



**Christmas 2022**

# Introduction

When I was a child, things were different. There was not all of these electronic gadgets kids get today at Christmas. While some of our presents did need batteries, most of them used good old muscle power to operate, such as a brand-new bicycle. That is a present still appreciated by many children today.

Another thing we used to like to get was games. Now these were not the electronic games of today, but good old board games (not bored games). Many of us older folks still remember the games we used to get at Christmas. One of my favorites was Hi Ho Cherry-O. It is a simple board game where you attempt to pick all the cherries off of a tree. The version I had, one of the earliest editions since it came out in 1960, had trees that actually stood up on the board and the cherries hung on the tree. It seems so simple, but you have to watch out, for if the spinner says you spill your bucket, all cherries have to go back on the tree.

What wonderful memories many of us have of playing board games. It was family time. You couldn't hide in your room playing video games. All the games required at least two people, but four would make it so much more fun.

Our theme this Christmas is called "A Hasbro Christmas". This is because Hasbro now owns the rights to most board games we remember. They have acquired both Parker Brothers and Milton Bradley. The great thing is that they still produce the classics we enjoyed. This Christmas, we will take a look at some of the all-time favorites, like Candy Land and Chutes and Ladders, and you will be encouraged to play them again, or maybe for the first time.

There are two goals for this emphasis this year. One goal is to get families and friends playing together. God designed us for relationship. We want to rekindle the tradition of getting together and having some simple fun and laughter. Let's share life together this Christmas.

The second goal is that in the midst of the fun and relationship building, that we will go deeper in our relationship together with God. Each week we will focus on one classic board game, but we

will also tie it in with a theme from God's Word. Who said learning couldn't be fun, but it also might change your life in the process.

As you go through these devotions, you will discover that they are designed for a family setting. That does not mean that they cannot be just as meaningful for individual devotions, or as couples. If you are doing these alone, you may want to consider journaling your thoughts in place of the family discussion.

As these devotions were written, they were written from the perspective that those using them are Christians and that God is actively working in their lives. I understand, however, that some of you might still be at the point of being seekers after salvation. As you go through these devotions, you may discover that you want to be more than just a seeker. If so, I have provided a simple plan of salvation in the back of this book on page 29. If you pray the prayer there, let me encourage you to speak with me or another Christian about your decision, so that we can rejoice with you and be there to help you in your first days as a new Christian.

One final piece of instruction. Since Christmas falls on Sunday this year, I did not write a specific devotion for Christmas Eve on Saturday. Let me encourage you, that if Christmas Eve is when you usually celebrate with your family and do devotions together, that you do the devotion designed for Christmas Day. This devotion will seek to tie together everything we will look at together this Christmas. It could have a profound impact on your family as you share it together.

Are you ready for what God is going to do this Christmas season? Then let's get out the board games and see what God is going to do. Just remember, no cheating and no pouting, just a merry Christmas together.

*Rev. Mark Eby*

## Calendar of Events

**First Sunday of Advent:** The season of Advent begins on Nov. 27 this year. Join us for our service at 10:45 as we enter the Christmas season together. Our theme this year is A Hasbro Christmas. Our devotions begin on this day.

**Young Adult Christmas Party:** On Friday night, Dec. 2, at 7:00, young adults are invited to the home of Pastor Mark and Tammy for an ugly sweater Christmas party. Make sure and wear your killer ugly sweater, for this will be a mystery dinner called “Murder at the Office”. Bring some Christmas food that is to die for that can be shared and come help us discover who did it. It might be you.

**Children’s Christmas Program Practice:** On Sunday, Dec. 4, following the morning service, the children eat lunch together and then have a dress rehearsal for their program. Please pick your child up at 3:00. They will also practice on Saturday, December 10, from 10:00 to 12:00.

**Children’s Christmas Program:** On Sunday night, Dec. 11, the children will be presenting their program called “Christmas Cookies”. They will be presenting this as a dinner theater. The children need to be at the church by 5:15 with seating beginning at 5:30. Tickets are \$12.00 and children under five are \$5.00, and proceeds will go to the cost of children’s camp.

**Women’s Ministry Christmas Party:** On Dec. 12, Women Renewed is hosting Jingle and Mingle, a fun evening of Christmas cheer for women. The fun begins at 6:30, and women are invited to bring an ornament to exchange, a sweet or savory treat to share, and a friend.

**Teen Christmas Party:** The teens are planning a Christmas party for Sunday, Dec. 18, at the church following the morning service.

If you would like to participate in the “Dirty Santa” gift exchange, you may bring a gift around \$10.00.

**Church Board:** The Board meeting and Christmas dinner will be at the home of Pastor Mark and Tammy. The date and time are still to be determined.

**Christmas Eve Service:** On Saturday, Dec. 24, we will have a candlelight Christmas Eve service at 6:00. Invite your family and friends to join us for a special time of singing Christmas carols, hearing a Christmas devotion, and sharing communion together.

