

Introduction

I am excited about this series, "Starry Night." "Starry Night" will be the name of our Advent series. Let me explain what that's about. People are going, "Well, what's the deal?" The most obvious one is the Star of Bethlehem, and we'll be building toward that as we talk about that on Christmas Eve. What we'll be doing through the series is we'll be looking at four different passages that use stars as a picture of God's promise of looking forward to His deliverance through Jesus Christ. Today, we'll be looking at the story of Abraham in the Book of Genesis. So if you have your Bible, feel free to go ahead and open it with me to the Book of Genesis, chapter 15.

Before we jump into the text, what I'd like to do is share with you some of the resources that we have for you and for your family to better understand and to better celebrate Advent together. On Advent each week will be a time when we will contemplate the fact that God indeed came in Jesus Christ, and now we are waiting for that Second Coming as He comes to set all things right. So, as we wait for that Second Coming, there are several different resources that we want you and your family to take advantage of during this Advent season:

First, inside your worship guide, you see this (holds up pamphlet). This is our 30 x 30 guide. We would love for you to think about different ways, maybe 30 different ways, that you could show acts of kindness, love, and service to your neighbors, to your friends, and your coworkers for the 30 days that are leading up to Christmas. So inside your worship guide there's this handout, and in there there's this list... Now, you don't have to do a single one of these, but these are just to give you an idea of ways that you could serve and love your neighbor. Now, as you do that, our hope is that you'll have opportunity to share the Gospel, to have a spiritual conversation, to be able to invite them to be part of one of our worship services. We would love it if you would use those opportunities to invite people to be part of our Christmas Eve services. So, on the back, you can read about our Christmas Eve services. We'll have three Christmas Eve services this year. We'll have one on Christmas Eve eve (on December 23rd) at 7 o'clock. We hear from people every year and they say, "Wouldn't it be great if we had a Christmas Eve service the night before so that those of us who already have plans and can't be here could join us. I said, "You know what? ...Great idea." So we're going to try that this year... so you'd better come. (Laughter) Also, on December 24th, we'll have two more of those at 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. So we would love for you to join us for one of those Christmas Eve services, to invite your friends, and to be here as we proclaim the Gospel, the Good News of who God is and what He's done in Jesus Christ.

Then also we'll have our Three Trees emphasis. The trees are placed out here and in another couple of places on our campus. You can grab a tag with a list of gifts and help provide Christmas presents for a family in need. You can read about that on the back as well.

Finally, we talk about caroling in Prestonwood. What is that about? Well... it's not because I'm such a talented singer. What we believe is that we want people to know who Jesus Christ is. The Prestonwood neighborhood is very near to our church, and the entire neighborhood lights up their neighborhood with different themes for each street. Literally thousands of cars drive up and down each of the streets in the Prestonwood neighborhood every single year. So what we do is we have some church members who live in that neighborhood. We will set up with a caroling station with Christmas Eve invite cards, and we would love for you to be there. Now, I know what you're saying... a) "I ain't singing..." and b) You're thinking, "I'm surely not singing where people can stop and listen to me sing." This is what I want you to know. It's not so much about the quality of your voice as the quantity of faces in that yard. So, if you will simply show

up and mouth the word "watermelon" over and over, you too can serve Jesus this Christmas season. (Laughter) We'd love for you to show up, be there, and then we'll be handing out invite cards. We'd love for you to join us and to be part of that. You can read more about other events that we have happening, on the back of that form.

A few other things I want to make you aware of. The last couple of years we've made our own Advent devotional. This year, we're using an Advent devotional that has been produced by Buckner Children's Home. Buckner does great ministry in the state of Texas and around the world with orphans and orphan care. We are excited about this Advent devotional. It is high-quality, it is awesome, and it's yours free. Just stop by and grab one for you, for your family, and for your friends. We would love for you to have that and use that as we count down to Christmas Eve.

If you have small children, we think that one of the best ways that you can teach them to story of Scripture is through making a Jesse tree. A Jesse tree is a way that you can make an ornament and then tell a little portion of the story of Scripture. We have a packet that has the ornaments and a chart that has the story of Scripture handy for you. It's in our children's area. If you go down to our children's area, they have these available and it's a great thing for you to do together as a family. I would love for you to make a Jesse tree with your family this Advent.

