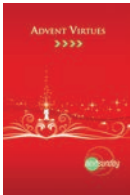




## **1 Peter** **Keep Hope Alive**

This study of First Peter focuses on keeping hope alive in the face of pressures and circumstances that could possibly extinguish it completely, or worse, turn authentic faith into a pale replica of the real thing.



## **Advent Virtues**

The phrase “holiday rush” is not an exaggeration. The frantic pace required to purchase gifts, bake holiday foods, and attend Christmas parties, plays, and performances takes its toll; we arrive at Christmas Day exhausted. Within the context of December busyness, the ancient Christian season of Advent takes on new meaning and acquires renewed importance. May God instill the virtues of *hope*, *peace*, *joy*, *love*, and *faith* in each of us this Advent.



## **Apocalyptic Literature**

This study examines five apocalyptic texts in the Bible—from Zechariah, Daniel, Matthew, and Revelation. With each new year bringing a new prediction of impending doom, it is always a perfect time to get the story straight. Apocalyptic literature does not address the future. It addresses our present.



## **Approaching a Missional Mindset**

The World isn't the same as it once was. We must be the church in a new place, in unimagined ways, and with a wider range of people. Engage your small group with the radical and refreshing challenge of developing a “missional lifestyle.”

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## **Baptist Freedom** Celebrating Our Baptist Heritage

What makes a Baptist a Baptist? Of course, the ultimate answer is simple: membership in a local Baptist church. But there are all kinds of Baptist churches! What are the spiritual and theological marks of a Baptist? What is the shape and the feel of Baptist Christianity?



## **The Bible and the Arts**

God has used artistic expression throughout the centuries to convey truth, offer blessing, and urge believers to deeper faithfulness. In modern life, artistic expression flourishes, from movies to books to music to paintings to photographs. Sometimes artists are intentional about trying to portray God's truths. Other times, perhaps God is working even when the artist is unaware of it. As believers, we may hear and see God at work in many art forms.



## **The Birthday of a King**

The first four lessons in this unit draw inspiration from a traditional interpretation of the Advent candles as the Prophets' Candle, the Bethlehem Candle, the Shepherds' Candle, and the Angels' Candle. The final lesson, which occurs after Advent, celebrates the theological meaning of Jesus' birth as described in the prologue to John's Gospel.



## **Building a Unified Church**

What common purpose unifies the church? What strengthens the church? What weakens the church? What are the building blocks upon which our church is built? These are the central questions for the following study that reflect on our call to build a unified church that is resolute in its understanding of the wisdom of God that humbles the great and lifts up the lowly.



## **Challenges of the Christian Life**

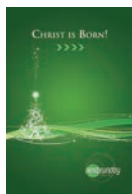
The way of the cross is difficult, and taking Jesus seriously means looking honestly at how we fall short of God's best hopes for us and seeing how much we need God's grace. For all of us there are times when we need to remember that Christ is our saving grace and recommit ourselves to the journey of faith, rediscovering, again and again, the life-giving purpose described in the book of Ephesians.

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## Children Who Knew God

God works among all of God's people, including children. This unit reminds us of the children in Scripture who acted so that others could know God's love. These four examples of children who are faithful to God help us recognize that no one is too young or insignificant to participate in the mission of God.



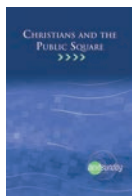
## Christ Is Born!

Even in the midst of difficult circumstances, Advent is a time when we can find hope. Much like today, people in the 1st century church faced struggles. Examining the Gospel of Matthew, lessons include "Waiting for Christ," "Preparing for Christ," "Expecting Christ," "Announcing Christ," and "The Arrival of Christ."



## Christians and Hunger

These sessions challenge us to apply gospel lenses and holy imagination to what literally gives us energy to live: food. With God's grace, we have the opportunity to imagine communities where tables are large and all are fed.



## Christians and the Public Square

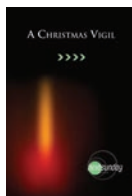
Politics and faith are tricky areas for Christians to negotiate. The First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees religious freedom for all Americans. As Christians who are also citizens, questions abound: How do we distinguish between faithful and unfaithful forms of civic engagement? How do we give Caesar his due while giving our all to God?