**Christmas Day Service:** On Sunday, Dec. 25, we will not have an in-person service, but a special prerecorded service will be available for you to enjoy at home with your family. May this be a very special time for you and your family.

# The Advent Wreath

Advent is a time of expectation. This is symbolized not only by the four-week period of preparation, but also by the lighting of a new Advent candle on each Sunday of the season. The flame of each new candle reminds the worshiper that something is happening, but something more is still to come. The Advent season will not be complete until all four candles are lighted, with the central Christ candle also burning brightly on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

There is symbolism in the color of the candles in the Advent wreath. The three purple candles symbolize the coming of Christ from the royal line of David. He is coming as King of Kings as well as Prince of Peace. The pink candle is lighted on the third Sunday of the Advent season. This candle symbolizes joy.

A progression is noted in the lighting of the Advent candles, beginning with the first, symbolizing prophecy. The second reminds us that we are involved in a season of preparation for the celebration of the coming of Christ. Joy is the theme of the third candle as we proclaim that Christ brought joy to the world when He appeared. The revelation of God's love for all humankind is portrayed by the lighting of the fourth candle. The culmination of the season comes on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, as the Christ candle is lighted. We rejoice over the fact that the promise of long ago has now been fulfilled.

# Week 1 Candy Land

(Light 1 purple candle each night this week)



**Sun. Nov. 27:** Isaiah 7:14

The first game we shall look at this Christmas is Candy Land. It was created in 1948 by Elanor Abbott for children in the hospital. It is a simple board game in which movement is based on flipping over a card to reveal either one- or two-colored squares. You move your game piece, a gingerbread man, to the next square of that color or to the second square of that color if your card has two colored squares. The game requires no reading and minimal counting skills, making it suitable for young children. There is no strategy involved and no choices necessary.

A unique factor in this game is the fact that the winner of the game is already determined before the game even begins, simply because of the way the cards are stacked. We will use this feature of the game this week to look at prophecy. God knew years before it happened that a virgin would have a child and He would be called Emmanuel. Is life simply the flipping of a card, or is there more going on than we see at first glance?

Take a minute and discuss how it makes you feel to know that the winner has been determined even before you play the game? Would you like life to be this way?

If you have this game, this would be a good night to enjoy it as a family, or perhaps join another family for game night as we begin this Advent Season.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, as we begin this Advent season, I pray that You will open our hearts to what You would teach us, even through a simple board game. May we come to understand the truth you would speak into our lives and be changed. Amen.*

**Mon. Nov. 28:** Read Matthew 1:18-25

We mentioned yesterday that the end of Candy Land is determined by how the cards are stacked up. There is no skill involved, just the luck of the draw. One of the things I discovered is that this makes it hard to cheat, even if cheating means helping a little person win. The only real way to cheat is by stacking the deck.

You may wonder if prophecy is about God stacking the deck. Our scripture last night pointed to a virgin having a son and He would be called Emanuel. Now tonight, our scripture shows that prophecy being fulfilled.

In a way, the deck is stacked. God already knows what is to come, but there is more. Read Galatians 4:4. What we find here is that not only does God know what is to come, He knows the right card to slip into the deck at just the right place. That means life is not a random stack of cards. God is in control.

Take a few moments and discuss whether you would like life to be just a random flip of the cards or do you prefer to know God is acting to create the future He desires?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, there is so much about life I do not understand, but I am so glad it is not left to chance. I trust the future you are creating for my life. Amen.*

**Tues. Nov. 29:** Read John 3:16-17

While I am not a fan of cheating in order to win, I have occasionally been known to cheat to help someone else win. I love to see the smile on a kid's face when they win

even if it means I lose. I am not the only one, for I have seen others do this as well.

God is the same way. When God interrupts the natural flow of history, it is not for his sake, but it is for our sake. The whole story of Christmas is God interrupting what would have been with an unexpected card known as Jesus. It would cost our Heavenly Father dearly, but it would make possible our winning the battle with sin.

Discuss how it looked like God might have thrown the game so that we might win?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your son who came at just the right time. You were willing to suffer what looked like defeat for my victory. I praise you for your love. Amen*

**Wed. Nov. 30:** Read Luke 1:26-38

There is one feature of Candy Land that can be either a joy or a curse. There is one type of card that I did not mention, and that is the card that sends you to a certain place on the board. You could move forward near the end at Snow Flake Lake, or you could move backward near the beginning at Gingerbread Tree or perhaps one of three other spots in the middle. You must go wherever the card says.

We have talked this week about God stacking the deck so that we could win, but unlike the game, we still have choices. We see that in the story of Mary. The angel told her what would happen, but Mary had a choice in how she would respond. What do you think might have happened if she had refused to be the mother of Jesus? Do you think she might have been tempted to refuse?