Finally, we have a children's book called "Ishtar's Odyssey." This is about a Persian boy who sees the Star of Bethlehem and the events that unfold after that, leading up to the birth of Jesus Christ. This is a great book. We would love for you to pick this up for your family for a suggested donation of ten dollars. That's available right out here at our media desk. Whenever service is over, all of these resources are available for your family. We hope that you will pick them up, share them with others, and then join us as we celebrate Advent together and begin sharing the goodness of God as we count down toward Christmas Eve.

Those are the resources and we look forward to having the opportunity for you to join us as we use those. Let's pray together and then we'll jump into God's Word.

"Lord, we need to hear from You today. There are so many things that distract us, that come against us, that maybe even depress us. Sometimes the weight of everything feels like it's too much to bear. So Lord, we thank You that You didn't abandon us but that You gave us Jesus. Father, I pray that as we walk through this Advent season that, as a church, we would grab hold of the gift of Christ, that we would look expectantly toward it, and Father that You would indeed transform us. We love You, Father. We thank You for Your goodness, we thank You for Your grace and for the way that You give them to us in Jesus Christ. It's in His name that we pray. Amen."

1. Our God Makes Promises

So, the first starry passage is in Genesis chapter 15. The first idea of Advent is the idea of "Hope." Now, "Hope" is one of those things that we talk a lot about, but we don't really even know what it means. Hope is more than a wish. I think I want to begin there. Oftentimes, when we talk about hope, many people simply think that it means, "We're wishing that something will happen." ... "I hope that it might happen." We're hanging onto this vague notion that out there something might take place. That is not the biblical picture of "Hope." Whenever people who capture prisoners want to break them for information, their first tool is not water-boarding. Their first tool is removing any idea of rescue because if they take away the idea of rescue, then they can take away hope. Without hope, humans truly struggle. We need something more

than wishing, but we need something that we can actually count on. That's why the story of Abraham is so powerful and so good for us right now. Genesis chapter 15 is an episode in the life of Abraham. God has made him a promise, and He promises to Abraham that He will make him into a great nation. We sit here today as inheritors of that nation, the nation of Israel. Obviously we are not literally the nation of Israel, but we are God's people, The Church. We have inherited that great promise that was handed down to Abraham, but Abraham didn't know that thousands of years later we would be sitting here talking about him, reading his name, and talking about the great promise made. He was living in a place where he had to trust God's promise. Genesis 15:1... *"After these things the Word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.' But Abram said, 'O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'Behold, You have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.' And behold, the Word of the Lord came to him..."* In other words, Abram said, "I have nothing. How am I going to be a great nation? I don't have any kids." Verse 4: *"... And behold, the Word of the Lord came to him: 'This man (Eliezer of Damascus) shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir..."* (God made him a promise) *"...And He brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then He said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' And he..."* (That's Abram) *"...believed the Lord, and He..."* (The Lord) *"...credited it to him..."* (Abram) *"...as righteousness."*

I want us to start with something that is absolutely breathtaking, if you think about it. Most of the time, we run right past this fact, but I want us to begin today, pondering a deep theological truth. Are you ready? Huh? Nope... you're not ready. (Laughter) Are you ready? (Clapping) I like a little feedback, guys. It's okay; you can talk. I know you're full... you've got all that dressing still in your system. Just go ahead; let it out. Not salad dressing... turkey dressing. Okay. The deep theological truth I want us to start with today... "God makes promises." We run right past that so quickly... that God makes promises. Why? ...Because we've grown accustomed to the idea that a) There is a God and b) That that God makes promises. How revolutionary must it have been in Genesis 15, someone that we know from the Book of Joshua... Abram, who previously was a pagan worshipping other gods, now actually hears from the Lord, and the Lord tells him, "I will make you into a great nation." He makes Abram a promise ...based on His nature, based on who He is... that He will do something... that He will come through. Our God... hang onto your hats... is a promise-making God. Our God, over and over, in the pages of Scripture, reveals that He loves us enough to promise us things that will indeed come to be... even though we cannot yet see them. Our God makes promises. I know what you're thinking... "Are you sure about that? Does He really make promises?"