## Christmas in Mark

In the early chapters of Mark, we will encounter a Christmas story. This story, however, will not be quite like the one told by other Gospel writers, but it will resonate with the reality of your life. Mark doesn't deny the beauty or reality of the nativity; however, he seems to believe that Christmas begins—the gospel begins—when Christ intrudes upon the hard realities of life.

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## **A Christmas Vigil**

In our faith tradition, all hope is fastened to the child we find lying in a Christmas manger. Christians gather in houses of worship and around Advent wreaths to reflect upon the implications of his birth and to anticipate the day when hope will become certainty, when what we can only pray for now will become definite. Advent is a season to remember, but it is also a time to renew our lives of hope in the One born in Bethlehem.



## **The Church on a Mission**

What does it mean to be a church on a mission? The lesson of Acts 1:8 is that we must simultaneously carry out Christ's mandate at home, in our region, in places that have been our blind spots, and around the world.



## **Colossians**

### **Living the Faith Faithfully**

Paul's letter to the Colossians begins with a high-minded philosophical defense of the faith, but concludes with a collection of extremely practical advice for living by faith. This study addresses the questions many Christians face today, helping them apply Paul's practical advice in their own lives.



## **Confronting Brokenness in the Church**

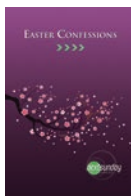
The words of Paul reach across the centuries to call us to repentance and unity. We can easily hear how Paul might struggle with us even today. Paul's original audience struggled with divisions, arguments, jealousy, and sin. They debated what to believe and how to live. It was fragile and given to quarreling. With Paul, we learn to confront the brokenness of our beloved church.



## **Easter and After**

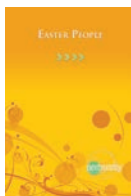
This study reflects on John's portrait of Christ during the time of his Passion, examining the empty tomb, and moving on to the early preaching and ministry of the Christian church. By focusing on all of these Lent-Easter aspects, we can come to a more holistic understanding of Jesus the Christ.

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## **Easter Confessions**

Easter confession is often found on many different lips in the Gospel of John. When we listen carefully, those ancient confessions still echo into this new millennium.



## **Easter People**

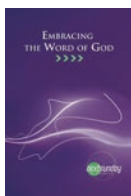
From Palm Sunday's parade to Maundy Thursday's haunting meal to Easter morning's explosion of lilies, embracing pageantry helps us remember Jesus' devastating death and exhilarating resurrection, truly "the greatest story ever told." But how does this central event of our faith transform us?



## **Elijah**

### **Trusting God**

When Israel needs a prophetic voice to confront the nation's religious infidelity, Elijah responds to God's call. Elijah's story reveals that a life of faithfulness is built on trust in God's care and guidance.



## **Embracing the Word of God**

We live during a time of transition in Christian history. Basic assumptions about the truth of the Christian faith are being questioned, not only by nonbelievers, but by Christians themselves. First John offers a starting point for understanding of what it means to "be" Christian.



## **Esther**

### **A Woman of Discretion and Valor**

The book of Esther is a magnificent narrative that refuses to interpret life as being driven by coincidence or happenstance. In the otherwise unknown characters of Esther, Haman, and Mordecai, we trace the movement of the divine hand as God collaborates with God's risk-taking people to rescue them from the hand of their enemies.

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## **Facing Life's Challenges**

This study explores four significant challenges common to most persons of faith: the challenge of new light, the challenge of time's limit, the challenge of living with mystery, and the challenge of authentic spirituality. Although these issues are neither simple nor easy to ponder, this study effectively leads us in confronting these challenges.



## **Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

Forgiveness is a central issue in our capacity to remain redemptively connected to those relationships we prize. Restoring broken or interrupted relationships is a primary issue for all of us, and managing forgiveness is crucial to the possibility of experiencing reconciliation. Several dimensions of forgiveness affect our lives in significant ways. In this study, we attempt to address a few of those important issues.



## **The Four Cardinal Virtues**

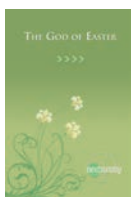
Christians are learning how to distinguish between members of a church and disciples of Christ. Discipleship involves developing virtues in those who come to our churches seeking life, salvation, grace, mercy. If we want to have something to offer a world in desperate need, then we must return to virtues like discernment, justice, courage, and moderation. We must return to the hard and glorious work of making disciples.



