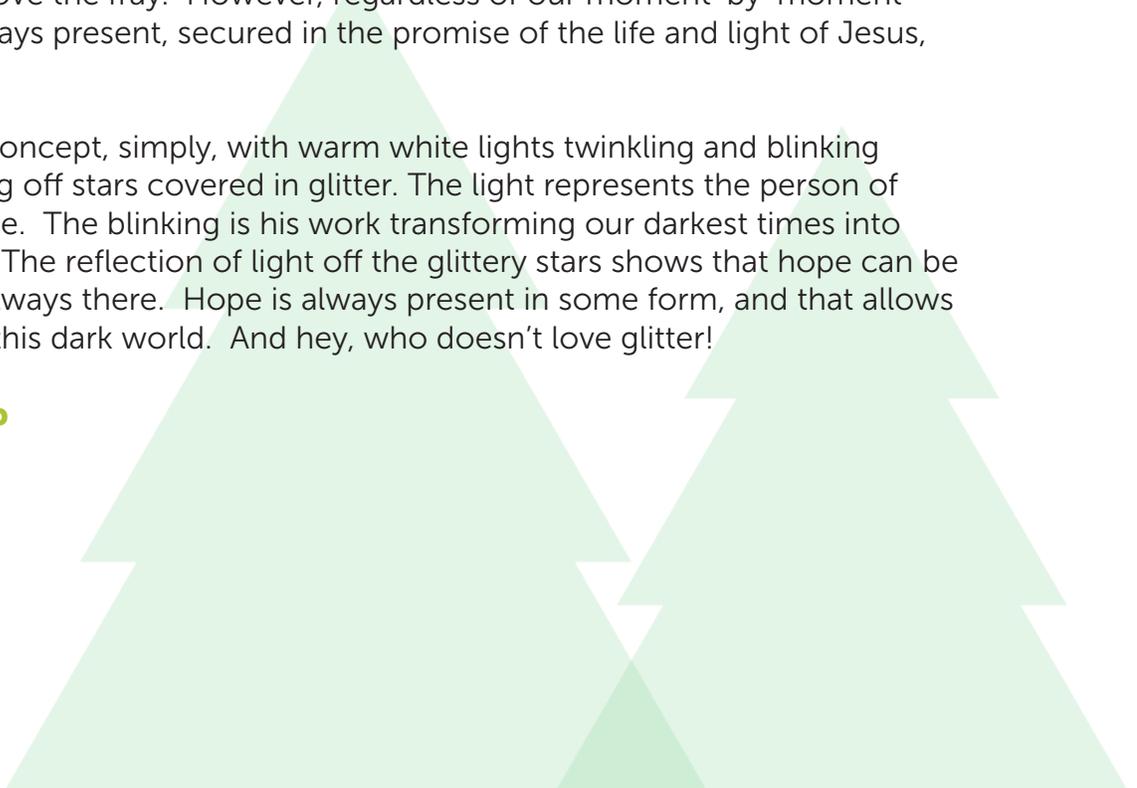
The FCC Framingham Campus Family

TREE 7: THE GLITTERING FLEXIBILITY OF HOPE

We are a small group of families, including newlyweds, singles and married couples with kids ranging from toddler to teen. Hope can be elusive in this time. Each week we experience a different level of hope. Some weeks we feel like we're hanging on to hope with the weakest of grips. Other times, it feels like hope helps us take flight with wings that take us soaring high above the fray. However, regardless of our moment-by-moment experience, hope is always present, secured in the promise of the life and light of Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Our tree captures this concept, simply, with warm white lights twinkling and blinking together while reflecting off stars covered in glitter. The light represents the person of Jesus who gives us hope. The blinking is his work transforming our darkest times into moments of his power. The reflection of light off the glittery stars shows that hope can be dim or bright, but it is always there. Hope is always present in some form, and that allows us to shine like stars in this dark world. And hey, who doesn't love glitter!

The Botsis Faith Group



TREE 8: HOPE IN COMMUNITY

In a year characterized by uncertainty and isolation, we are looking for hope in community. We have been inspired by the heroes we see around us who serve in all kinds of ways on the front lines of our changed and changing world - in hospitals and clinics, in grocery stores and delivery trucks, in classrooms and campuses (see our ornaments). We have been challenged to find new ways to connect with one another - online, outside, socially distant but still together. It all looks different, but still we come together because it doesn't matter how we do it. It only matters that we find ways to gather and bear witness to one another the love the Lord has for us (our puzzle pieces). Finally, we weave together these ideas, looking back on 2020, with our garland. We have shared many ways the Lord has brought us hope and met us in and through our community and we are blessed.

The Grady-Harper and Lim Families



TREE 9: HOPE IN ADOPTION

In August of 2012, we sent our second child off to college and became empty nesters. Just a few days later, we received a call informing us that a family member had just had a baby who had been taken into custody by the Department of Children and Families. When we heard this, we had a clear sense that we were supposed to foster parent this baby. We contacted DCF and quickly made preparations to receive a newborn, who arrived four days later. Through an unfortunate series of events, she became available for adoption. We were faced with the decision to let her go and be adopted by someone else or to adopt her ourselves. After much prayer, we decided to adopt her and in January of 2015 she legally became our child, Sarah Grace Meister.