1 John 2:25... *"And this is the promise that He made to us—eternal life."*

Ezekiel 36:26... *"I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."*

1 John 1:9... *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

Our God is always making promises. Don't run by it... don't take it for granted... don't forget about it. Our God makes promises and then, on top of that, He keeps them. Our God makes promises and He always keeps His word. If God has made a promise to us, and that promise is this... "I will deliver you in My Son Jesus Christ..." His Word is true. If God has promised that He will come again one day, His Word is true. So what we see in the pages of Scripture first is that God makes a promise, and God has promised that one day He will indeed return and set all things right. That's a promise. Do you believe it?

2. We Are Transformed By Trusting These Promises.

You see, Abram believed the promise, and that is the second thing that we see here in this passage, in verse 6. *"He believed the Lord..."* (Abram believed the Lord) *"...and He..."* (The Lord) *"...counted it to him..."* (Abram) *"...as righteousness."* Once Abram trusted in God's promise, then Abram was transformed. Once Abram trusted in the promise, Abram was transformed. Do you want to be spiritually transformed today? It can't happen until you trust in the promises of God. God has promised you that He will deliver you in His Son Jesus... He has promised you that He will one day come and set all things right... You cannot know the transforming power of God until you trust that God actually will keep His promises. Now, I know what you're thinking... "Steve, I've been trusting... It's just not getting any better." Here's the thing. There is a difference between trusting in the Lord and believing that God exists. Let me say that again. There's a difference in trusting in the Lord and believing that God exists. Oftentimes whenever I talk to people who are in a difficult situation, I say, "You've got to trust in the Lord" in that particular moment. What they hear in that is, "If you believe in God, then He will make all the bad stuff go away." That's not necessarily true.

One of my best friends is a pastor. His name is Brent. Brent and his wife Julie, several years ago... gosh, it's been maybe twenty years ago now... had a daughter. The daughter was born with a heart defect... a hole in her heart. They had to go to California to await a heart transplant. During that time, Leslie (that was their daughter's name) had a diagnosis that was getting more and more severe and a prognosis that was looking more and more bleak. The longer that this went on and the more that it became readily apparent that their daughter was most likely not going to make it, Brent, who is a pastor, began to become very angry with God. He would even say things like, "How could this happen to me? Why, God, would you allow something like this to happen? I'm out there proclaiming Your goodness, I'm doing good work for You, why would this happen to me?" He said that and in that moment, one of his theological mentors came to him and saw him in the state that he was in. He said this to him, "Why do you think that the things that you preach don't apply to you?" He was like, "Whoa... what are you talking about?" He said, "You tell people all the time that if bad things happen, it doesn't mean that God will take them away. It means that God will use them, if you will trust Him." Brent realized in that moment that it was certainly the case in his own life. He had been asking God to change the circumstances but wasn't allowing God to change his heart. God had promised in the pages of Scripture, over and over and over, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." God will do the things that He says that He will indeed do, even if pain comes our way. We know that Jesus Himself told us, "In this life, you will have trouble." I'm sad to tell you that Leslie did not make it. She received the heart transplant. It was too large for her body, and they couldn't close the chest cavity. Her body was infected and soon thereafter she died, at about six months of age. But I'm happy to tell you that Brent's heart was changed in the process. He was able to use those painful, difficult circumstances to proclaim the faithfulness of the Lord to nurses and to doctors and the medical personnel all throughout that hospital and even now to use it as part of his testimony, that in the midst of painful and difficult circumstances, God might not change the things happening to you, but He can change the way that you respond to them. What changed? Brent got hope... that God was still on His throne, even when those difficult things were taking place.

You see, whenever I talk about faith sometimes, I've used the analogy of the idea whenever I was teaching my children to trust me. I would hold their hands as they would jump off the side of the pool and then I would back up a little bit. They would jump six inches and then I'd back up a little bit more and they would jump eighteen inches... eventually they were doing full-on jumps freely into the pool and they're swimming toward me and I'm taking steps back away from them. I've talked about the fact that sometimes that's the

