

Advent Devotional

Preparing Our Hearts for Christmas



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What is Advent?

During Christmas, we often encounter the term “Advent”. But for many of us, our understanding of this concept is limited to a Christmas countdown consisting of tiny doors or windows that contain a daily toy, treat, or trinket. Yet Advent is so much more than an inedible piece of chocolate hiding behind a perforated window.

The word Advent comes from a Latin word meaning “coming” or “arrival” and is used to describe the time leading up to Christmas when we anticipate and celebrate the birth of Jesus. Advent traditionally begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas and is observed each Sunday until Christmas Day.

In addition to celebrating the first Advent (or arrival) of Christ, this season also invites us to anticipate Jesus’ second Advent, when He will return in glory to rule and reign over all things.

As we live in the tension between the first and second Advent of Christ, Christmas is a time when we often see this tension reflected in our own lives. We celebrate the arrival of Jesus with expensive gifts, lavish decorations, and spectacular Christmas sweaters. But we do so in the midst of our everyday lives as we wrestle against sin, witness the brokenness of the world around us, and experience the longings that come from living in a world that is not our eternal home.

Preparing our hearts for Christmas doesn’t mean ignoring the reality of the world around us in the pursuit of an idyllic season of festive wonder and delight. Instead, it means embracing the tension that exists from living between the first and second Advent as we celebrate all that Christ has accomplished while honestly reflecting on our continued need for a Savior.

At Christmas, we celebrate that Christ has come. But He is coming again. And when He does, He will make all things new. Until then, we wait with eager anticipation, rejoicing in the hope of His second coming, and finding peace in the knowledge of His great love for us.

How to Use This Devotional

This study focuses on the four traditional themes of Advent: Love, Hope, Peace, and Joy. Devotionals will be released each Sunday from December 3rd through December 24th. A short Advent reading will also be available on Christmas Day.

Each weekly devotional will include the following:

Scripture Focus: Builds on the weekly Advent theme.

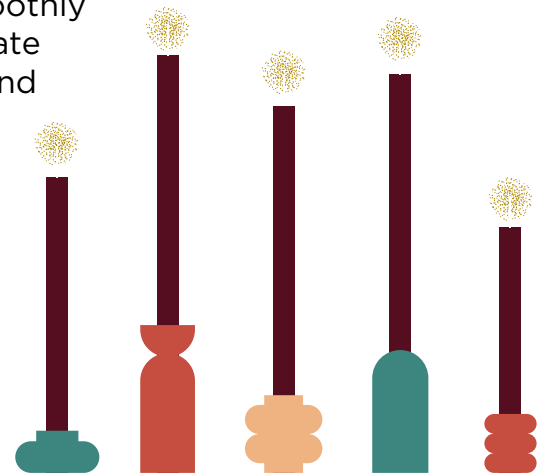
Personal Reflection: A short devotional that helps adults and older children engage with the Advent theme and apply these truths to their everyday lives.

Family Experience: An outline that walks families and children of all ages through the weekly Advent theme.

If you're a parent, we encourage you to embrace the Advent season by utilizing the Family Experience and intentionally creating space to help prepare your children's hearts for Christmas.

Depending on the age of your kids, these times of connection may be brief. But the impact can be profound as God uses even these brief moments to work in their lives and hearts.

Our hope is that you can incorporate the activities included in this devotional into your everyday rhythms as you celebrate Christmas together. Each week may look different, and some weeks may go more smoothly than others. But God will use this time as you create spiritual habits with your family and as you love and lead your children to become followers of Jesus.



ASSEMBLING AN ADVENT WREATH





What is an Advent Wreath?

The Family Experience uses an Advent wreath as part of the weekly devotional. This can be a fun and memorable way to celebrate the Advent season together as a family.

God's unending love is symbolized by the round wreath, which is often created using evergreen branches to represent the everlasting life we have received in Christ. The candles of the Advent wreath represent the four themes of Advent: Love, Hope, Peace, and Joy. The center of the wreath can hold a fifth candle to represent Christ, which is lit on Christmas Day.



How to Make Your Own Advent Wreath

To assemble an advent wreath, you'll need the following supplies:

1 Round Tray

5 Candles

Evergreen Branches or Other Holiday Decor

The tray is simply used to hold the candles, so you can either purchase a special tray or use whatever is available around the house. Arrange four of the candles around the outside of the wreath, then place one in the center.

Once you have your candles arranged, it's time for the fun part. You can put your creative (or not so creative) skills to work and decorate your wreath however you'd like. Maybe it's live greenery, leftover tinsel, or garland remnants that you found in the bottom of your Christmas storage bins. Either way, have fun with it!

Your last (and most important) step is to take a picture of your Advent wreath and post it on social media. **Be sure to tag @rockharbor.tv so we can admire your handiwork!**





Helpful Tips to Engage with Your Children

Here are some ideas and suggestions to help you make Advent a fun and memorable experience for your kids:

Make Advent a priority. We know how busy schedules can get during the holidays, and the last thing we want is for you to feel the pressure of adding one more thing to your calendar. But time with family matters. And time spent focusing our hearts on the true meaning of Christmas is never wasted. To help you prioritize Advent, schedule a consistent time each week to gather as a family. While the traditional advent celebration falls on Sundays, feel free to do what works best for you! The most important thing is to carve out a dedicated time and make it a recurring part of your calendar.

Keep your Advent wreath in a visible location. After putting so much work into your Advent wreath, be sure to show it off! Giving it a place of prominence in your home will serve as a helpful reminder of the Advent season and will provide accountability to continue this rhythm as a family.

Create an intentional environment. When you gather as a family to celebrate Advent, try to create a fun and intentional atmosphere. Sit down at the table together, dim the lights, turn off the TV, and put any phones or devices away. And remember, bribes are your friend (Yes... we really did just say that). Providing a fun holiday treat or snack can be a helpful way to keep kids excited and engaged.

Encourage participation. What kid doesn't love to play with fire? Letting kids take turns lighting the candles is a fun way for them to participate and be involved in the family devotional. If they're old enough, consider letting them read the Advent scripture or prayer.

Have realistic expectations. Your Advent experience may not go according to plan. In fact, it probably won't. There may be tears, there may be tantrums, and there may be melted candle wax to clean up. Embrace it. The years go by quickly, and the work you do in these moments to connect with your children is never wasted. The worst case scenario is that you'll have a fun story to laugh about next year.

Have fun! Don't forget to laugh, to be silly, and to enjoy this time together as a family.