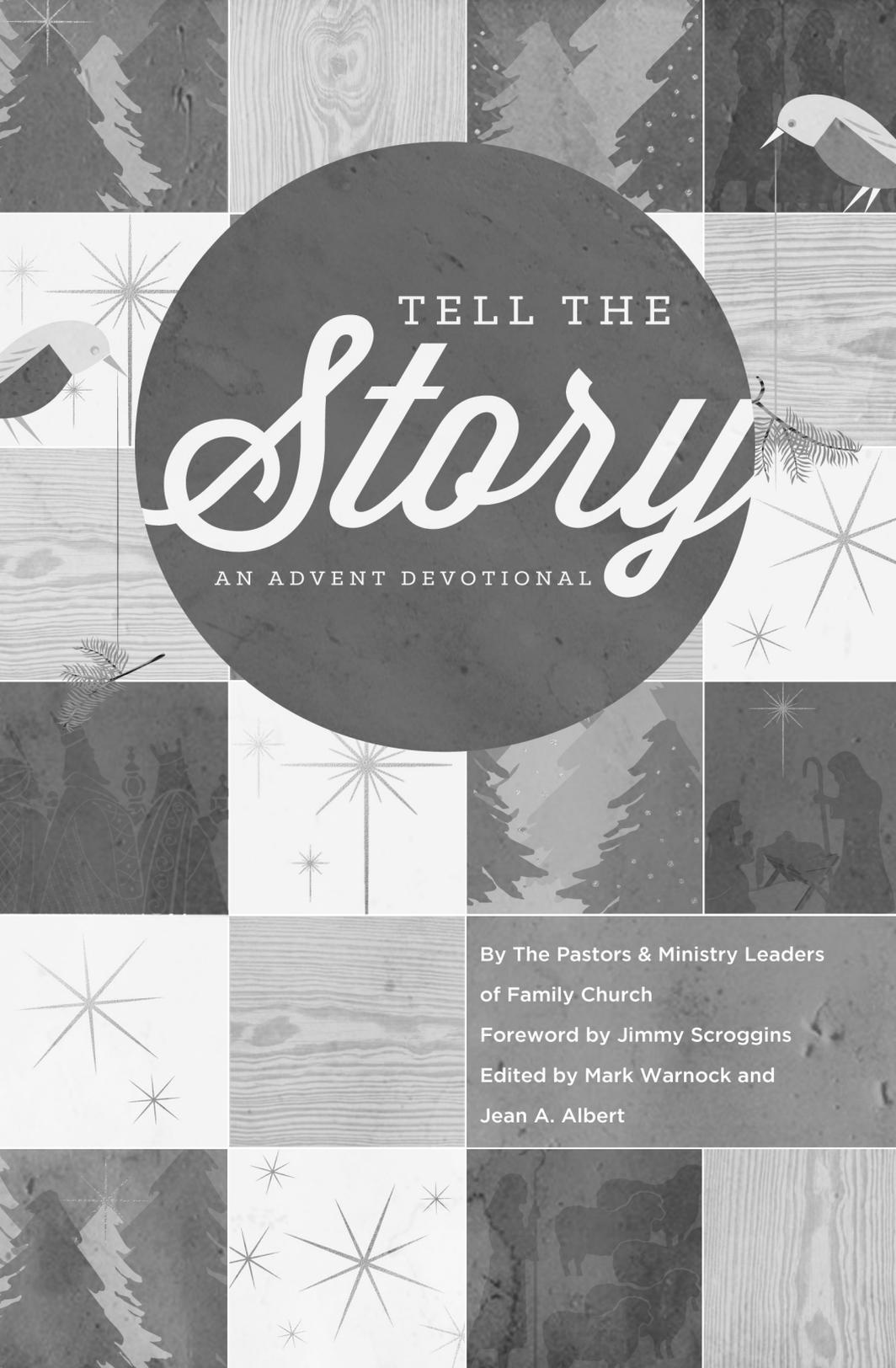


TELL THE

Story



TELL THE
Story
AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

By The Pastors & Ministry Leaders
of Family Church
Foreword by Jimmy Scroggins
Edited by Mark Warnock and
Jean A. Albert

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FOREWORD

By Jimmy Scroggins, Lead Pastor, Family Church

Our church has a rich tradition of celebrating Christmas. For decades our congregation put on a musical extravaganza called “The Singing Christmas Tree.” “The Tree,” as our members affectionately called it, became an institution in our community – part of the way that our entire city celebrated Christmas. Hundreds of people were engaged in the production, and thousands of people came each year to hear the music, experience the drama, and listen to the message. From beginning to end, the message was clear – Christ has come! Through that event many people came to know Jesus and many people were introduced to our church.

“The Singing Christmas Tree” started out as a relatively simple cantata with choir members standing on a set of risers decorated like a giant Christmas tree. Over the years elements were added – Vegas-style lights, live animals, Broadway-caliber special effects, expensive tickets, a huge promotional effort, and a cast of hundreds. “The Tree” was exciting, and it was powerful. But beneath the camels and laser lights and costumes, the music was the heart and soul of the whole thing. The music was what made people return year after year, the music was what stirred souls, and the music carried the message of Jesus. The music combined classic and contemporary, conflated carols and show tunes, and made the familiar and traditional seem new and fresh.

I believe that the event resonated so strongly with so many because the music made people feel something. Artistic expression has the power to make us do that – make us feel something in our hearts, feel something in our souls, feel something that we can't quite explain, feel something that makes us want to connect.

Even though our church doesn't do "The Tree" anymore, we have more artists engaged in our church than ever before. And these gifted men and women have a passion to make us feel something through music about Jesus. So this year, our worship ministry has produced the Christmas album "Tell the Story." It contains original arrangements of traditional Christmas songs, and every song carries the same message – Christ has come!

In addition, our pastors and ministry leaders at Family Church have written the devotional book you hold in your hands. We hope you will use these stories, reflections, and devotional readings personally and with your family as you ponder the message that permeates our ministry – Christ has come!

Our church has changed a lot in recent years. And our celebration of Christmas has evolved as well. But one thing hasn't changed at all – we are still all about Jesus. So no matter what your past looks like, no matter what your family looks like, and no matter where you are in your faith journey – we want you to feel something this Christmas. We want you to engage with the message that God is reaching out to you.

We want you to believe that Jesus came as a baby at Christmastime, grew up into a man, was crucified on a cross, and was raised from the dead. Christ has come, and He has come to make a difference in your life. So read, ponder, listen, share, and enjoy. Most of all, believe! Christmas reminds us that Christ has come!

Love and blessings to you and yours.
Pastor Jimmy

INTRODUCTION

I'm so grateful to the pastors and ministry leaders of Family Church for working together to create this devotional book for you and your family.

One of the great things about the Family Church ministry staff is our diversity. Some are young, some older; some have been Christians for many decades, others are much newer to the faith; a few have seminary PhDs, others have no formal theological training. The men and women who have written these devotionals come from a variety of racial and cultural backgrounds, minister to different age groups, and each has their own unique voice. I think you'll be stimulated by the range of perspectives.

We have three hopes for this book.

First, we hope that it will help you dive deep into the story of Christmas. Most of us are familiar with the basics of the Christmas story: Jesus, born in a manger, announcing angels, trembling shepherds and seeking wise men. When we take a closer, unhurried look at some of these passages, though, we can discover some profound details about the way God works and about the mission of Jesus. We've written on the classic Christmas passages in Matthew and Luke, but have also included some Old Testament readings that prophesy the coming of Jesus. We want you to see how Jesus' coming is the fulfillment of God's plan from the very beginning.

Second, we hope that this guide will help you establish, re-establish or strengthen a daily quiet time with God. For centuries, men and women who have thrived in their relationship with God have made it a habit to read His Word and pray every day. In our busy world, doing that consistently is quite a challenge—especially during the busyness of Christmas. Even pastors can find their personal time with God squeezed out amidst the holiday buzz. As our world gets more frenzied, however, it is all the more important that Christians seek the Lord in “the secret place” and find in Him the strength and comfort we need to live with a peace the world cannot give us. So take thirty days to go on this journey with us, and by the end, you may find that meeting with God every day has become a habit. We pray so.

Third, we hope that you will be spurred on to “Tell the Story.” The arrival of Jesus to rescue us is the greatest news the world has ever heard. We owe it to our friends and neighbors—and to Jesus—not to be silent, but to share His story, especially in this season.

There are thirty devotional readings in this book, designed to cover the season of Advent, which starts four Sundays before Christmas day. Each is written by a different pastor or ministry leader from Family Church. Each one has a Scripture passage printed for you to read, and a short reflection on that passage, along with a suggested prayer.

We have designed five of the thirty devotionals to be able to be used as simple Family Devotions—one for each of the four Sundays of Advent, and one for Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. One way to share the story is by sharing with your family. You may even want to invite some neighbors to participate in Family devotions with you.

To help you, we have included two appendices: one on how to have a quiet time with God, and another one on how to lead a successful Family devotion time. We hope you find them helpful.

I need to express my great gratitude to the devotional writers, the awesome pastors and ministry leaders of Family Church, who I get to work with every week. Jean Albert's sharp editorial eye was a tremendous help, as was the guidance of Pastor George and the Kids ministry team as we developed the Family Devotionals.

Now, as much as any time I can remember, the world needs—and we need—the peace and presence of Jesus. “We have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him.”

Merry Christmas,
Mark Warnock, Editor

First Week of
Advent

B U S T E D !

Aaron Filippone, Family Church Gardens

Genesis 3:14-15

“Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Going to school wasn't the highest priority on my list as a kid. Most days, I would have done anything to be able to stay home from school. One morning, I decided that this was my big chance to skip school. As I was walking down the street developing my plan, I could hear the loud screeching sound of the air brakes. My heart began to beat out of my chest. I looked ahead and a dust cloud from the dirt road enveloped the big yellow bus. It was at that moment that I had a decision to make. I could run toward the bus and get on, or I could slow down and intentionally miss the bus. It didn't take me long to dart to the left and hide behind the big wooden telephone pole by Mr. Mock's house.

After what seemed like hours, the bus closed its doors and proceeded down the road towards Kingsford Elementary School. I turned around and started walking home. Before I could start working up fake tears and a story about missing the bus, I was met by my mother who was standing on the front porch watching the entire saga unfold.

Have you ever been found in your sin? It's a terrible feeling. Imagine what Adam and Eve felt like when they were busted. Imagine the guilt, the fear, the anxiety. They probably thought that the human race would be completely obliterated that day. But God had a different plan. In this incredible statement, God promises to send a rescuer who will defeat the devil and roll back the curse of sin and death. Scholars often call this passage the *protoevangelium*, literally the first mention of the gospel. Thousands of years later, God came through on his promise by sending Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

I haven't found my kids skipping the school bus—yet—but I have caught them sinning. No matter how big or small their sins are, no matter how disappointed or embarrassed I am at their actions, one thing remains true. They are my kids and I could never stop loving them. In the same way, we who are in Christ have a heavenly father who can never stop loving us.

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Dear God, thank you for keeping your promise to send Jesus. Today I confess my great need for you. Please forgive me for choosing my plan over yours. Thank you for continuing to love me in spite of my sin. Amen.

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Family Devotion Guide

Based on “Busted!” by Aaron Filippone

(For practical suggestions on how to lead a Family Devotional time, see Appendix Two.)

- Read the following passage from Pastor Aaron’s devotion:

Going to school wasn’t the highest priority on my list as a kid. Most days, I would have done anything to be able to stay home from school. One morning, I decided that this was my big chance to skip school. As I was walking down the street developing my plan, I could hear the loud screeching sound of the air brakes. My heart began to beat out of my chest. I looked ahead and a dust cloud from the dirt road enveloped the big yellow bus. It was at that moment that I had a decision to make. I could run toward the bus and get on, or I could slow down and intentionally miss the bus. It didn’t take me long to dart to the left and hide behind the big wooden telephone pole by Mr. Mock’s house.

After what seemed like hours, the bus closed its doors and proceeded down the road towards Kingsford Elementary School. I turned around and started walking home. Before I could start working up fake tears and a story about missing the bus, I was met by my mother who was standing on the front porch watching the entire saga unfold.

- Discuss: How do you feel when you get caught doing something wrong?
- Explain that Adam and Eve got caught sinning in the Garden of Eden. God had commanded them not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but when the serpent tempted Eve, both Adam and Eve ate the fruit. This verse is what God said to the serpent.
- Read Genesis 3:14-15:

“Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

- Read the following passage from Pastor Aaron’s devotion:

Have you ever been found in your sin? It’s a terrible feeling. Imagine what Adam and Eve felt like when they were busted. Imagine the guilt, the fear, the anxiety. They probably thought that the human race would be completely obliterated that day. But God had a different plan. In this incredible statement, God promises to send a rescuer—the woman’s offspring—who will defeat the devil and roll back the curse of sin and death. Scholars often call this passage the protoevangelium, literally the first mention of the gospel.

Thousands of years later, God came through on his promise by sending Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

- Discuss: Why did Jesus come?
- Listen to “O Come O Come Emmanuel” from Tell the Story Christmas CD from Family Church Worship.
- Have a family member read this prayer aloud:

Dear God, thank you for keeping your promise to send Jesus. Today we confess our great need for you. Please forgive us for choosing our plans over yours. Thank you for continuing to love us in spite of our sin. Amen.

CREATED WITH A PURPOSE

Tim Akin, Family Church West

Isaiah 49:5-6

And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him—for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength— he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Have you ever felt you were made for a specific reason or with a particular mission to accomplish in life? Perhaps you believe that you were made to be a mom or dad, a husband or wife, an athlete or artist, a teacher or a doctor, a pastor or a professor. Eric Liddell, a Scottish 400-meter gold medalist in the 1924 Olympics and a missionary, believed that God made him for a purpose. He said, “God made me fast and when I run I feel his pleasure.” Liddell used his God-given talent as an athlete to accomplish the mission of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ in his home country of Scotland and as a missionary to China.

In Isaiah 49:5-6 we read a prophecy about “the Servant of the Lord,” who was born for a specific reason and to accomplish a particular mission. In fact, He was confident that God had prepared Him for His mission from the womb, and He believed that this task would be accomplished.

This “Servant” is revealed to us in the New Testament as Jesus Christ, the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” Here, Isaiah is teaching us that Jesus was created for the purpose of redeeming all people from their sins and what a great mission this is.

In Acts 13:47, St. Paul paraphrases Isaiah 49:6 when he says, “I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” When a person repents of their sins and believes in Jesus Christ, they are made into a new creation, they are born again, and they are given a new purpose and a new mission in this life. All Christians are given the mission of being ambassadors for Christ, and calling people to be reconciled to God. Are you living out your life’s mission?

.....

Dear Jesus, thank you for saving me from my sins, and for being a light to all nations. Give me the strength to accomplish your mission of being your ambassador and sharing with those far from God how to be reconciled to Christ. Please use me as a missionary where I live, work, and play. Amen.

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