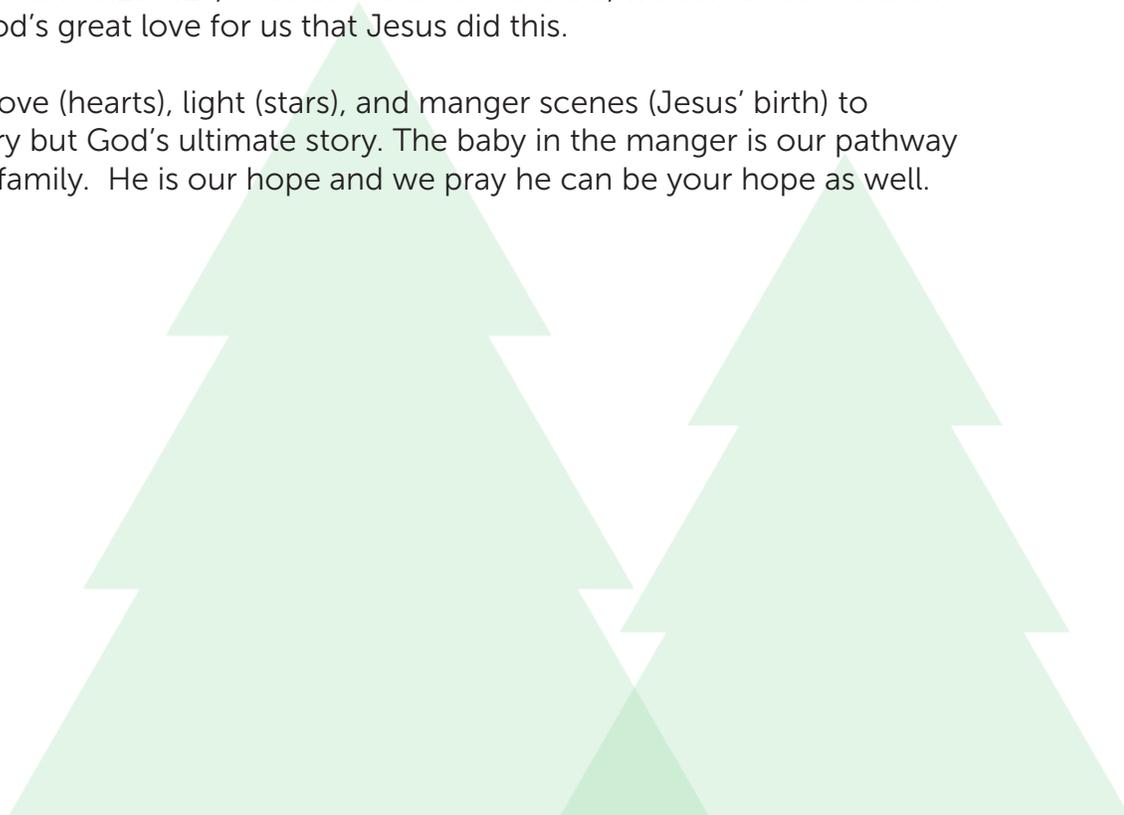
People sometimes tell us how lucky Sarah is that we adopted her. We'll let you in on a secret. We are blessed by her. She is a delight and brings us love and joy every day. We thank God for Sarah daily.

At Christmas, we celebrate the arrival of another baby, Jesus Christ. Like Sarah's, the circumstances around his birth were not ideal. He was born in a stable with a feeding trough for a crib. Unlike Sarah, however, this baby was God in the flesh. The same person that spoke the world into being became a helpless baby. "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind." (John 1:3-4 NLT)

Jesus also came for a purpose. He was born to die – to sacrifice himself to save us. He offers us forgiveness and reconciliation with God through His death and resurrection. He offers this as a gift. We just need to receive it. This gift also includes adoption into his family: "...you received God's Spirit when He adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, 'Abba, Father'." (Romans 8:15 NLT) Just like Sarah is our child, we can all be children of God. It is because of God's great love for us that Jesus did this.

We filled our tree with love (hearts), light (stars), and manger scenes (Jesus' birth) to reflect not only our story but God's ultimate story. The baby in the manger is our pathway to adoption into God's family. He is our hope and we pray he can be your hope as well.

The Meister Family



TREE 10: HOPE BECAUSE CHRIST'S LIGHT ENDURES

We have hope in this life because no matter our turmoil, pain or despair, Christ has always been there to guide us – to lift us up and carry us through. His love and grace are represented in the lights shining brightly on the tree. When we look for the light in times of darkness, he will reveal the love and peace that he intends for us. When he lifts us from darkness and into his light, he restores our spirit no matter how lost, broken, sad or hurt we feel. God's gifts of pure love, healing, renewal, and forgiveness endure each and every day, which he reminds us in the beauty of his creation all around us. My soul comes alive when I am surrounded by God's splendor in nature because, it brings healing and joy within my soul. The white magnolias represent spirituality, purity and inner peace reminding me of Christ's everlasting love which fills my heart with hope, joy, and peace.

The Miranda Family

TREE 11 – HOPE IN GOD'S WORD

Many people are going through hard times but they keep holding on every day. My family and friends find strength and encouragement from Bible verses and quotes about strength and hope. We share with each other passages and quotes that make us smile in spite of everything we are going through. That's how we find strength ourselves. And that's how we strengthen each other. We wanted to share some of our favorite verses and quotes with you, so as you walk around our tree, you can read what encourages us and we hope it encourages you.

