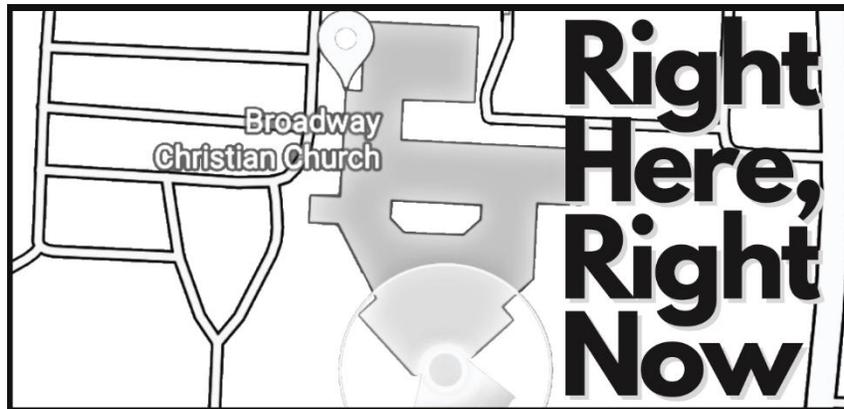




**Columbia, Missouri**  
**The Worship of God • November 28, 2021**  
**The First Sunday of Advent**



**The Scripture**  
**Psalm 25:1-10**

*To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.*

*O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.*

*Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.*

*Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.*

*Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.*

*Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.*

*Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O LORD!*

*Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.*

*He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.*

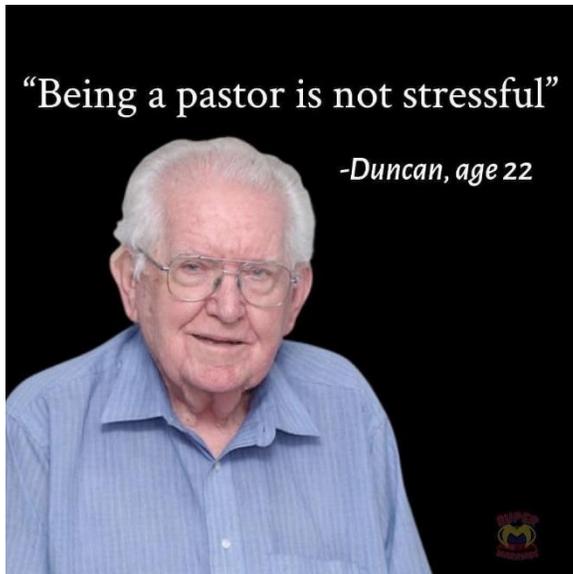
*All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.*

**The Message**  
**“Right Here, Right Now: Hope”**  
**Mark Briley**

Happy New Year!

Your expression is priceless. Some of you feel like you must have entered a turkey-tryptophan coma and missed the whole month of December. Some of you are just ready to roll with whatever the day brings, and you almost shouted back, “*Happy New Year!*”

Those of you who have been grumpy about Christmas decorating and Christmas music debuting before Thanksgiving feel like I’m jumping the gun, and you’ll have none of it. And some of you... well... you think your pastor has finally lost it. I’m not sure I can argue against you on that one. Someone shared this meme with me this week.



So, what’s the New Year’s deal? Today we celebrate the Christian New Year. The first Sunday in Advent has long marked the beginning of the Christian year. Advent literally means, “*Coming.*” It’s a “*people get ready*” season where we prepare ourselves to receive the gift of Christ in our lives just as we will celebrate on Christmas. Advent includes the four Sundays leading up to Christmas Day, each one designated by a single word (*which is represented in the candles we will light each week*). Today’s word is Hope... some call it Promise Sunday. And like the societal

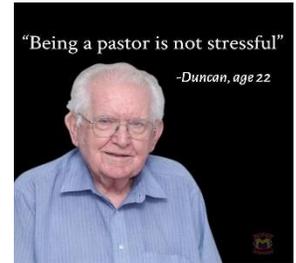
practice of making New Year’s resolutions in January, Christians can get a jump on it and resolve today to claim just how you want to arrive at the manger this year.