way God works when He is teaching us to trust Him. He will have us do little things and then bigger things. We hear that and we understand that. But here's the thing: You cannot experience the freedom of transformation until you jump for the very first time. If you want your heart to be transformed, you have to finally just decide to trust God and to jump. I want you to know the freedom that comes from having hope in a God that keeps His promises. You can't know that until you finally decide to jump. Why is it that I can meet terminal cancer patients who are joyful to the very end, and yet I can still meet people who really have just about everything that they need and pretty pleasant circumstances, and they might be bitter? Why is that? It is because oftentimes we are so concerned with getting God to change things rather than resting in Who God is Himself. The beauty of this walk... walking with Jesus Christ... is the immediate gift of the promise of salvation, when we trust the Lord at first... but it's also then that He continues to grow us each and every day, the more that we trust Him. Trusting God may not mean that God will change your circumstances. Trusting God may not mean that God will change your circumstances, but it does mean that He will change your heart. It means that He will free you from believing that you are the most important person in the world. He will let you know that the most important person lived and died on a cross and was raised from an empty tomb so that you might know the freedom of who He is.

That's the first time that Abram hears the promise about stars. God uses it a few pages later. Turn with me, if you want, to Genesis chapter 22. In Genesis 22, Abraham (as he is now called) has grown to a point of faith, a place where he trusts God enough. He has been jumping into the pool of faith, so to speak, and now God is backing further and further away. Now, finally, He's like, "Okay, Abraham; let's see if you can swim in this big pool of faith. Take your son, the only son that you've got, Isaac, the one that I gave you, a child of the promise... take him up to the top of this mountain and sacrifice him to Me. Now I'm going to see if you truly trust Me." The Bible says that Abraham trusted the Lord so much to the point that he did... He walked him up to the top of the mountain, he bound him, he put him on top of the wood, and he was ready to sacrifice him there. The Book of Hebrews says that Abraham believed that God would resurrect Isaac from the dead, that he had that much faith. He had grown to trust the Lord that much in his own heart, in his own life. And as he raised the knife, prepared to kill Isaac, God stopped him in that moment. Genesis 22:15... *"And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, 'By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies and in your offspring shall all the nations of the world be blessed...'"*

3. The Transformed Are To Bless.

Abraham has been transformed through his faith. Now he's willing to do whatever it is that God has asked him to do, and now in this moment He has asked him to sacrifice his greatest possession... his son. He follows through in faith and then God declares the promise once again. But did you notice the phrase that's added? It's in verse 18: Not only will you have offspring that will be as numerous as the stars of the heavens, but in verse 18 we read... *"In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."* In other words, "Abraham, I will indeed keep My promise, but in keeping My promise, you have a job. Your job is to bless everyone else." In Genesis 12:2, God basically says the same thing to Abram. He says, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing." Over and over, we read in the pages of Scripture, that God blesses so that we will bless others. So let's walk through this progression one more time. Our God makes promises... those promises oftentimes are bold and seem impossible, but our God always keeps His promise. Then whenever we trust in those promises, when we place our faith in that God, He transforms us. For many of us, that began on the day

that we trusted in the biggest promise, that God had rescued us from our sin, in Jesus Christ. We trust in Him then and He transforms us. It continues on every single day when we trust Him in our difficult circumstances. But then, after He transforms us, He lets us know, "I have changed you so that you will now bless others." God blesses you; God changes you, not so that you can keep it all to yourself. Sometimes we think about our faith sort of like a cul-de-sac. We go down to the end of the road, and we just drive around in circles. We think, "As long as I'm down here worshipping and enjoying God's presence, that's pretty good." God actually says, "No. Now that I have shown you who you were intended to be, in My grace, it's time to leave the neighborhood and time to go bless everyone else." You have been transformed so that you might bless the rest of the world... which kind of brings us to the point. You see, the first idea of Advent is Hope, and I think that we desperately need it.

I talk to so many people day-in and day-out and it's like they're just completely discouraged. I understand it. There are days when I turn on the news and it's like, "...some people killed some other people in this part of the world..." It just feels like that's day-in and day-out. It doesn't matter if it's someone who's a terrorist or a criminal, or if it's someone shooting up a medical facility, or if it's someone who is acting on racist tendencies. It's like we're bent to destroy one another, and we can't understand what it means to love our neighbor. There are times when it feels almost overwhelming to me, and I feel like I want to give up. I just want to say, "This really can't make any difference..." and it's then that I remember, God made a promise, and this is His promise: "One day I will return; I will set all things right. I will judge those who have opposed Me; I will reward those who have followed Me. I will be exalted higher than every other name, and I will be worshipped. Everything will be set in the way that it ought to be set in that moment because I have made a promise and I always, always, always keep My Word." (Clapping) That's pretty great, right? So here's the thing. I realize that whenever I get depressed or overwhelmed, I cannot bless the people around me. Every single day... do you know what I have to do? I have to go back to the well and remind myself, my God made a promise and my God always keeps His Word. My God made a promise and my God always keeps His Word.