Harriet Nanfuka



TREE 12 - HOPE FOR THE BLENDED FAMILY

TJ and I had been dating for about a year when we decided to introduce our kids to one another. This was easier said than done because we lived on opposite sides of the country at the time - my son and I out in Arizona and TJ and his two kids here in Massachusetts. Once the dates were set and plane tickets purchased, our excitement intensified. The kids' eagerness to meet one other grew as our trip got closer.

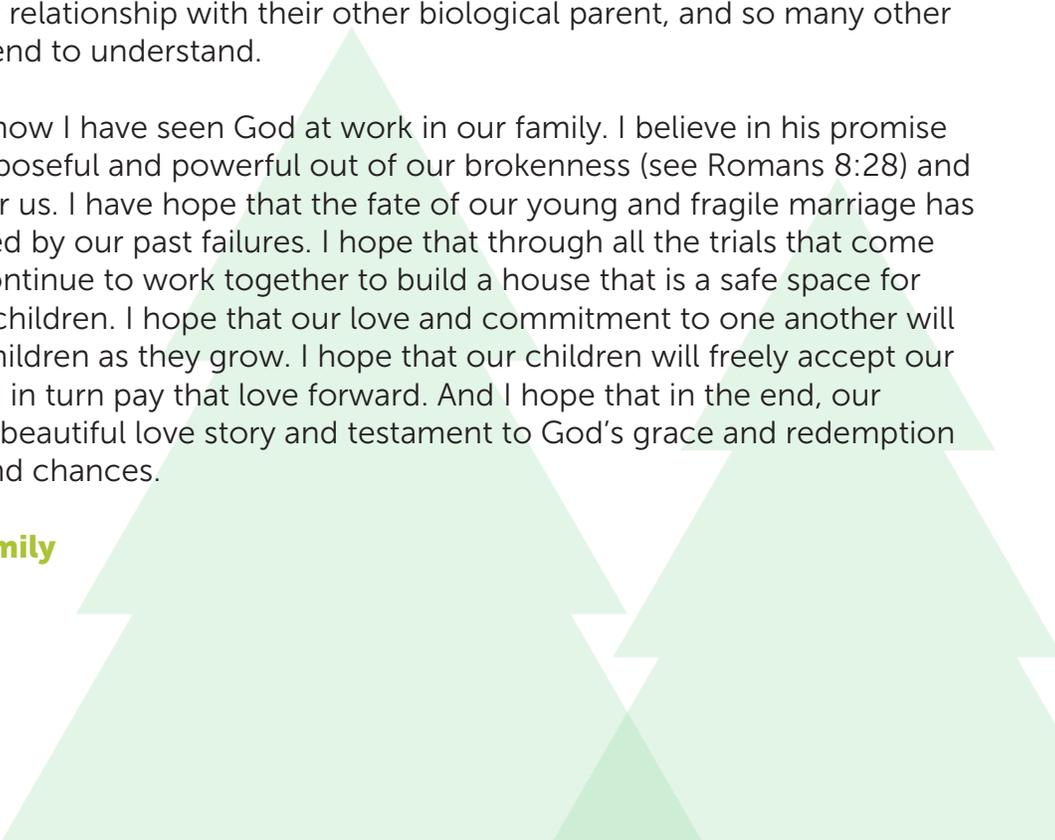
I remember the afternoon our kids first met. After TJ and his kids picked Tristin and me up at the airport, the five of us spent the afternoon watching street performers and eating our way through Faneuil Hall. By the end of the day, the newly formed "three amigos" were singing "Mommy/Kristin and Daddy/TJ sitting in a tree, k-i-s-s-i-n-g. First came love, then came marriage..." I am sure you know the rest. In that moment I could not help but think how effortless it had been for them to be together and what a beautiful family we could be.

Fast forward to a chilly April day in 2018 when TJ and I, with the three amigos in tow, walked down the aisle in what seemed like the perfect beginning to our new blended family's "and they lived happily ever after" fairy tale ending. While we were all excited about this new chapter in our lives, the reality is that no one dreams about being in a blended family.

Born from grief and failure, blended families are convoluted and messy. Parents, scarred by failed relationships of the past, are often blindsided by the tug of war issues that stem from conflicting disciplinary styles, household cleanliness tolerances, financial disciplines and so forth. Children have the great hardship of adjusting to new parental figures, living with strange new siblings, shuffling between homes every few days, and dealing with new and unfamiliar routines and expectations. They also deal with insecurities around how the new dynamic will affect their relationship with their other biological parent, and so many other heartaches I won't pretend to understand.

Married almost 3 years now I have seen God at work in our family. I believe in his promise to make something purposeful and powerful out of our brokenness (see Romans 8:28) and have hope in his plan for us. I have hope that the fate of our young and fragile marriage has not already been decided by our past failures. I hope that through all the trials that come our way, TJ and I will continue to work together to build a house that is a safe space for each other and for our children. I hope that our love and commitment to one another will be an example to our children as they grow. I hope that our children will freely accept our fierce love for them and in turn pay that love forward. And I hope that in the end, our marriage will stand as a beautiful love story and testament to God's grace and redemption in remarriage and second chances.

The McQuay-Rizzo Family

A large, stylized green tree graphic is positioned in the bottom right corner of the page, partially overlapping the text.