This “*people get ready*” season is also a “*people get real*” season. A resolution is only as powerful as it is honest. It requires self-awareness and discipline. And as warm and fuzzy as we’ll make it as we drift through candy-cane lattes, holiday light gazing and company parties (*of which I’ll love them all*), it’s a “*people start training*” season too.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing as a prisoner of an internment camp in Nazi Germany, wrote this about Advent. “*The celebration of Advent is possible only to those who are troubled in soul, who know themselves to be poor and imperfect, and who look forward to something greater to come.*”

A tough word but I've got to say, *"I'm here for it,"* this year. I know my heart will often be ready to jump right to the joy of Christmas this season, but I'm resolving to show up to each moment this year and not wish away the season. *"Right here, right now, there is no other place I want to be."*

How many of you are singing the Jesus Jones song in your head right now? No one? .....



*"Right here, right now."* Those were the inspired lyrics of Mike Edwards, front man of the band, *Jesus Jones*.<sup>1</sup> The single alone sold a million copies, and the song was played on collegiate radio stations more than any other song in 1991. Mathematicians among us will tell you that was how many years ago now? 30! We're adopting that title as our Advent theme this year and each week; I'll highlight a lyric from the song.

Today's line: *"Right here, right now... there is no other place I want to be."* I want to show up to this season every day ... and that starts today. Will you take this trip with me? Just be *here* right now. A friend shared this week some grief moving into this season – new for him in ways like it has never been before given some changes in his personal life. He said, *"I grieve that this season won't be what it used to be, and I have great anxiety about what this season may be in the future."* His resolve? Be where his feet are. *"That's all I got,"* he said.

Famed and retired Buffalo Bills coach Marv Levy, used to ask his team before the start of each game, *"Where would you rather be than right here, right now?"* Before they even took the field – where the reality of the struggle plays out – they were asked to show up in anticipation of what's to come.

This is Advent's annual invitation. Show up *now* even though all hopes are not yet fulfilled; even though the true struggle is still ahead of us. Can you be right here, right now, willing to wait for the revelation God is brewing? Will you go with me? Let's try again. If I say, *"Happy New Year!"* would you say it back to me? *"Happy New Year!"* Let's go.

The psalmist is our Advent partner today. It's a New Year prayer, clearly written in a time of anxiety. Some things never change it seems. The writer is asking for God's help. *"Deliver me from enemies!" "Guide me." "Show me your ways!" "Forgive me" "And get me out of this anxious place of my life."*

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus\\_Jones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_Jones)

Lots of anxiety expressed in the psalmist's prayers. We may fit right in here, living in what is being called the Sunday Scaries. Have you heard of the Sunday Scaries? I had not. It's a real thing! Dr. Sanam Hafeez coined the term studying how common it is for people to feel anxious as the weekend winds down. He said, "*When your mind begins to focus on reports, kids' activities, and the long list of to-dos, it's easy to slip into an anxious state of mind.*"

The flood of anxiety that many of us feel as the workweek approaches (*or the Sunday Scaries*) is linked to the modern psychology of time. We have a distinctively modern view of time. Writer Derek Thompson says we have two modes of thinking: "*productivity mind and leisure mind.*"<sup>2</sup> We may think of this as workday thinking and weekend thinking which is why the big tug of war comes on Sunday evening. We feel guilty about letting go and relaxing even a bit and we're anxious about how we'll get it all done as we start over again on Monday. This is a first world, western society reality. We weren't always living in such duality nor were we designed to live this way. I'm sorry for the ways we've pressed each other into such levels of anxiety.

The psalmist's prayer can be ours today, too: "*Make me to know your ways. Give me a mind not segmented and compartmentalized but one of clarity that is grounded in your hope.*" And you may be saying in your heart right now: "*But Briley – you don't get it. Hope is beyond any realm of possibility for me right here, right now.*" I can't talk you out of that space. I have felt that, too.

President of Phillips Theological Seminary – one of our DoC institutions in Tulsa – is the Rev. Dr. Nancy Pittman. She was an elder in the church we served in Tulsa and a dear friend. Additionally, she was in the same youth group as Broadway's beloved Kim Ryan – a couple of kind, compassionate, brilliant leaders coming out of west Texas. She wrote a "*Hope*" devotional this week saying, "*I am, down to the very bottom of my soul, an optimist. I am the person who, when pushed off the roof of a 20-story building shouts to the person standing at the tenth-story window, "So far, everything is going great!" ... except this year,*" she writes. She names all the anxious realities you and I both know and are experiencing: COVID realities and how it divides us and all the other pains of this year. On top of all of that, her beloved spouse of almost 35 years and a brilliant and compassionate man in his own right, passed away. She is looking at the Advent season Scriptures and struggling to muster up any optimism. It's as if "*any optimism turns into a net with a large hole at the bottom of my fall from the 20-story building.*" But on the heels of that... she says what Bonhoeffer and the psalmist also seem to know. Because she's now in this very real place of pain and hurt and anxiousness; no longer weighed down by false optimism that keeps her from feeling the pain of the world or her own deep wounds, she says, "*This means that now I can*

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<sup>2</sup> Thompson, Derek. "How Civilization Broke Our Brains." *The Atlantic*, January/February 2021, 82-84.

*truly hope.*”<sup>3</sup> Now, she’s looking for the Messiah with new eyes, a new heart, with full soul. “*To you, O Lord, I lift my soul. In you, O God, I put my trust.*”

If we are really to offer our lives to God – to be God-minded and not double-minded, means we trust God in the waiting... and the waiting isn’t idle. It’s a season of training. It’s a matter of intention. I shared before how it’s a shift in mentality. It’s not “*I’m trying, God.*” It’s, “*I’m training.*” Trying gives a sense that we don’t think we’ll succeed. Training gives a sense that we’re focused, intentional, and have every reason to believe we’ll make it. Think of the implications. Are you *trying* to be a faithful partner in your marriage or are you a marital partner in intentional *training*? Are you *trying* to work hard at your job or are you intentionally *training* to get better, stronger, smarter? Are you giving faith the good ol’ college *try* or are you giving yourself over to the necessary *training* a growing faith requires this season? There’s a difference.

Don’t be afraid to fail. The third verse of our psalm says it all in the New International Version of the text: “*No one who hopes in you, O God, will ever be put to shame.*” “*The path of the Lord is faithfulness,*” the psalmist adds. It’s almost as if the writer – the fervent pray-er of this psalm – is trying to convince themselves that this *is* the way; this *is* God’s path forward; this *is* the hope... and it will not disappoint.

That’s the prayer that is prayed again by the Apostle Paul and probably my favorite hope verse in all of Scripture, Romans 5 when he says, “*Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance produces character; character produces hope, and hope*” what? “*Hope does not disappoint.*”

I can get on board with these who keep praying themselves into hope. I’m there a number of days... and have been more in the last year-and-a-half than I can ever recall in my life. We can easily shift into soul paralysis, or we can lean into hope trusting that God has us right here, right now, because we’ve given our lives to be ready for whatever this moment requires. Do you believe that? In my doubting moments, I can’t say I get there. But that’s why hope isn’t easy. What did Paul say precedes hope – suffering, perseverance, and character building. That means we work at hope. How do we do that? We stay focused. We keep the main thing the main thing... and we keep that main thing in the window ahead of us.

Author Bob Goff started putting his personal cell-phone number in the back of his books several years ago. He gets phone calls all the time, most of the time, with people asking, “*Is this really you?*” He much prefers a thoughtful question about something you really want to wrestle with. I’m sure he gets some doozies. But he answers every call. Can you imagine? He got a call recently from a young person who

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<sup>3</sup> From Phillips Theological Seminary’s 2021 Advent Devotional. [www.ptstulsa.edu](http://www.ptstulsa.edu).

asked, “*What’s the **one** thing about relationships?*” Bob chuckled and said, “*You haven’t had a girlfriend yet, have you?*” He said, “*It would be like asking an astronaut, ‘What’s the **one** thing about getting to the moon?’ I bet she would shrug and say, ‘I don’t know... arrive?’*”

And then, in Bob fashion, he leans into it a bit further: “*If I wanted to get to the moon, here’s what I’d do. I’d find someone who had built plenty of rocket ships before and had successfully launched a couple. I’m certain I wouldn’t spend any time with people who wanted to argue about what color to paint the booster. I’d also be really picky about who I’d let get in the capsule with me and even more picky about who I’d let speak into my ear. The final important thing I’d do if I wanted to get to the moon is this: ‘I’d keep the moon in the window and keep pointing in its direction.’*”<sup>4</sup>

If we truly hope to find Jesus at the end of this Advent journey, it starts right here, right now. We put Jesus in full view in front of us; the front window of our lives, and we consistently point at him along the way. It’s going to take a thousand mid-course corrections to get to anything worth working towards. It’s never going to be about figuring out the one thing we need to do to get there. We simply, present to God, each other, and ourselves in the moment, point toward Jesus, and look for the next opportunity to keep moving forward in his direction.

This has been a hard season to stay focused, and I think those who’d love to see the Church fall flat – remove its influence in the world – have loved the distractions that have turned Christians against each other. “*Let’s create division and watch them implode,*” they think. “*If we can turn their hope into hopelessness, they’ll run themselves into the ground.*”

And I’ll be honest, I’ve wondered sometimes if this is happening. The Great Resignation we are talking about in society as people leave jobs, careers, and relationships, may include the Church as well. And at times, I think, “*Are we doing this to ourselves?*” In this stressful season, I just see Christians struggling more with each other over and above anyone else.

I joined the Jeep family in recent months and the Jeep Wave is real. Do you know about this wave? You drive a Jeep, and all the sudden you’re in the club. Before perfect strangers, now part of the Jeep family. You drive down Scott Blvd. (*or your boulevard of choice*), and another Jeep approaches in oncoming traffic, and here comes the wave. Never fails. And you feel like you’re part of something bigger than yourself. I’ve been amazed what that alone has done for my morale some days – to feel seen and known and accepted just because. Now, I know all Jeep drivers are not

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<sup>4</sup> Dream Big. Bob Goff. Pgs. 117-119. Nelson Books. 2020.

the same. I asked Dane if he thought all Jeep drivers would get along if we gathered at a big Jeep convention and actually had to do something together beyond the Jeep Wave. Dane loves the Jeep, and so I knew what he'd say. He said, "*Of course. In the end, you all drive Jeeps, and that's enough to keep you all together.*"

My friends – it's the Christian New Year. Let's turn some pages, shall we? Let's free ourselves of what holds us back. Let's get Jesus in the window in front of us. And let's move in that direction. We'll make some mistakes along the way. We won't get it all right, and that can be frustrating. Maybe we need a Jesus wave. Maybe it's the double heart pat. Something that reminds us of when we pass one another or when we're struggling with differing opinions on where we go from here, we remember that we are *for* each other. Jesus is in the window ahead of us, and we're committed to hope each other forward in the right here, right now. No matter what, we can trust that in the end, we all have Jesus, and that's enough to keep us together.

Right here? Right now? There is no other place I wanna be. Happy New Year, Church!

**Song of Focus**  
***"Right Here, Right Now"***

WORDS: ED VARNUM; MUSIC: GARY ARTHUR

1. So long ago in Nazareth, the angel of the Lord  
told a young girl she would carry God's incarnate Word  
and God's Son into this world, all people here to bless.  
"I am God's servant," Mary said. "To my Lord, I say 'Yes.'"
2. Shepherds watching flocks by night all heard the angel's song:  
"Do not fear! We bring good news! A Holy child is born!"  
The shepherds left their folks to see the marvelous thing God's done,  
then carried Christ to all they met: "He's here, God's Holy One!"
3. The holy child in manger lay upon a bed of hay,  
but Christ is risen, glorified. He's still alive this day!  
He is here before us now, not distant, far above,  
saying, "Carry me, my grace into this world that I so love."

*Refrain:*

Right here, right now, we open our lives to you.  
Right here, right now, Christ, be born in us anew.

BROAD HEARTS BROAD MINDS BROAD REACH