Mary did not refuse, instead she responded by saying, “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Why would that take a lot of faith on her part? It means trusting that God knows what cards come next, and He is working all things for good. Do you trust Him?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I do not know what the future holds, but I choose to trust you. I pledge to follow wherever you may lead. Amen.*

**Thurs. Dec. 1:** Read Luke 10:21-24

There is another aspect of the game that can really be troubling.

There are two spaces that say, “Stuck on a Licorice Space Lose One Turn.” One of these spaces is back toward the beginning, but the other is near the end. Just when you are thinking you are about to win, suddenly you have to wait.

Waiting and Christmas go hand in hand. It was that way before Jesus was born. People longed to see Him, but God did not send Him. Not until, as we saw earlier this week, that the time was right. That is the way God always chooses to work, at the right time.

Of course, that means sometimes we must wait. If we have to miss a turn or two, that is ok. It just means God is waiting for the right time. The “right time” is always better than the “now time” with God.

How are you at waiting on God’s time? Is there something you are waiting for at this moment? Do you want it now, or when God knows the time is right?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for always doing things at the right time. Help me to have the faith to trust in your timing. Amen.*

**Fri. Dec. 2:** Read Mark 1:14-15

The very first card you flip in Candy Land is very important.

On the 2004 version, the first card you want to have is a single orange square. That means you get to take the rainbow trail shortcut and skip 54 spaces. That puts you way ahead of everyone else. Do you like shortcuts?

In life, there are very few shortcuts. In our passage today, we find the beginning of the story of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. If Mark’s Gospel was all you read, you might think Jesus just appeared one day as an adult. That would have been quite a shortcut.

However, we know from the other Gospels that He had to experience all of life just as we do. That is why Hebrews 4:15 tells us that He was tempted in all ways just like we are, but it also tells us that He did not sin. His life is an example and hope for us.

When God allows us to take the long way in life, it is not because He does not care. Remember, He has stacked the deck. There is a good reason He did not just zip us past the tough spots. There is a benefit for us or someone else.

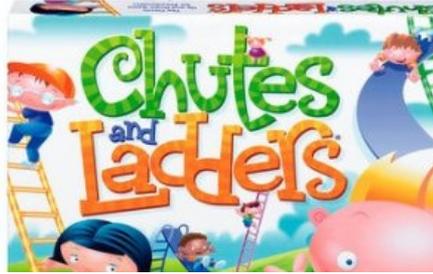
Are you facing a difficult situation in your life? Once again, do you trust Him? Are you willing to go the long way through if that is what God knows is best?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I wish I could take a shortcut at times. Help me to be patient, and understand that you can take the tough times in my life and make something beautiful out of them. Amen.*

**Sat. Dec. 3:** Take time today to catch up if you are behind, reflect on what God has been saying, and act on God's word to you. Most of all, have fun playing.

## Week 2 Chutes and Ladders

(Light 2 purple candles each night this week)



### **Sun. Dec. 4:** Read Luke 1:8-17

This week we are focusing our attention on a very popular game called Chutes and Ladders. It gets its name from the fact that the game has ladders upon which you can advance up the game board and chutes by which you can slide back down. The game is derived from an old game in India called Snakes and Ladders. They thought in the US that chutes, or slides was a lot friendlier concept for children. The American version has a playground setting.

The board is divided into 10 X 10 squares, each numbered from 1 to 100. The goal is to be the first to reach 100. Players advance by spinning a pointer on a card numbered 1 – 6. You then advance the number designated. It is said that the game could end in 7 moves, but it could also go on indefinitely.

We will use our game this week to look at the theme of preparation for the Messiah, especially taking note of the ministry of John the Baptist. Discuss for a few minutes what you think it means to “make ready a people prepared for the Lord”,

This would be a good night to get out your game of Chutes and Ladders and refresh yourself of what it is all about. You might also want to join another family for an exciting game night.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, once again, I ask that you would open my mind to what you would say this week. Help me to understand what it means to prepare this Christmas for the coming of the Lord. Amen.*

**Mon. Dec. 5:** Read John 1:29-31

I want to begin our discussion of Chutes and Ladders at the end of the game. The goal of the game is simply to get to square 100, but what is square 100? That may sound like a silly question, but when the game was invented in India, that square was known as Nirvana, the ultimate goal of Hindus.

As Christians, we have a different goal in mind. For John, the goal was the coming of Jesus. John wanted the world to be ready for His coming, and during John's ministry, Jesus came.

But Jesus tells us He is coming again, and once more the call is to be ready. Read Matthew 24:36-44. As we begin our look this week at preparing for His coming, how do you think we need to prepare? Are you ready?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, it is exciting to think that Jesus is coming again. Help me to understand how I can be ready when He appears. Amen.*

**Tues. Dec. 6:** Read Matthew 3:1-6

When you look closely at the gameboard, you begin to see something held over from its origins with Hinduism. The chutes and ladders are all about karma. This is basically the belief that you get what you have coming to you. At the base of each ladder are kids who are doing something good. They get to climb up higher. But the picture at the top of each chute is a child doing something bad. They end up sliding back down the chute.