TREE 13 - THIS IS OUR FATHER'S WORLD

As the staff of Faith Community Church, we are convinced, without a shadow of doubt, that no matter how dark it may seem, Christ is in control. This is still our Father's world. Jesus works in this world and in our lives, giving us hope and life in every circumstance, in many varied ways. He is unchanging and always pulls through. Our tree tells this story of hope. The multicolored lights blinking vigorously speak of the myriad ways Jesus works in our darkest moments and transforms us into bright lights radiating his love and goodness. The green of the tree represents the new life Jesus brings. The one strand of bright white light reveals the true north star of Jesus, our source of hope, and the purple decorations reveal his royalty and splendor. You can have hope too, because Jesus is in control and this is still our Father's world.

The Faith Community Staff

TREE 14 – ADOPTED BY LOVE

We adopted our child as an infant. Adoption is a beautiful reflection of God's love...sometimes too beautiful to fully comprehend. And just like we sometimes struggle to fully accept God's love, adopted children can struggle as well. They can struggle to feel cherished. They may struggle with feelings of being unwanted by their birth parents. They may struggle to feel secure in their new, forever home. They may sometimes feel like outsiders, even within families that love them. However, the strong and unconditional love of a forever family can help to heal some of those struggles. The adopted child can come to know that he or she is wanted, cherished and loved.

God welcomes us all to be his adopted sons and daughters through faith in Jesus Christ. But sometimes, despite his acceptance, his promises, and his faithfulness to us, many of us struggle to feel secure in his love. We struggle to feel wanted, deserving, and cherished by our Lord and Savior. We sometimes feel like outsiders within our church family or Christian community. But as adopted children of God, we can come to feel wanted, cherished and loved.

We can trust God's promise to us in Romans 8:14-15. It says, "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

And that is our universal story of adoption and hope.

Anonymous

TREE 15 – HOPE IN GOD’S BLESSING ON THE NEXT GENERATION

“This Little Light of Mine”

The world can be a really scary place. We see violence, racism, political unrest, judgement, and hatred on a weekly, and sometimes daily, basis. As adults, it is natural to feel overwhelmed by work, family, and the day-to-day struggle of navigating through a pandemic. We feel like we have minimal ability to effect real change. The daunting reality of what it would actually take to make the world a better place seems crippling. But in our children, we see so much more than we see in ourselves. We see greatness and the hope for change. We see hope for a world that will be kinder and gentler. We see a natural love for others in an innocence that does not judge or hate based on our differences. We teach our young ones to appreciate those differences.

In a world which can feel very dark, Jesus gave us children – “these little lights of ours” - to shine. That gives us hope for the future.

For God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.
[2 Corinthians 4:6]

The Parabolicoli Family



TREE 16 - HOPE BECAUSE HE BREAKS CHAINS

Darkness reigns when my mind and my soul are in chains. I used to live my life in chains. Certain experiences from my past put me in chains and kept me there. For me, those chains come in the form of anxiety and depression, which try to tether me to a life of dysfunction. If I let them, they smother me. Well, they used to smother me. They don't smother me anymore.

Because now I have hope. My soul was once wrapped in chains. But Jesus broke those chains and set me free. With freedom came joy, peace, and hope. So many of my friends at Celebrate Recovery have experienced that same freedom and now have that same hope. We don't all battle the same things. For some it's addiction. For others it's co-dependency. Some struggle with rejection and a lack of self-worth. We were not all wrapped in the same chains. But we share a common experience. We were all once living in chains and now have been set free.

This tree represents Jesus' power to break the chains that bind us. The blue lights spiraling up the center of the tree represent the hurts, habits, and hang ups that once held us captive. They never truly go away. They are a part of us. They remain in our history. But they no longer have power over us. The white lights wrapping the outer layer of the tree represent the light of Jesus Christ and his power to break chains. And the broken chains? Well, those broken chains need no explanation. But I'll tell you anyway. Broken chains have no power. The hurts attached to them can no longer bind us. No chain that Jesus breaks can continue to have power over me. He is my savior, my redeemer, my hero. I hope you can grow to love him as much as I do. He'll break your chains too, if you ask him. So I invite you to visit Celebrate Recovery. I hope you'll consider joining us. It may just change your life. You can find more information at www.faithma.org/celebrate-recovery.

Nancy Brown for Celebrate Recovery



TREE 17 - HOPE THROUGH OUR HOPKINTON CHRISTIAN PRESCHOOL COMMUNITY

Psalm 94:19 "When doubts filled my mind, your comfort gave me renewed hope and cheer."

There were so many unknowns as we started our school year in September. The challenges we faced were great, but our God is greater! I've been overwhelmed as I have watched God pour over this team of teachers and the families we get to serve, providing hope and joy in such a challenging season. HCP is filled with hope this year! **Mrs. Mercier**

HCP has brought the hope of continued in-person education for our son Ronan and all the preschoolers who so greatly benefit from learning from their awesome teachers and classmates. - **McCarthy family**

HCP has given my family and I hope that although we're all in the trenches of a tough season, we are not alone, and we're still offered a chance to smile every day! **Karalekas Family**

This year has been so awful for so many. As the days turned to weeks and then months when the kids were stuck at home, their spirits were down. Our son Ashton's ability to go to HCP has brought light, hope and joy to our family. He looks forward to each day and is so proud of his accomplishments. Thank you for being our bright spot this year. **Gibson family**

Hope is seeing the teachers and staff at HCP shine brilliantly into the lives of their students and then watching the kids share their light with others. You make a difference in our kids' lives! **Ramsay Family**

We are thankful for Hopkinton Christian Preschool for giving us hope for normalcy during a difficult year. It has been a real comfort knowing that our child has a safe and happy classroom experience. **Seekell Family**