## **Galatians**

### **Freedom in Christ**

Paul wrote with fiery passion, as you will notice from the opening paragraphs of this letter to the Galatians. But his language reveals that he was writing about a crucially important issue—the very nature of salvation in Christ



## **The God of Easter**

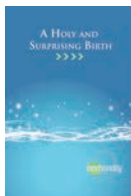
Our God is the God of Easter—the God who commands that even death and sin be made to submit to love. We should never forget that holy and blessed moment in which death was swallowed up in victory. Ours is the God of Easter, and we are a people who abide in the victory accomplished that day.

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## Godly Leadership

Nehemiah was called to return to Jerusalem to lead in the sacred task of rebuilding the city's walls. Displaying characteristics often lacking in secular leadership—prayerful humility, a willingness to work with diverse teams, wisdom in confronting conflict, and a passion to stand with the powerless—Nehemiah offered his people a portrait of godly leadership that can still shape our own calls to lead nearly 2,500 years later.



## A Holy and Surprising Birth

Christmas begins here—discover these five love stories from the book of Luke and renew your appreciation of God's laborious effort to birth our salvation.



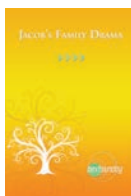
## How Does the Church Decide?

An array of decisions draw energy and time from church members. These decisions may be theological, such as mode of baptism, aesthetic, such as the color of the sanctuary carpet, or functional, such as the selection of a new minister. This study will consider how the church has made its decisions in the past to help guide our decisions today.



## Is God Calling?

Witness the varying forms of God's call, the variety of people called, and the variety of responses. Perhaps God's call to you will become clearer.



## Jacob's Family Drama

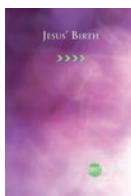
All of us have families. All families have strengths, weaknesses, conflicts, success stories, and unique relational patterns. The family of Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Esau, Leah, Rachel, and Laban is no exception. In their struggles, conflicts, and triumphs, we come to know ourselves. As they overcame, we too can overcome.

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## **James** Gaining True Wisdom

If we'll be honest with God and ourselves as we study what James says, we can make great strides toward wisdom and a living faith.



## **Jesus' Birth**

Luke's Gospel contains a full account of the events leading up to Jesus' birth. He starts from the very beginning, nine months before John's conception, and tells his account in full detail. God's presence in Mary's life birthed an incredible joy that was shared by her cousin Elizabeth. We, too, may share in this joy, especially during Advent as we remember that God comes to us as well.



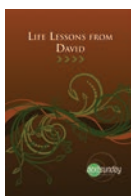
## **Jesus' Lessons on Wealth**

In *Jesus' Lessons on Wealth* we'll delve into some of the challenging passages in the Gospels of Mark and Luke that deal with finances. We'll search for new and different ways to open our eyes to the message of Jesus and how we should use our resources of time, talents, and—yes—money as he intended us to do.



## **Life Lessons from Bathsheba**

Who was Bathsheba? She was a complex figure who developed from the silent object of David's lust into a powerful, vocal, and influential queen mother.



## **Life Lessons from David**

In the Bible, we catch David in the various stages of the human journey: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and senior adulthood. From the biblical treatment of the stages of David's life, we can land some insights to assist us in better understanding the human journey.

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## Love's Redeeming Work

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is genuinely that powerful. It is the power of salvation, the power of transformation, and it is the power for extraordinary living in today's world.



## The Matriarchs

The matriarchs of Genesis offer their lives as a testimony of faith, perseverance, and audacity. We learn from their mistakes and suffering. We will gain the hope of Hagar, the joy of Sarah, and the audacity of Rebekah as we are challenged to examine our prejudices and our insecurities while studying Esau and Jacob's wives.



## Missional Hospitality

If we are serious about following Jesus, we will be people of open hearts, open hands, and open homes. In other words, as followers of Jesus we will practice the fine art of hospitality. In lesson one, we reflect on hospitality to strangers. In lesson two, we address hospitality to the poor. In lesson three, we focus on hospitality to sinners. In lesson four, we learn about hospitality to newcomers.

Lesson five reminds us about our hospitality to Christ.



## Moses

### From the Burning Bush to the Promised Land

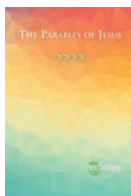
We would do well to trace the life of Moses so we might discover how his life changed, both personally and as Israel's leader, as he learned what it meant to love God with all his heart, soul, and strength.