Now Jesus does not teach karma, instead he says that the rain falls on the just and the unjust in this life. What the chutes do remind us of is that there is bad in everyone's life. Read Romans 3:23. This reminds us that we all sin. That means that like those who came to John the Baptist, we all have

things we need to repent of as we prepare for the coming of the Lord. Repent means not only to say we are sorry, but it means to make a choice to leave that old way of living behind. Do you have something you need to repent of as we prepare for His coming this Christmas?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, You know my life. You know all the bad. I ask that you forgive me and enable me to live life in such a way as to bring glory to you. Amen.*

**Wed. Dec. 7:** Read Matthew 3:7-12

I could not write these devotions without experiencing the games, so one day I played Chutes and Ladders in my office. The goal was to see how quick I could finish. I was sure I could be one of those who did it in 7 moves. It seemed like it was 70 moves later and I was still at the bottom. Every time I started to move up, I would end up on a chute and fall back towards the bottom.

This made me think of how hard we try to be good. We say I will just try harder, but somehow, we still mess up. Is there any hope for us?

John promised that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. What an amazing promise. That means it will no longer just be us trying harder. The Holy Spirit will give us wisdom and strength to overcome. What a precious gift this is. Are there areas in your life where you need the Holy Spirit to give you victory? Even now you can pray and ask for the Holy Spirit's power to bring you victory. He is ready to help you overcome.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you that it is not up to me to just try harder. Thanks for the gift of your Holy Spirit. May I live according to the wisdom and power of Your Spirit. Amen.*

**Thurs. Dec. 8:** Read John 1:35-39

There is an interesting feature in our game this week. That is, that more than one player can occupy the same space. As a matter of fact, as I researched this game with two other

people (their names have been kept confidential), all three of us ended up on the same space.

As I thought about this, I realized what a great lesson this is. We often think of our spiritual growth in individualistic terms. The Bible, however, seldom shows individual believers. They are all in community together. That is the case with John's disciples in our passage today.

When we talk about trying to be the people God has called us to be, we must realize that we are stronger together than by ourselves. Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. How has this proven true in your life? Who do you have in your life that is helping to pick you up when you fall spiritually? Who are you helping to pick up when they fall?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for the people you put in my life that help me along this journey. Help me to be there for others as well. Amen.*

**Fri. Dec. 9:** Read Luke 1:76-79

We spoke earlier about the end of the game, but I want us to go back there today. The official rules of the game state that you must spin the exact number necessary to land on block 100. That means you could quickly get near the end and then be stalled because you did not spin the exact number necessary to win. While you wait for the perfect spin, someone else could win.

I end our week here today because we have talked about being good this week, but there is something we must not leave unsaid. That is that entering heaven requires more than just being good. It requires something harder than just spinning the right number. Entrance into Heaven requires perfection, and none of us are perfect.

John was to prepare people for the coming of the Lord, the one who would provide forgiveness for sins. Without that forgiveness, we are without hope; with that forgiveness, eternal life in Heaven becomes ours. This forgiveness, however, is not a one-time thing. Even as we approach the end of life, we still are not good enough. We continue to

need God's grace. Read 1 John 1:7. Praise God that he continues to offer our cleansing.

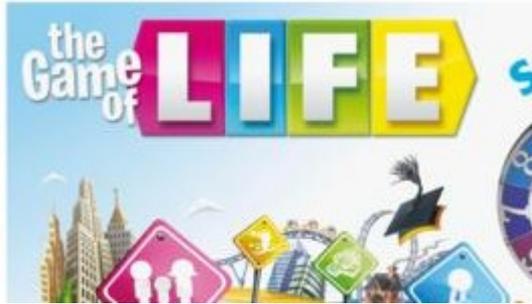
Take a few minutes to discuss why you still need God's forgiveness and how much it means to you.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I know that despite all you have done in my life, I am still not perfect. Thanks for continuing to provide cleansing for my sin. Amen.*

**Sat. Dec. 10:** Take time today to catch up if you are behind, reflect on what God has been saying, and act on God's word to you. Most of all, have fun playing.

## Week 3 The Game of Life

(Light 2 purple candles and the pink candle each night this week)



**Sun. Dec 11:** Read Luke 1:26-27

Of the games we have looked at so far this Christmas, The Game of Life is the most complicated. While it still has a spinner like Chutes and Ladders, it also has added 4 different cards that determine action during the game, and the addition of money. There are also cute little cars and pegs that represent people. One of the big differences from the other games we have seen is that there are decisions to be made.

When it began in 1860, the game was originally called “The Checkered Game of Life” and the board was a modified checkerboard. Today’s version, which was created in 1960, shows a winding path that takes you from a decision about college to retirement.

As we look at our game this week, we are going to do so in light of the story of Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus. Did he find joy in the path his life took, or was it filled with fear, disappointment, and sorrow? Discuss your opinion of this question?

This would be a good night to get out your own “The Game of Life” and refresh yourself on what this game is all about. You might also want to join another family for an exciting game night.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, once again I ask that you would open my mind to what you would say this week. Help me to understand how to find real joy in my life. Amen.*

**Mon. Dec. 12:** Read Luke 2:4-7

As we begin our look at our game this week, I want to begin with what the instructions say is the goal of the game. It says, “the wealthiest player wins.” So, according to The Game of Life, life is all about reaching retirement with as much money as you can get, but is that what life is really all about?

If it is all about being the one with the most money, then Joseph had to be miserable. In our passage today, we find that all he could provide his wife and new born baby with was a bed in a stable. That does not sound like much of a winner, does it?

But think again. How poor do you think he felt as he looked down upon his wife and the little child God had blessed them with? Do you think he would have chosen to be rich and give that up?

As we look this week at what brings joy in life, maybe we need to make sure our focus is not clouded by what the world seems to think life is all about. Let’s look deeper to see where true joy comes from.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help me to see where true joy comes from. I do not want to miss it while chasing after something that cannot satisfy. Amen.*

**Tues. Dec. 13:** Read Mark 3:31-35

Not only is the goal of the game to be the person with the most money at retirement, but the game continues until all players retire. While this is just a game, and I cannot be too critical, the reality is that not everyone will reach retirement. Did those who die young live a joyless life, and did they die as losers?

Many Bible scholars believe that the reason Joseph is not mentioned in our passage today is because Joseph had passed away by this time. Was his life a failure? Well,

think for a moment about what Joseph got to do in life. He got to bring Jesus, the Son of God, into the world. He protected his family by taking them to Egypt when Herod wanted to kill Jesus. He brought his family back home to Israel and provided for his family, this included making sure Jesus was raised as a devout Jew.

Perspective is the key to joy. The things that Joseph did as Jesus' earthly father were difficult, but at the same time he had the privilege of being a part of the redemption of mankind. Did Joseph realize the important role he played?

In life, we may at times not realize the important role we are playing in the lives of those around us. If we lose sight of this, we may get discouraged. Take time to discuss how your life is a blessing to those around you and then rejoice?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help me to see how my life matters. Help me to realize it is not the length of life or the possessions gained that make a life worth living, but it is the privilege of making a difference in the lives of others. Amen.*

**Wed. Dec. 14:** Read Matthew 1:18-21

The Game of Life seems to provide people with variety in their game lives. You can choose whether or not to go to college. You can also choose whether or not you have children, that is unless you accidentally land on the spot for twins. There is one thing you cannot choose, and that is whether or not to get married. The game just assumes that this is everybody's goal in life, and for most people it is. However, we do not always get what we want in life.

Joseph's plans did not include marrying a lady who was already pregnant with someone else's child. If he had stuck to his life plan, he would have put her out of his life. However, God had a different plan for his life.

Joy for Joseph's life came down to whether he would accept God's plan for his life or choose his own path. I believe if he had said no to God, he would have had a more traditional life, but he would have also missed his joy. A third choice might have been going along with God's plan

but not being happy about it. This too would have robbed him of joy.

Think about your life this Christmas. Are you finding joy through a life submitted to the will of God? If not, what needs to change? Could it be your attitude?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help me to trust you with my life's plans. Help me to believe that following you will give me the most joy in life. Amen.*

#### **Thurs. Dec. 15:** Read Matthew 2:13-15

During my game playing research, I discovered how quickly things can change. On one turn I drew a card that said I got a promotion for all of my hard work. Then a couple of turns later I drew a card that said I was fired for sleeping on the job. I am sure I must have had a good excuse. Suddenly, however, I was out of my job as a scientist and I needed a new career. My next career was as a video game designer. How exciting! What this illustrates is the fact that things in life do change, even when you are following God.

I am sure Joseph had it all figured out. They would go to Bethlehem for the census, have the baby, then return home to pick up where they had left off. However, it did not happen that way. Suddenly, God said to Joseph, there has been a change in plans, you are going to Egypt.

Now there were good reasons for the change. This was not God doing a random thing to shake up Joseph's life. The new plan was the best plan for Joseph and his family.

Sometimes this happens in our lives as well. It is easy to get all nice and settled, but what happens when God tells us it is time for a change? Do we trust him enough to accept the changes, or do we fight to keep things the same? What would have happened if Joseph had not accepted God's new plan for his life? Do you think it works the same in your life?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help me to always be willing to listen to your plan and to accept what you have for my life. I*

*trust that you are only doing what is best for me and those you are touching through my life. Amen.*

**Fri. Dec. 16:** Read Matthew 2:19-23

There is one moment of decision in The Game of Life that I want us to look at today. At one point, you can choose to have a family or you can choose to have a life. Now I know that having children is not for everyone, but I think it misses two truths. The first is that some people really do not have a life until they have kids. That is when their lives really begin to feel complete. The other thing I would note is that even if we do not have kids, a full life is never a life all about me.

Joseph's life would have looked so different without Jesus. From his decision to accept God's call to be the husband of Mary and the father of Jesus, everything became about the baby. Life was no longer about what Joseph wanted.

This may seem like a life without joy, always putting someone else above yourself, but it is the very life Jesus demonstrated. Read Philippians 2:5-11. Jesus came to show us what real life is all about. It is about others. He gave himself for us, that we might give ourselves for others.

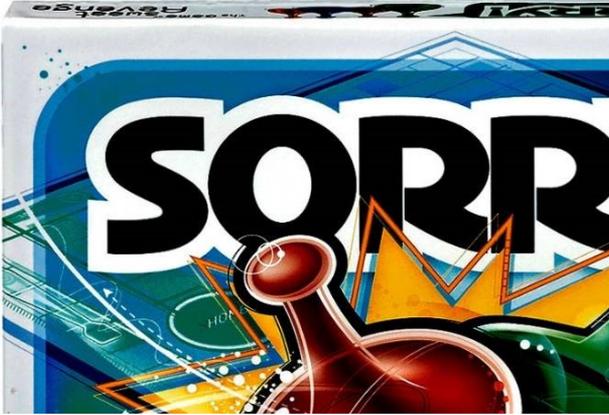
Discuss times when you really found joy in helping someone else? This is the way life was meant to be lived.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for the example that Jesus gave me, that real life is about others. May I never get so caught up in my own life, that I fail to follow your example. Amen.*

**Sat. Dec. 17:** Take time today to catch up if you are behind, reflect on what God has been saying, and act on God's word to you. Most of all, have fun playing.

## Week 4 Sorry

(This week we will light all four candles on the outside.)



**Sun. Dec. 18:** Read Matthew 2:1-2

The game we will be looking at this week is called Sorry. It has been a popular game since it was first produced in 1929. Unlike the first three games we looked at, this one is a game that requires decision making and strategizing.

The goal of the game is to get all four of your pawns from your color's start position to your home position by following the track around the outside of the board according to the numbers and rules on the cards you draw. Be forewarned, your opponent may at any time be able to send you backward and even return you to your start position. What that means is, you never know who the winner is going to be, just by the way things look.

We are going to combine our game this week with the theme of God's love. As we do so, we shall be looking at the visit of the Magi to Jesus and the events surrounding their visit. Can you think of how that story might illustrate the love of God?

This would be a good night to get out your own game of Sorry and refresh yourself on what this game is all about. You might also want to join another family for an exciting game

night.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, once again I ask that you would open my mind to what you would say this week. Help me to understand how great your love is for me. Amen.*

**Mon. Dec. 19:** Read Matthew 2:3-6

The beginning of the game of Sorry can be quite frustrating. In the classic version it takes a 1 or a 2 to move a player off of start. The problem is that the deck of 45 cards only has 5 “1”s and 4 “2”s. That leaves 36 cards that will not help you get off start. As I researched the game, I was the poor guy that could not draw a “1” or “2”. That meant I sat there and watched my opponent make their way around the board. I was destined to be a loser. I felt like giving up. Have you ever felt like giving up on something?

We often judge people based on appearances. That was what happened with the Magi. They went to Jerusalem because that is where they figured a Jewish king would be born. Bethlehem, however, was nothing special, and a stable was definitely not the place a king would be born in, but that is exactly where Jesus was born. What do you think the Magi thought when they found out where Jesus was born?

I believe that God chose the place in which Jesus was born out of love. To let us know that Jesus was not just the Savior of those the world would say are winners, but even for those who the world might forget.

This Christmas, as you look at your life, do you see yourself as a winner or a loser? If you think you are a loser, take heart, Jesus loves you. And that love means there is hope in your life. Don't give up. Believe in His love.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, there have been times in my life where I really thought of myself as a loser. Thank you for this reminder that even in those moments, you love me. Amen.*

**Tues. Dec. 20:** Read Matthew 2:7-12

If you are a timid person, then Sorry is not the game for you. Sorry is a cutthroat kind of game. In order to win, you try

and cause as much trouble for your opponent as you can. This might be by sending them back to start, making them go backwards, or changing places with them so that you have the advantage. You must have a “who cares about them” kind of attitude. It is winner take all.

That was Herod’s attitude toward Jesus. As we shall see in the next few days, he was not interested in worshipping Jesus, he was set on removing any competition to his power.

There are those who think that is how life should be lived. This kind of life, however, usually leaves them lonely and unloved. Jesus, however, sets us a totally different example. Read Luke 23:33-34. Jesus was not interested in tearing people down, instead He was willing to forgive them for He saw who they could become.

That is good news for us. That means we who have been his enemies in our sin, can still find forgiveness in His love. How does this make you feel? But it also means that we are called to live the same kind of life He did. Are you busy tearing others down to get ahead, or are you reaching out to others in love so that together we can all be winners?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I thank You that in your love for me you were willing to build me up, not tear me down. Help me to love enough to follow your example for those around me. Amen.*

**Wed. Dec. 21:** Read Matthew 2:13-15

When I played my research game of Sorry, nothing seemed to go my way. I finally got my pawns out of the start circle and moving around the board when suddenly in a few moves, my opponent sent all my pawns back to start. It looked like there was no way I could win. All hope was lost. Have you ever had moments in life that looked hopeless?

It must have looked like that for Joseph. It was bad enough to be out of town when the baby was born and to be born in a stable. But now he was going to have to spend life on the run from a crazed king seeking to kill his son. Things did not look hopeful.

But in this story, we see the love of God. God was so aware of

what the future held. The gifts the Magi gave were more than they appeared. These gifts would come in handy in helping this family as they were refugees in Egypt.

This is a great example of our loving God. Sometimes he keeps us from the hard times, but sometimes he allows us to go through hard times because He knows how we will benefit from them. In the times he lets us go through these hard circumstances, He works in ways to help us face them. Think about your life. Can you think of times when you faced a difficult situation in which God provided what you needed to get through? Isn't His love amazing?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I thank you that even when times seem tough, you are still here. Help me to trust you at all times and live in hope. Amen.*

**Thurs. Dec. 22:** Read Matthew 2:16-18

The game may be called Sorry, but I do not think my opponent was ever very sorry when they sent me back to the start circle. They didn't care that they hurt my feelings. They didn't care that they made me feel like a loser.

Our scripture today is actually one of the hardest passages to read in the Christmas story. To imagine that Herod would have all of these babies killed. Did he say I'm sorry, no; and even if he did, he did not mean it. He was out for himself, and really did not care how other people's lives were affected.

We do not have any examples of Jesus saying He was sorry. That is because we never see Jesus doing anything that required it. We on the other hand, often have reasons to say we are sorry. Many of them are because of things we did by accident, but there are also many of them that are because of choices we made.

I have noticed that people rarely say I'm sorry these days. Often, instead, they make excuses, or they find a reason to blame the one who was affected by them. I wonder if it is because we have forgotten what love is. It is about caring for others and hurting when others hurt. This is especially true when we have hurt them by accident or even by purposeful action. Do you care enough about how your life affects others to tell them you are sorry?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help me to think beyond myself and see how I affect others through the choices I make. Help me to love them enough to not only say I am sorry, but to really be sorry. Amen*

**Fri. Dec. 23:** Read Matthew 2:19-20

There is an interesting saying on the back of my Sorry box. It says, “Rules are simple and the game is fast with sudden reversals since the ‘tail-ender’ is often the eventual winner.” That is what happened in the game I played as I previewed the game. After everything started off so badly for me, suddenly it changed. Suddenly, I was the one moving around the board and my opponent was stuck at start. I must humbly say, “I was the winner.”

This reminds me of what Jesus said about life in Matthew 19:30. Take a moment and read this verse. With Jesus, it is never about how things look. He can take losers and make something wonderful out of their lives. Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. They were losers, but not anymore, because of the love of God in their lives. Has His love changed your life?

This week has been about the love of God that invites you into a personal relationship with Him. It is a love relationship. For God loved us so much that He sent His Son that we might have life. It is real life here and now where we learn to live in love, but even better, have life with Him for all eternity. Do you have this kind of personal relationship? If not, turn to page 29.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I thank you that it is not about how we begin our life, but about how we finish. Thank you for your love that found me a loser and has enabled me to become your precious child. Amen*

## Christmas Eve

(Light all four candles on the outside today. If this is your family's main Christmas celebration, light the white Christ candle in the center and proceed to the next page.)

**Sat. Dec. 24:** Read Luke 2:22-35

Besides losing, what is the hardest part of playing a game for you? For me, the hardest part is waiting for my turn. Some people take so long with their turn, that sometimes it seems like maybe I will die, before it is my turn again. If you think of someone that slow, maybe you shouldn't say their name out loud if they are present. Of course, you may be the one that is slow.

Not only is it the slow passing of time, but it is also the concern that before your turn comes around again someone might just mess up what you planned by what they do on their turn. This can be the case in the game Sorry when you are about to make it safely home, and just before you do, someone lands on you and sends you back to start.

Simeon had been waiting. He believed God had made him a promise that he would not die before the Messiah came. As he got older, do you think he might have wondered if he heard the Holy Spirit correctly? Have you ever been waiting for God to fulfill a promise He made to you and as time passed wondered if it would ever happen?

Read Galatians 4:4-5. God is never slow; He is always right on time. Maybe when God takes His turn, it changes what you had planned, but remember this, it will not make you a loser, but a winner. Jesus made it possible for us to all be winners when He sent His Son to be born of a virgin. Trust God's timing and trust what He is doing. Turn to page 29 to find out more about how you can be a winner through Christ.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I thank you that I can trust you. You always act at just the right time and in just the right way. Help me to never forget this. Amen.*

# The Final Game - Scrabble

(Light all five candles today.)