The way our son's eyes light up on arrival at HCP gives me hope that the kindness, friendship and nurturing he receives in his time here will comfort him for many years to come. **Munn Family**

We experience HOPE at HCP when our son runs into school eager to start the day and when he runs out to give us a big hug at pick up. HCP gives children HOPE and a bright future! **Barry Family**

HCP has given us hope that our babies are more resilient than we know and will make it out of this crazy year unscathed. **Vale Family**

When James was struggling with being separated from his class and teachers during quarantine, Mrs. Gooley and Mrs. Devenney actually travelled to our house to visit with him in the backyard. It gave him (and us) such hope to have teachers that care so much! **Eaton Family**

It is my hope and desire that all people would feel the love of God in their lives. Being a part of Hopkinton Christian Preschool has provided me with the opportunity to share God's love in a tangible way with young children in an environment where I too have experienced the wonder of God's love in so many ways! **Mrs. Ahern**

The Hopkinton Christian Preschool Family

TREE 18 – HOPE FOR ALL NATIONS

I have had the wonderful privilege of sharing friendship with women who come from various countries. As we share life, and stories from our past and present, I can see the common thread of God's faithfulness in each story, through every obstacle, battle or struggle, no matter how big or small. God has been the light in the darkness for each one of us. And that reminds me that he is the light of all nations and all people. Each woman comes from a different culture, nation and background yet Jesus' light shines in their past and present! His light has no borders, and his love has no bounds. It is a true and perfect love for all Nations!

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12

The Tamierao/Ferreira Faith Group

TREE 19 – MUSIC AND ANGELS

Marked by the overwhelming impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 has been a year of extraordinary loss for so many of us. The group of women who decorated this tree has collectively suffered many personal losses, but one stands out, because that one was shared by all of us. We are dedicating our tree tonight to someone who contributed to our growth, learning and love of Christ. The loss of our friend and sister, Julia Cobb, who served in the worship ministry at Faith Community and impacted more lives than she will ever know, has inspired our theme of "Music and Angels."

"In him there was life, and that life was the light of all people." John 1:4

We all agree that Christ's spirit living in us allows us to light up every space we are in. We are assured that we can count on Jesus to provide for each of us in our spaces. In a year that has been so challenging, it is a tremendous gift to have confidence in the knowledge of the eternity that lays ahead for all that make a decision to place their trust in Christ. We are promised a future with Christ that exceeds anything we have here. The hope of this future exceeds everything we have here. We are grateful for this gift, the unconditional nature of all that is offered and our opportunity to accept it. We have that hope for ourselves and we have that hope for Julia. And we can't wait to one day join her and hear her angelic voice singing Christ's praises again.

The Dinsdale/White Faith Group

TREE 20 - LOVE FIRST

Feelings are a part of human nature. They are brought on by situations, people and circumstances. We experience joy when good things come to us, and feel of sad when disappointments occur. It seems natural to feel jealous of people who have more or to pity those who have less. But what if the first feeling we had towards others was love?

Jesus has shown me this type of love, through my work in Worcester. I was teaching a group of adult learners working toward achieving their GEDs for a myriad of reasons. Some were seeking promotions at work. Others were trying to be positive role models for their grandchildren to prove that it is never too late in life to achieve a goal. And others who were still young enough to attend high school, but without adequate support, needed to find another way to learn.

Each of my students encountered obstacles on their paths that might prevent them from completing their education. They would often have to miss class or leave early. I was sad that these wonderful people did not have the same opportunities as I did in achieving an education.

When I was offered a position closer to home, I worried about telling my students that I would be leaving. I wanted them each to know that I cared about their future even though I wouldn't be with them. But I was feeling incredible sadness and guilt over their struggles.

On my last day with them, my students threw me a going away party. I walked into the classroom to balloons, cards, and homemade dishes and desserts. Most of these students were poor, and taking care of their families. Some were dealing with health problems. A few were even homeless. However, what I came to learn from them over the six months I had with them, is that they had the love of Jesus. It didn't matter what materials goods they had, because they appreciated whatever they had, and still gave to others. They appreciated the time I was able to work with them and help them move closer to achieving their goals. Each one of those students showed me love first, despite the fact that we come from different places, have different financial situations, speak different languages, or look different from one another. They taught me that the first feeling we should have toward all people is love.

The Hodge Family



TREE 21 – HOPE IN A GOD WHO MEETS OUR NEEDS

Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said “And then, just when everything is bearing down on us to such an extent that we can scarcely withstand it, the Christmas message comes to tell us that all our ideas are wrong, and that what we take to be evil and dark is really good and light because it comes from God. Our eyes are at fault, that is all.”

Our God, our precious God, left the safety and warmth of heaven to come to earth to be born in meager means - to fill the darkness of the sky with light and hope for all to see. There were so many unknowns, so many obstacles, but God had an amazing plan to offer hope and redemption for all. Today we have so many obstacles. We have so many unknowns but we have the hope and love of Jesus Christ to guide us each and every day. His light found in his Word is our path in life. His love is the light we need amidst the evil and darkness of the world we live in.

Our tree represents the reality of the world we are living in today. We have material needs, we have fears, and we have many unknowns. Jesus Christ will light a path to God, even in the midst of the chaos around us. Our group is LOL (Laugh Out Louds) because amidst the craziness and seriousness of life, we choose joy and try to find laughter around us.

Heavenly Father. Thank You for the gift of Your Precious Son to give us hope and light and love in this world that so desperately needs You. Help us to be that light, that hope and that love to the world around us all.

The Laugh out Loud Faith Group



TREE 22 - HOPE IN THE FORM OF ORANGE

There's so much we love about the color orange - orange slices, orange sherbet, orange sunsets...and the list goes on. Our family ministry truly does love orange. Our whole ministry is built around it. We love how it represents how the light of Christ through His Church (represented by the color YELLOW) and the love of the family (represented by the color RED) combine to produce something truly beautiful.

We have so much more influence on the spiritual journeys of young lives when we work together. Yellow and red are each beautiful in their own right, but in family ministry, we believe there is so much more power in orange. This year we've seen our families work harder than ever to engage their children's faith. And our church staff and volunteers have had to get creative at helping our families from a distance.

Our hope is not just in the pandemic ending, but in the God who is leading us in directions we never thought possible. We have been praying for ways to partner with parents - and the pandemic has forced us into that new, creative space in ways we never dreamed! This tree reminds us that the journey is not complete...but with the Hope of Christ, we will endure and take the things we've learned into the future. We can do more together.

The FCC Family Ministry Team

With ornaments donated by our families (red) and volunteers (yellow).



TREE 23 - LIGHT OVERCOMES DARKNESS

I am affected by the seasonal darkness that descends this time of year. The life and light of summer is gone. Short, gray days fade into long cold nights. My outlook can match the days - bleak, even dark. But, even in this dark season, I have hope.

I hope because God promised a great light to push back the darkness.

*The people who walk in darkness
will see a great light.
For those who live in a land of deep darkness,
a light will shine.*

Isaiah 9:2 (NLT)

I hope because he delivered on his promise on the day that Jesus was born.

I hope because I have met Jesus, and I get to walk through life - even the darkest seasons of life - with my path illuminated by his light.

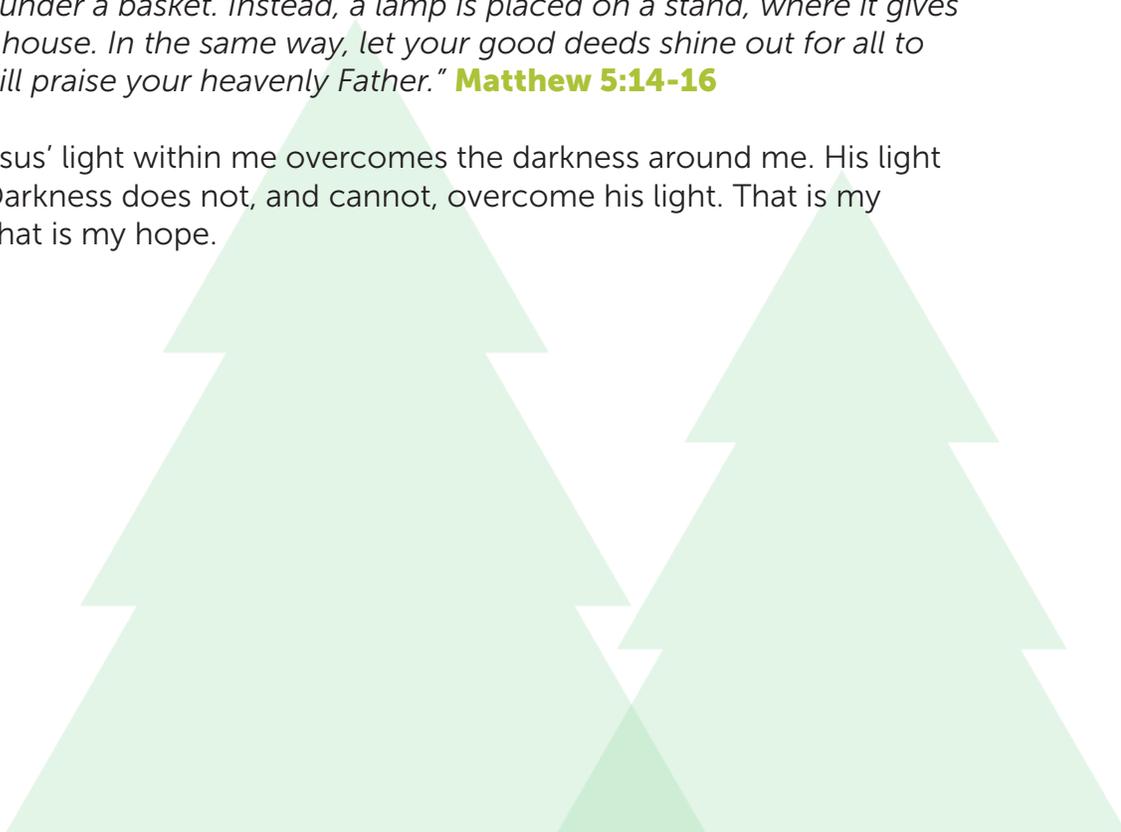
*"I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life." **John 8:12 (NLT)***

Walking with Jesus, I no longer live in the land of deep darkness. I don't feel lost and hopeless. Jesus' light in me gives me hope and comfort and a light that shines so brightly that I'm able to share it with others.

*"You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father." **Matthew 5:14-16***

I have hope because Jesus' light within me overcomes the darkness around me. His light overcomes darkness. Darkness does not, and cannot, overcome his light. That is my peace. That is my joy. That is my hope.

The Umholtz Family



TREE 24 – FUTURE HOPE FOR LOST LOVED ONES

This year many have lost loved ones - some through the normal course of life, others due to COVID, still others through tragedy or accident. It doesn't matter the cause. For each loss, empty places remain where once our families felt whole.

Each loved one is cherished and remembered. This tree represents my loss this year.

My mother recently passed away from complications due to food poisoning. While I am saddened by her death, I hold on to hope because I know that we will be reunited in heaven through our mutual faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. You can have that hope too, by accepting Jesus as your own personal Lord and Savior. It's a simple prayer: "Lord Jesus, today I place my faith in you as Lord and Savior." I hope you will pray that so we can all be united in heaven. I would love you to meet Jesus and my mother. The pink glitter represents her flamboyance and her pink hair. The white lights reflect her vibrant approach to life and her faith in Christ. Take a moment to pause here and remember any you might have lost in your family this year or years past and consider the invitation of Jesus to place your faith in him.

The Botsis Family



TREE 25 – PERSEVERANCE IN THE PANDEMIC

When Covid19 caused nursing homes to quarantine residents, including my parents, I had hope. I prayed and visited my parents at their window. When my parents were diagnosed with Covid in early May, I had hope. I prayed and again visited them at their window. I was there on May 26, 2020, the day the nurse told me that my Mom was struggling for oxygen and that my Dad had beaten Covid. I received the call at 6pm that same day, and was allowed in with full PPE, to tell my Dad that Mom had passed. We prayed and sang hymns together, then went in to pray and sing to Mom at her bedside. Hope was there with us, and the peace of God, which passes all understanding filled us, as we knew that she was already in heaven. Perseverance in times of struggle is possible with God by our side. The Lord is our Shepherd, leading us beside still waters and restoring our souls, even as we walk through the darkest of valleys, just as it says in Psalm 23.

Hope in Christ is helping us all persevere as we mourn family members and dear friends lost in 2020.

1 Timothy 4:16 tells us to “watch your life and doctrine carefully. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.” Perseverance in the Pandemic is the theme our Faith Group has chosen, so we have decorated our tree with tools and weapons for Covid-times. James 1:3 says, “the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” Our faith is surely being tested and it has been hard to stay hopeful in Covid-times, but with the Lord by our side - as individuals, as families, as towns, as countries, as a world, we will persevere and stay hopeful!

Wishing all a Merry Christmas and a Happy, Healthy 2021!!

The Cladis Faith Group



TREE 26 - HOPE THROUGH THE STORMS OF LIFE

Psalms 34:19 tells us, “many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” Last year at this time, my husband was hospitalized with multiple heart and lung complications. Both organs were working at 20% capacity and doctors thought he needed a lung transplant, and possibly triple bypass surgery. He had emphysema nodule flare ups and pneumonia, as well as congestive and systolic heart failure. Doctors called it the perfect storm.

My husband should not be alive today and should certainly not be strong enough to work. But when the situation seemed bleakest, God spoke promises to me, through His Word, and we believed. Before the hospitalization, because of my husband’s weakness and inability to walk even a few steps, I fell on my face before God and asked if he was going to take my husband home. The holy spirit prompted me to get up and worship him. I did and a few days later I asked for confirmation through his Word. These are a few of the verses he gave me.

Psalm 118:17 I (he) shall not die but live and declare the works of the Lord.

Psalm 118:29 Oh give thanks to the Lord for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.

Numbers 23:19 God is not a man that He should lie nor the son of man that He should repent. Has He said and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?

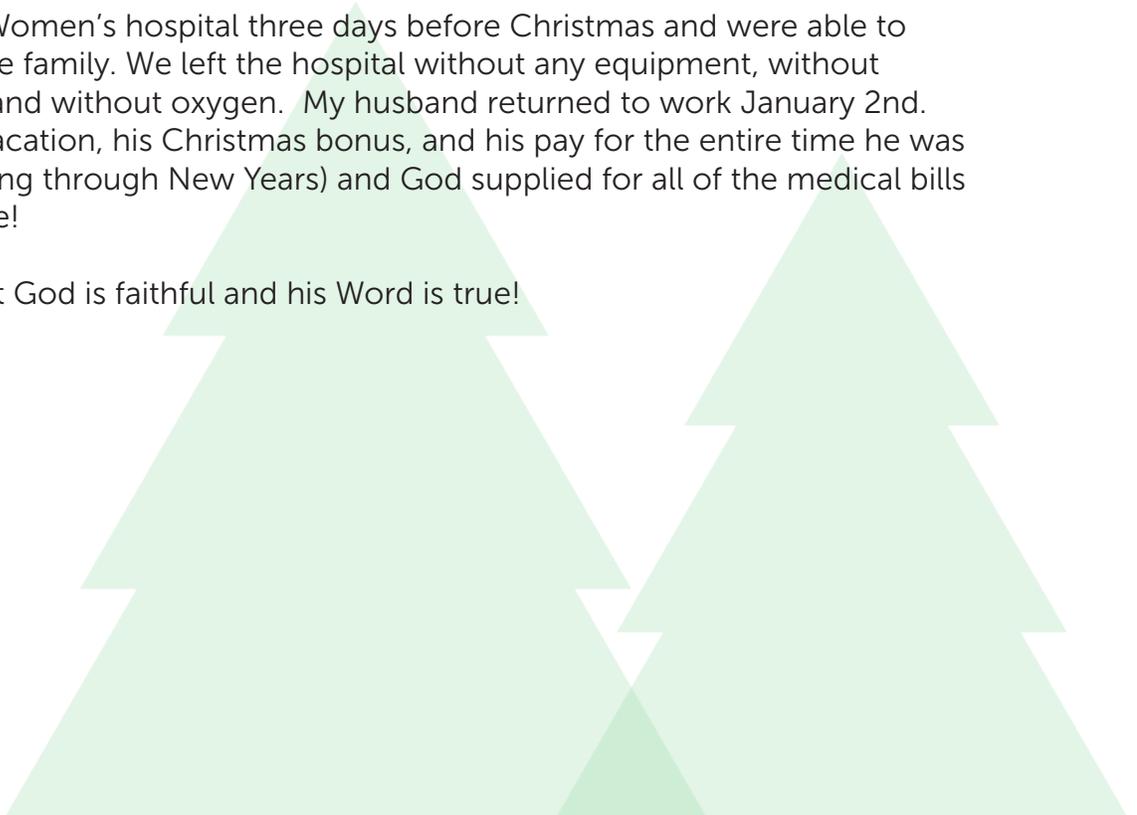
Ps. 90:10a 70 years are the life of a man, eighty if he has strength.

We saw God work in so many ways. One moment that stands out as a testament of his love, poured out through others, was when my friend drove 3 hours through a storm to bring us food, a gift card, a warm smile, and prayer! She was exactly what we needed at the time.

We left Brigham’s and Women’s hospital three days before Christmas and were able to celebrate with our entire family. We left the hospital without any equipment, without surgery or transplants, and without oxygen. My husband returned to work January 2nd. He had his Christmas vacation, his Christmas bonus, and his pay for the entire time he was out of work (Thanksgiving through New Years) and God supplied for all of the medical bills without it being an issue!

Our tree represents that God is faithful and his Word is true!

Cynthia Cutaia



TREE 27 - JESUS IS OUR HOPE AND OUR PEACE

"O Holy Night, the stars are brightly shining..."

With Covid, riots, fires, contentious elections, our world can seem hopeless. That's why I love the hymn, "O Holy Night." Its lyrics are as beautiful as they are counterintuitive: "A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn." A thrill of hope? A weary world rejoices? Can we really have this kind of hope in such difficult times?

I used to struggle with debilitating social anxiety – I couldn't talk or think when with groups of people. My face and neck would grow deep red and I would fill with panic at what was happening, with no ability to stop it. As a graduate student, getting assigned to work in small groups or to speak in front of the class were not uncommon, giving me ample opportunity to face this fear. Though not the most common of places to find encouragement, the restroom at school had this verse posted, which became a welcome refuge and source of strength for me.

"In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16:33

This verse reminded me that Jesus is the giver of peace and hope – that he is the source of my strength, peace and hope. All the names on this tree describe Jesus, the giver of hope and peace. May you find lasting hope this Christmas and know that "His law is love and his gospel is peace."

The Barker, Cabrera, and Loy Families



TREE 28 - A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS TREE

"I never thought it was such a bad little tree. It's not bad at all, really. Maybe it just needs a little love." Linus Van Pelt, A Charlie Brown Christmas

The team had just set up 28 donated and purchased Christmas trees in the church parking lot. There they stood, a veritable forest of trees, all in staggered rows, awaiting their lights and decorations. The purchased trees stood tall in all their nine-foot uniformity. The donated trees added color commentary. Some were tall, some were short. Some were short-needled, some were shaggy. They were beautiful in their diversity.

I looked down the long row of trees until my eye rested on the short, scraggly, slightly listing tree at the end. "Why are we using that one?" I thought. "It's awful. Surely we can toss that one out. We don't need a Charlie Brown Christmas tree."

As soon as that thought passed through my mind, it was immediately followed by another one.

"Yes, we do. We absolutely need a Charlie Brown Christmas tree."

As I crawl towards the end of 2020, I feel a little bit like that tree - tired and worn, scraggly and leaning. Maybe you feel that way, too. Maybe you feel like Charlie Brown himself - weary and frustrated by the events of the year, wondering what all the fuss over Christmas is all about, and feeling like no matter what you do, you simply can't measure up.

The beauty of this tree is that you don't have to measure up. You can be honest about your world-weariness. Because Linus was right. All you need in order to stand tall is a little love.

And that's what Christmas is all about. It's about God's light piercing our darkness and loving us back to health and strength.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. John 3:16-17

Christmas is about God's transforming love pouring down from heaven and lifting us towards his light. Every tree you've walked by tonight represents a person, family, or group who has experienced God's life-changing love. They wrote their stories and decorated their trees to share that love with you. It's a love that turns darkness into light, worry to peace, and despair into hope. We invite you to discover that love for yourself by joining us for Christmas Eve.

Before you go, consider the transformational power of Charlie Brown's love on that little Christmas tree. And while you're at it, take a closer look and see if you can find Woodstock and Snoopy playing together in the branches. Merry Christmas.

The Light The Night Team

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND THANK YOUS

An event of this size and scope is only possible through the generosity of many people and the loving work of an amazing team. We want to thank the many people for their roles and gifts of time, energy and resources. Each played a small part, some played larger parts, but together this event was possible because of their community spirit, collaborative effort and love in action. Thank you to each of you for helping make this possible. We could not have lit the night without you.

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