In the Book of Numbers, there's this incredible verse... chapter 23 verse 19. This is what it says: *"God is not man that he should lie or a son of man that He should change His mind..."* God does not lie and God does not change His mind. Listen to this next part: *"...Has He said and will He not do it?"* Has He said and will He not do it... or, Has He spoken and will He not fulfill it? My friends that are African American preachers tell me that whenever they preach, at the end of their sermon, they have a phrase that they like to say. They say, "Won't He do it?" They bring them to the end of the sermon and they tell everybody: "My God will keep His promise" and they say, "Won't He do it?" and the congregation says, "Yes He will." They say that because they know that every week their church has to be reminded that their God makes promises and He keeps His Word. I don't know about you, but I'm used to people who break promises. And the reason that sometimes I struggle with having hope is that whenever people make promises to me I find myself almost automatically, immediately making a contingency plan in case they let me down because people so regularly do let me down. But that's the beauty of our God. He never, ever, ever breaks a promise. If you get a promise in Scripture, then that promise can be taken to the bank because our God is as good as gold. He always keeps His Word. He never, ever, ever breaks His promise.

Over and over in the Bible, 238 times in fact, we read, "Do not be afraid." Don't be afraid. Why is it that oftentimes I talk to Christians and they are afraid? Do you want to know why? ...Because we have forgotten the promise that God will indeed one day return and set all things right. Scripture says, *"Behold, I am making all things new"...* *"Behold, I will change everything... I will judge everything... I will redeem everything... I will indeed one day do everything that I have promised to do."* Our God keeps His Word.

He always does the things that He says. If you are fearful, it is because you are not faithful. Whenever you don't have faith, you start to get afraid.

4. Even When It Takes Time.

When I turn on the news and I see people that look like they want to kill me, I have two responses that are possible in my heart: 1) I can be afraid... or 2) I can be faith-filled and say "My God will do whatever my God wants to do." In Genesis chapter 26, God makes this promise to Abraham's son Isaac: He takes the same promise that He had made to Abraham, and He gives it on to his son. Chapter 26, starting in verse 3: *"Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands."* God keeps His promises... are you ready for this? ...even if we don't see it happen. We don't like that. We're Americans. We like results. You know, if you look in the Bible, you will see that God basically has two kinds of miracles. Miracle type number one: Boom... He does it immediately. Water into wine. Bam. "Good use of time there God... very efficient. I like that kind of miracle. Way to go." Red sea turns into the red playground. We just walk right across it, totally dry. "I like that God; that was immediate results. We appreciate that." But then there are other kinds of miracles that take longer. Four hundred years of silence between the Book of Malachi and the Book of Matthew. The Messiah is promised. Do you think anybody ever woke up and said, "Ummm... I don't know if God's coming through on this one"? I bet they did. Generations of slavery in the land of Egypt before God raises up Moses. Do you think anybody ever said, "Things are too bad for God to work in these circumstances"? Probably. You see, the thing about the Church today is this: It is that we oftentimes look at the things happening in the world, and we believe that we know more than our God and we say, "This stuff is so bad, not even God Himself could fix it." And when that happens, we become fearful.