**Christmas:** Read Luke 2:1-21

On this special day, we have one more game that we want to focus on. Our game for today is Scrabble. A family fun game that focuses on making words from the 7 tiles with letters that you draw. It is a game that challenges your ability to spell and your knowledge of the English language. After the first player builds a word, each subsequent word must be made by combining letters with a letter in a word already played.

As I thought about this game, I wondered if you could win by playing just one word. The most points ever awarded officially for one word was the word **Q,U,I,X,O,T,R,Y**. You may not be familiar with this word, but it is a real word. It is also a word that can be worth 365 points. That is a lot of points.

Is it enough to win? It all depends on your opponent. However, I know a word that is a winner every time.

That word is **J,E,S,U,S**. Take a moment and read John 1:1-5 & 14. Here we find that God spoke a word. A very special word. A word that we have seen this Christmas season which radically interrupted history as Christ Jesus

was born in a manger. It is a word that radically interrupts our history, as God reaches into our lives. How has God reached into your life?

**J**,**E**,**S**,**U**,**S** is a word of hope. He is a word that reminds us that God desires that we might have our sins forgiven, that we might be ready to spend eternity with Him. That baby in the manger made this possible as He lived, died, and then He rose again. Today He is sitting at the right hand of the Father in Heaven interceding for us. How does this make you feel?

Not only did God speak this word through **J**,**E**,**S**,**U**,**S**, He also has spoken this very word of hope into our lives through others. Think this morning of the people, who like Joseph, got to have the joy of sharing Christ into your life. Who are the ones that spoke **J**,**E**,**S**,**U**,**S** into your life?

The most amazing thing about the word spoken through the life of **J**,**E**,**S**,**U**,**S** is that I do not have to be worthy enough, and neither do you. God not only interrupted history through Christ **J**,**E**,**S**,**U**,**S**, but He turned the very way it works upside down. Now the least of these, suddenly are those who receive the victory, as God reaches down in love. Have you ever felt like one of the least of these? How does it make you feel to know that in Christ, you are now a winner?

What a special word, **J**,**E**,**S**,**U**,**S**. He is more than just a baby in a manger. He is the word of God that makes us winners every time.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a winner with **J**,**E**,**S**,**U**,**S**, you may turn to the next page and read about what it means to have **J**,**E**,**S**,**U**,**S** as your Savior.

*Prayer: Thank you Father for speaking the truth through your Son. He has interrupted our lives in such a good way. Thanks for loving us enough that when we were one of the least of these, you came and brought victory in our lives. Amen.*

# Jesus Our Savior

This Christmas we are having fun using games to focus our attention. It may seem from this that we are just having fun and games. In reality, what we are about is very serious. Unless God intervenes in our lives, the path our life is on only leads to judgment, and Hell.

That may sound like a statement of doom, but when Jesus came to earth as a baby, it was to give us hope. God's Word tells us that we have all sinned, but it also tells us that because of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus, that if we confess our sins, He will forgive us. It does not matter what we did, or how many times we did it. No one is too bad to receive His forgiveness if we ask.

But forgiveness is just the beginning. He is ready to come into our lives and teach us how life should really be lived, and even more exciting is that he has promised us power to live that new life. He is ready to begin the process of transforming our lives so that we begin to live life the way He designed it. This is a life of peace, joy, and power. It is a life that makes a difference in the lives of those around us.

The fact that Jesus is coming to earth a second time, also brings us great hope as we anticipate it. Jesus tells us that when He appears, all those who are united with Him in faith, both the living and the dead, shall be gathered with Him. Never again will we be separated from Him. We will know eternal life in all of its glory.

This promise of Jesus' coming again is not just for the few that look like winners in this life, but for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord. That means me and it means you. You can know that God has forgiven your sins. You can know that eternal life in Heaven waits for you. You can experience God's transforming power even now in your life.

If you have read this far, you are probably asking, "what can I do to find this forgiveness?" In 1 John 1:9 we read, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." That simply means that He is just waiting for us to ask. We do not have to get our life together first. If we ask, He will forgive us.

Your prayer can go like this. “Father, I know that I am a sinner. Please forgive me of my sin. I need your power to break free from sin. Please come into my life with this power that I might discover the new life You have for me and know that eternal life is mine. Thank You for hearing my prayer. Amen.”

If you have prayed this prayer in faith, God has forgiven your sins and come into your life. You are now a child of God! He is ready to give you a brand-new life, and your future home awaits you in Heaven. Your responsibility now is to put your life into His hands and under His control and discover the great things God has in store for your life for your sake and for others.

If you have prayed and asked Jesus to come into your life, please let your pastor know so that he can be praying for you and offer you support in the new life that is ahead of you.

I pray that you have had fun playing games this Christmas. What a fun time we have had together. Most of all, however, I pray that Jesus has interrupted the regular flow of your life. May you be ready to meet Him when He returns, and may your life make an impact as we wait for His appearing.

Merry Christmas,  
Pastor Mark