## Old Testament Promises to God

Some individuals may feel that our promises couldn't possibly mean anything to God. Perhaps the real question is this: under what circumstances should or do we make such promises? The Old Testament contains several examples of people making promises to God, using the unique form of a biblical "vow."

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## The Parables of Jesus

Jesus told parables because they allowed a loving man to convey a confrontational message without scaring people away. Ready or not, Jesus is coming at you. His purpose? To change you for the better. His weapon? A few “harmless” stories.



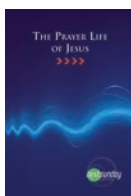
## Parables of the Kingdom

Jesus’ parables highlight values like patience, tolerance, receptivity, and humility. As descriptions of life in the kingdom, especially when approached in a season of Lenten reflection, they challenge us to mold our earthly lives to reflect our hopes for the future.



## The Passion of Christ

The four lessons in this unit highlight the faith struggles of the early disciples. In lesson one, Jesus addresses the issues of faith and practice. In lesson two, we meet Judas who, like us, struggled with God’s Kingdom and human kingdoms. In lesson three, the issue of temptation reminds us that our faith journey is a constant challenge. Lesson Four invites us to remember Peter’s experience of “faith failure.” Peter’s failure, however, is not the final word. There is forgiveness.



## The Prayer Life of Jesus

The study of Jesus’ prayer life can deepen our own prayer practices. These five sessions examine the importance of prayer at various stages of Jesus’ life and ministry. He made no important decisions without consulting God.



## Prepare the Way

In these sessions, we will seek to prepare the way toward and into the Christmas season. We begin with the theme of hopeful watchfulness in light of the coming of Christ. Next, we will spend two sessions considering the ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. Then, we will consider Matthew’s account of the birth of Jesus and join in wonder at the miracle of “God with us.” Finally, we will remember the story of the “holy innocents” killed by Herod in his attempt to eliminate the Christ child’s threat to his power.

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## Proverbs for Living

Long ago, a collection of wise teachers committed themselves to the ways of God and collected this wisdom into what we know as the book of Proverbs. These four lessons explore the simple truth of Proverbs: there is a good life to be had—a life lived in faithfulness to God.



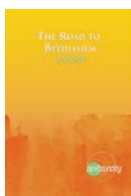
## Qualities of Our Missional God

Too often we are tempted to let “numbers” drive missions. The book of Numbers reminds us that missions is motivated by something deeper. Missions reflects the heart and nature of God. If we can just get past the math, we can see God’s nature clearly in the book of Numbers. . . in the wilderness.



## Responding to the Resurrection

All major events of human history elicit responses as varied as the personalities and situations represented by those affected. No one witnesses a world-changing event without being affected in some way. Studying the response of early followers helps us to shape our own response to the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us must consider our response to Jesus’ life, teachings, death, resurrection, and call on our lives.



## The Road to Bethlehem

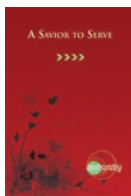
During this Advent season, our journey is prepared not only by the Christian calendar but also by the writer of Matthew’s Gospel. For any traveler willing to ponder, the Gospel writer has many insights on this journey.



## Roots in Tradition & Family

Over the course of this study, we will be taking a glimpse into a tiny window of Jesus’ spiritual autobiography. We will study the early signposts that became the foundation for his spiritual journey, pointing out landmarks that clearly gave him a sense of direction. In this way, we can use any clues we find to discern just what it took for Christ to become fully empowered to fulfill God’s mission and purpose.

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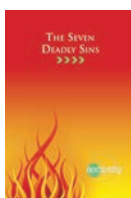
## A Savior to Serve

While serving Jesus should be our theme all the time, it is good to have special times during which we can focus on our discipleship. The lessons in this study are all based primarily on Mark's account of Holy Week, those days leading up to Jesus' crucifixion on Good Friday. The words Jesus spoke and the actions he carried out in our Gospel texts were spoken and done during a time of great tension, controversy, and danger that called for his great commitment, dedication, faith, and determination.



## Seeking Holiness in the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount has long been recognized as the pinnacle of Jesus' teaching. But with this importance in mind, it's easy to think of Jesus' teachings as lofty and idealistic, offering little guidance for everyday life. Perhaps Jesus' sermon allows us to see beyond ourselves, beyond our own failures and shortcomings—revealing God's intention for our lives.



## The Seven Deadly Sins

What exactly is sin? Just as we organize our cupboards and our schedules to make sense of our lives, Christian thinkers have organized sin into a number of categories in order to understand and surrender these patterns to God. The notion of "seven deadly sins" emerged as a way to recognize specific dangers to our spiritual lives. The purpose of the book is to guide people away from sin and into a wise and godly life.



## Sing We Now of Christmas

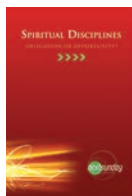
In this study, we will explore some familiar prophecies, as well as the Gospel birth narratives, through the lens of five traditional Christmas carols. As carols have grown to be a fuller and more meaningful part of our worship and celebration, so too can the stories of Jesus' birth continue to grow within us and enrich our faith experience.



## Songs of the Season

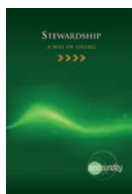
One of the most dearly beloved aspects of the Christmas season is the music. From songs on the radio to church cantatas to school holiday concerts, Christmas means music. For Christians, the most precious songs of the season are those that celebrate the coming of Christ, born as a baby in the little town of Bethlehem.

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## **Spiritual Disciplines** Obligation or Opportunity?

The spiritual disciplines help deepen a believer's faith and increases his or her intimacy with Christ. In this study, we take a deeper look at some of the disciplines and consider their practice as a response to God's love.



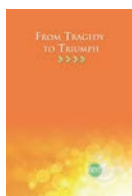
## **Stewardship** A Way of Living

Great News! Stewardship is not about money! At least not *just* about money. Certainly, stewardship relates to money, and, yes, we need to tithe. However, stewardship branches out into multiple areas of life. Properly practiced, this act of service can lead to peace and purpose in living.



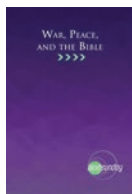
## **The Ten Commandments**

When the Ten Commandments are in the news, it is usually because a judge or teacher has hung them up on the walls. The Ten Commandments do not need to be posted or even preached nearly so much as they need to be practiced and viewed as life-giving, joyful affirmations of a better way of life.



## **From Tragedy to Triumph**

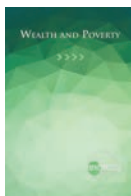
This study will focus on four crucial moments in the climax of God's plan: Jesus' last supper with his disciples, the betrayal of Judas and the denial of Peter, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. From the intimacy of the upper room to the tumult of the garden to the horror of the cross and finally, standing in wonder before an empty tomb in the light of early dawn.



## **War, Peace, and the Bible**

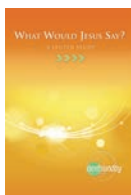
As people of faith, we are faced daily with an expectation that we participate in violent actions, our willingness to allow violence in the world to continue, and our response to violence in our lives. Is there a place for war and violence in our faith?

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## Wealth and Poverty

Wealth and poverty have always existed, and they have never been friends. Scripture has much to say regarding wealth and poverty, but these are not easy conversations for us to have. In the book of James, the author calls believers to engage in the conversation and deepen their faith in God in the process.



## What Would Jesus Say?

### A Lenten Study

To address what Jesus would say, we need to discover what Jesus did say. These lessons will attempt to help us understand Jesus' teachings and apply them today.



## Wise Women of the Bible

Even though it might surprise many readers, women in Israel were not limited to roles inside the home. In this study, we will meet a woman who was a general (Deborah); two female obstetricians (Shiphrah and Puah); an actress, of sorts (the wise woman of Tekoa); a female city official (the wise woman of Abel); and a woman who advised a king (Lemuel's mother).



## The Wonder of Easter

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul asserts that the message that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose on the third day is “of first importance” (v. 3). It is the core of the gospel story and of the Christian faith. But as much as Easter is a mystery to contemplate, it is also a hope to embrace and good news to proclaim.



## Zechariah

### Getting Back to God

The prophet Zechariah ministered during the late sixth century BC. His audience was composed of Jews who had recently returned from Babylonian captivity and were struggling to rebuild their nation under Persian rule. Like the returning exiles, Christians today often feel led to restore their relationships with God and each other. Perhaps the lessons of Zechariah can help us in that task.

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