One of my favorite places in the city of Houston is the Rice University campus. I kind of found it by accident whenever I first came to town. Driving around the campus, you see these 100-year-old oak trees that have been pruned to perfection, creating shady lanes all around the campus. As I was driving past it, maybe the second or third time, this thought came into my mind. "The person who imagined this for the very first time, who thought about these trees being planted here and the shade that they would create... they never saw it happen. They were dead and gone. But they thought this would be so beautiful and so good that they would do something that future generations might enjoy. If that sort of idea might be born in the mind of man, what sort of promise might my God have ...for this church, for this world, for this country... that we cannot even conceive of yet? What kind of promises are so big that we step back right now and we look at the world and we go, "Man, that's too big... that's too bad... nothing can happen there." And our God says, "Just give Me some time because I do My best miracles when you think it's totally dark. That's when the light breaks through." You see, I talk to people oftentimes and the things that they will say to me is, "Steve, where was God whenever I found out that my wife's cancer came back?" "He was on His throne." He was still on His throne and He's asking you now to trust Him, that even if the circumstances don't change, that He is still good, He can still be trusted, and that your heart, when filled with faith in Him, can become a hopeful heart that can do what? Bless other people. Sometimes we do our best blessing when we are in the most pain. People say to me, "Where was God whenever I lost my job or whenever the economy tanked, whenever all these layoffs started happening?" He was on His throne, and He said, "Let Me see how My people will respond in the midst of being squeezed. Will they choose, even now, to know that I love them, that I see them, that I have made a promise and that they can bless others?" "Where was God whenever my family started falling apart and my son or my daughter left and they started rebelling

against all the things that we taught them?" He was on His throne, and He is still, even now, claiming to keep His promise, to redeem all things, to beautify all things. God is still keeping His promise. He never left His throne. Not for one instant has anything in the world transpired that God did not see and say, "I can still redeem even that." That's how big He is.

So Church, today the question now for us becomes this: "Do we have enough faith to believe that no matter what circumstances I'm in right now, I can still have hope." Do you feel like you're overwhelmed? You can still have hope because our God hasn't forgotten you. Do you feel like you're afraid? You don't have to be; you can trust Him, you can have faith in Him. You can still have hope. Do you feel like you'll never be able to beat that addiction? You don't have to because our God is bigger than your addiction. You can still have hope. Do you feel like you'll never be able to break that cycle in your life, that generational curse? You can know freedom; it will be broken in the Name of Jesus Christ because our God keeps His promise. You can still have hope. Our God always keeps His promises. (Clapping) That's how big He is. We have hope because our God... He never relinquishes His throne. We get to choose between faith and fear.

So Church, now the question that we have to ask ourselves is this: "Won't He do it?" (Congregation) "Yes He will." Amen; let's pray. (Clapping)

"Father, I know there's somebody who's here right now that feels that they were at the end of their rope when they walked into this room, and today they have heard that they can have hope in You. I pray God that right now they would turn to You. Father, there are people that are here right now and they are feeling like they have nothing left to give. God, I pray that You would let them know right now that You will give on their behalf... that they don't have to give because You give. You give life. You give hope. You give peace."

Nobody is looking around right now. This is what I want to do. I just want to ask you, if you say, "Steve, right now, do you know what it need? I need some prayer because I feel like I am out of hope." Just raise your hand; I just want to pray for you. Nobody is looking. Just raise your hand if you say, "Man... I am out of hope." A lot of hands are going up. Raise them up. Who else? "Lord Jesus, for all of these that have raised their hands... I just bring them before Your throne right now. There is a lot of hopelessness in this world, and I pray, Lord, that they would know that You have never left their side. Never once have they ever had to walk by themselves. You have always called them 'child.' You have always been faithful. You have always been there." You can put your hands down.

I want to pray for you today if you say, "You know what? I'm just afraid..." If you're afraid today, would you just raise your hand? I just want to pray for you. I want to ask you to choose faith instead of fear. Raise them up. Okay. Let me see you. Who else? Raise them up. "Lord Jesus, You have said that You will never leave us, that You will never forsake us. You have told us that perfect love casts out fear. I pray that those with their hands raised right now, Father, would know that they are loved perfectly in Jesus Christ and they do not have to be afraid. And, God, that they can trust in the love that You have given them through Your Son so that they could know hope." You can put your hands down.

If you're here today and you say, "You know what, Steve? I have just never actually believed in Jesus, and the reason that I don't have hope and maybe I'm afraid is because I've never just said 'Yes' to Him." If that's you today, I want to pray for you and ask that today you will have the courage to say "Yes" to Him. Would you raise your hand if that's you, and it's time for you to say "Yes" to Jesus for the first time today? You say, "Okay; today's the day." Raise your hand for me. "God, thank you for Your goodness; thank you

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By Dr. Steve Bezner. Week 1 in the series "Starry Night"- Advent 2015.

for who You are and that You always keep Your promise and that You never let us down. Even when we can't see You, You are still there. God, we love You. We pray this in the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen."