Advent



A Series of Devotional Readings from
Crosspoint Community Church

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Printed in China.

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About This Advent Guide

The word Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means "arrival." Advent is all about the coming of God himself who took on flesh and "moved into the neighborhood" (The Message translation). This arrival culminates in Christmas, when we celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Advent is the season we choose to sit in the feelings of anticipation and waiting. Instead of rushing to the end of the story, we sit in the space between because God meets us in our waiting. We all have things we're waiting for, and rushing to the end bypasses the way God wants to draw near to us in the present moment.

This guide will follow the traditional 4 themes of Advent: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Each week will have 7 Bible passages, along with prayers, a devotional from someone in our community, a question to reflect on, and a practice. It's structured to be done daily, but don't feel like you need to "catch up" if you don't read every day.

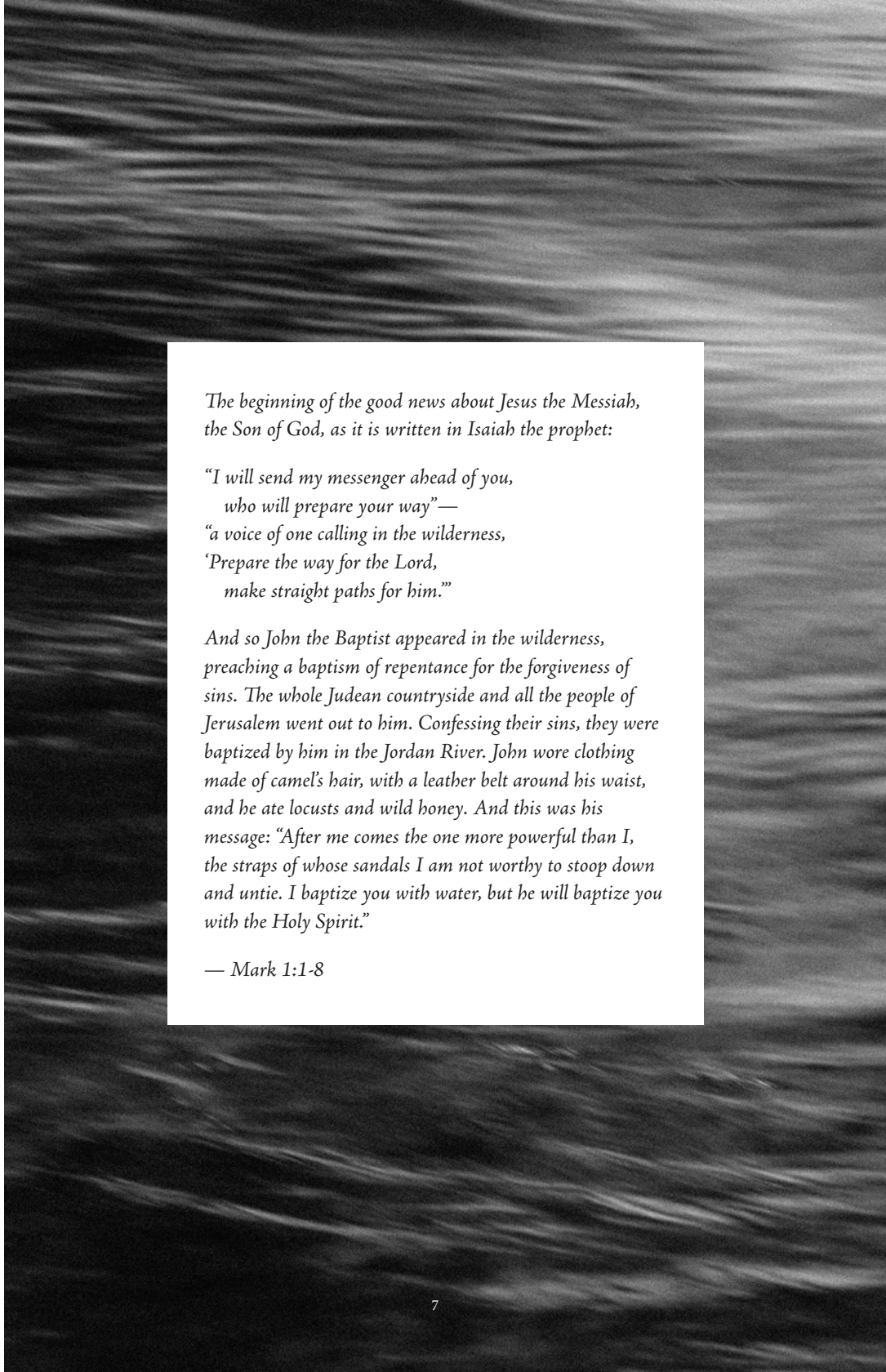
The devotions you'll read cover a wide spectrum of submissions from our staff, leadership team, and church body over the last 5 years. Some submissions have been edited or combined to accommodate the new format.

Feel free to use this in whatever way will be most helpful for you. We designed the guide with a variety of use cases in mind. If you read it in the morning or at lunch by yourself, use the question as a journal or prayer prompt. Maybe you consider using the guide as a mealtime devotion to be read with other people and discuss the question together. If you have a small group that meets up in December, you can use these devotions and questions as your content.

Our hope is that this Advent guide is not just more noise in an already busy holiday season, but that it would help you create the space to open yourself up to an experience with God. Allow him to mold and shape you during this Advent season.

Preparing Your Heart for Advent

Brent Behling



The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way"—
"a voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.'"

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

— Mark 1:1-8

Throughout the Christmas season, time can move fast as there is a lot of preparation, hanging lights, putting up the tree, wrapping gifts, family traditions, and travel. Unfortunately, in the middle of all our busy holiday "preparations," we tend to lose the true focus of the season. John the Baptist reminds us of the most important preparation of all:

"Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him." (Mark 1:3)

John is not challenging us to make sure our house is clean and decorations are up. He is calling us to prepare our hearts, turn from sin, and focus our daily walk on the path of Jesus. There is no greater hope in life than following him. As we look forward to the celebration of the coming king, and his promised return, we are called to make space for him; not when we can squeeze it into our busy schedule, but in our daily activities and routines.

Mark 1:1-8 provides the Hope that we are looking for. This holiday season, as you trim the tree, watch re-runs of holiday movies on the Hallmark channel, and participate in family traditions, let each moment prepare your heart. Let's remember the deeper preparation God desires: lives cleared of distractions, becoming like Jesus, and doing as he did.

Make this your prayer today as you begin to lean into this season of Advent:

Lord, in this busy holiday season, help me prepare the way for you in my heart. Thank you for the unshakable hope that only Christ provides. Please continue to open doors of opportunities, to provide that hope and love of Jesus to others.





Week 1

Hope

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

ISAIAH 12:34

WEEK 1 INTRODUCTION



The Light is Coming

Christmas is "supposed to" be a cheery time full of good food, family, fun traditions, and special music. And while it can be a magical season, it is also a reminder that not everything is as it should be.

For many people the holidays bring up difficult feelings related to losing loved ones. Even without the weight of grief, this season can feel heavy and dark. The weather has turned, the plans don't come together, finances aren't what you'd like them to be, rates of depression go up, and it doesn't help being surrounded by people who seem to have it all together and keep chattering about how this is the most wonderful time of the year.

Advent reminds us that no matter what is happening around us, no matter how dark the night, the light is coming. Jesus meets us in the hurt but doesn't want to let us get stuck in it. Instead he gives us hope for what is to come.

This week's theme of hope isn't about sticking your head in the sand, pretending like everything is fine. It's about recognizing that God is bigger than whatever it is we're going through, and trusting that he's working even if we don't see it. True hope is about defiantly trusting in the goodness of God and refusing to give into despair or let the darkness win. It's about trusting that God has something better coming, even though we can't see it right now.

Our Reason *for Hope*



Sarah Jones

Pray

God of hope, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

In you, Lord, I have taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame.
In your righteousness, rescue me and deliver me;
turn your ear to me and save me.
Be my rock of refuge,
to which I can always go;
give the command to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.
Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of those who are evil and cruel.

For you have been my hope, Sovereign Lord,
my confidence since my youth.
From birth I have relied on you;
you brought me forth from my mother's womb.
I will ever praise you.
I have become a sign to many;
you are my strong refuge.
My mouth is filled with your praise,
declaring your splendor all day long.

— *Psalm 71:1-8*

Read

Refuge. Rock. Fortress. For me, these words bring to mind a sense of safety, security, and stability. These verses remind me that God is strong, capable, and unshakable. Nothing catches him by surprise, and no scenario is too unsettling or wicked for him to handle.

Throughout Psalm 71, the author recalls God's faithfulness to him throughout his life, from the day he was born until he is old and gray. The author praises God for always being his deliverer and affirms that God is where he finds help and safety when the evil in the world seems overwhelming.

We live in a world that is constantly shifting. Personally, I can become disillusioned or feel hopeless when my circumstances, especially good ones, change. A truth that has helped me reframe difficult or unexpected situations is, "The only constant in life is change." When good times come, we appreciate them for as long as they linger. In the same way, a hard season may feel unending, but in most cases it won't last forever.

Sometimes the anxious voice of our culture causes us to despair over the future or to doubt the sovereignty of God. But we can find hope and assurance in God's goodness. God is faithful. His love and care for his people do not change, and we can put our hope in that.

The proof of that hope is the person of Jesus. Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Jesus shows us that God is always present, even in the midst of instability and shifting circumstances.

Jesus is, and always has been, our reason for hope. There is always hope because of the life God offers through Jesus and the promise of what is to come.

Respond

Reflect

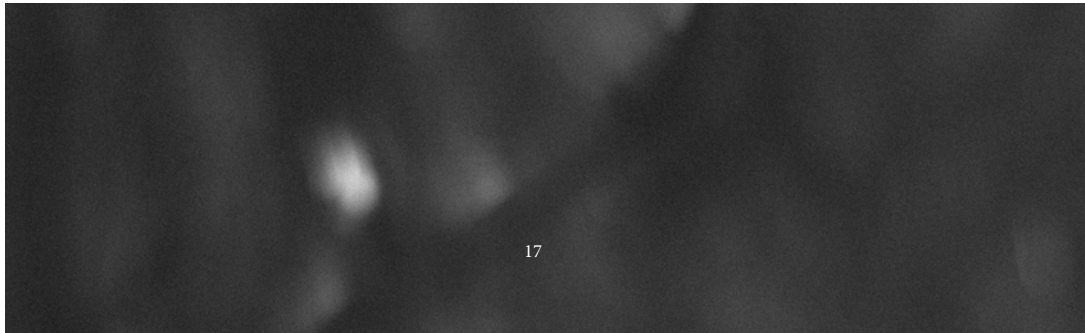
How do you usually respond to changing circumstances?

Practice

Bring a changing or difficult situation to God in prayer today.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of hope and of despair, and to places known and unknown. Help us to receive your hope no matter how hopeless things feel. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who endured a crown of thorns knowing resurrection was coming.
Amen



Joy and *Anticipation*



Deb
Pritchard

Pray

God of hope, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

— *Romans 13:11-14*

Read

Imagine yourself as a child waking up in your bed on a cold winter morning. Slowly the realization swells up inside you - IT'S CHRISTMAS MORNING!

You spring out of bed and step over to the window to peer out at the pale pinks and blues of early morning. You feel a glow of anticipation welling up inside as you go to your closet and put on your soft, warm robe and tuck your cold feet into your slippers. Gently, you open your door and step quietly into the hallway to sneak downstairs to behold the beauty of Christmas morning.

Christmas is meant to help us remember the first Advent when Jesus came to earth.

Let us greet this new day with an even greater joy and anticipation than Christmas morning (Jesus' first Advent). He will one day return (the second Advent), unless we first return to him, and we are closer to that time now than when we first believed.

Respond

Reflect

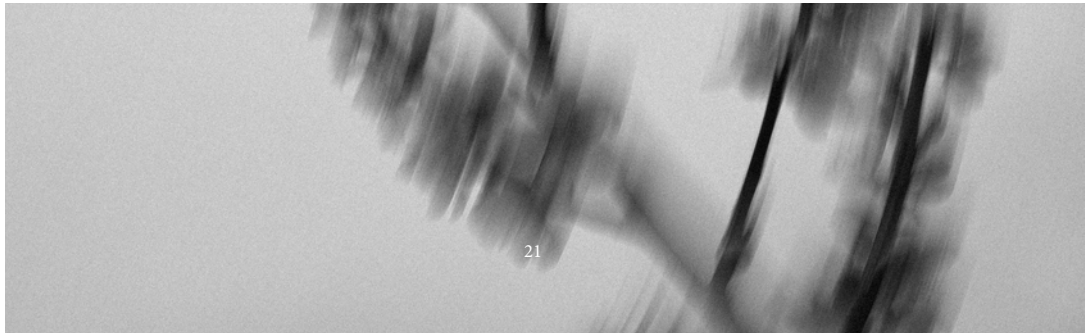
What is something you're looking forward to about Christmas this year?

Practice

Let that glow of anticipation fill your heart as you get dressed for your day, or as you slip on your coat. Put on the armor of light and clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ as you go into your day!

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of hope and of despair, and to places known and unknown. Help us to receive your hope no matter how hopeless things feel. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who endured a crown of thorns knowing resurrection was coming.
Amen



Trust Amidst *Uncertainty*



Anna Meister

Pray

God of hope, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

— *Luke 1:26-38*

Read

It has been said that there is only one constant in the world: change. This is true in big global events like war, politics, and disease. It is also true in the smaller day to day things like friendship, kids, work, or the aging process.

Change is happening all the time, all around us. And with that change comes uncertainty over what things are going to look like in the future. No matter how much we try to forecast and predict, if we're really honest, there's no way to be sure how things are going to work out.

I'm not one who likes uncertainty. I like to know the plan and feel confident in how things will go. Anybody else?

As I read about Mary and the news Gabriel brings, my blood pressure rises for her! Mary was initially troubled and had questions about God's plan. This woman, favored and chosen by God, felt uncertain. She could have protested this thing that felt scary and hard but she faithfully stepped into God's will, despite how she might have been feeling.

Mary was able to say yes, because she knew God. She knew Him to be good and trustworthy. So regardless of how she felt; she knew his plan was best. She trusted him.

The things God asks us to do are sometimes going to be uncomfortable and hard. But like Mary, the more we know him the better we are able to trust him. "For nothing is impossible with God". This is as true for us today as it was for Mary all those years ago.

Respond

Reflect

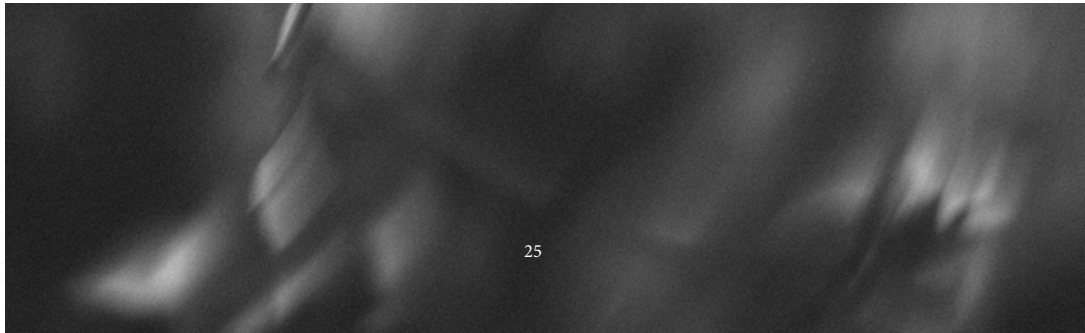
What is something you're facing that is difficult, or makes you feel uncertain or afraid?

Practice

Place your trust in God today by bringing it to Him, asking Him to remind you of who He is and what He has promised you.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of hope and of despair, and to places known and unknown. Help us to receive your hope no matter how hopeless things feel. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who endured a crown of thorns knowing resurrection was coming.
Amen



God In *Our Midst*

Katie Ignatowski & Cameron Lucas



Pray

God of hope, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."

But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test."

Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

— *Isaiah 7:10-16*

Read

It's pretty bold of Ahaz to refuse to ask God for a sign after being told to do so. God had come to King Ahaz through Isaiah to let him know that he doesn't have to fear the armies that are about to invade Jerusalem. God promises to protect Jerusalem and tells Ahaz to ask for a sign showing that God's promise will come true. Ahaz refuses.

He pretends to be spiritual about it by referencing Deuteronomy 6:16 that says "Do not put the LORD your God to the test...", but Jewish commentators pick up on the fact that Ahaz had a different reason for not asking.

He didn't ask for a sign because he didn't believe God would come through on his promise.

When Ahaz refuses, the Lord offers his own sign – *"the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel."*

Matthew 1:22-23 fulfills the words of the prophet Isaiah – revealing the birth of a savior called Immanuel, meaning God with us. Literally God in our midst. Our savior isn't a distant deity up in the sky; rather, he comes to us in human form and gives us his Spirit to walk with us. He is with us when we sleep and when we rise, when we succeed and when we fail, when we celebrate and when we grieve.

It seems that God wanted to offer Ahaz some comfort and reassurance at a very hard moment. In the same way, God is with us in the moments we are unsure, unsteady, or confused. In whatever difficult moments we find ourselves in, God is near.

Respond

Reflect

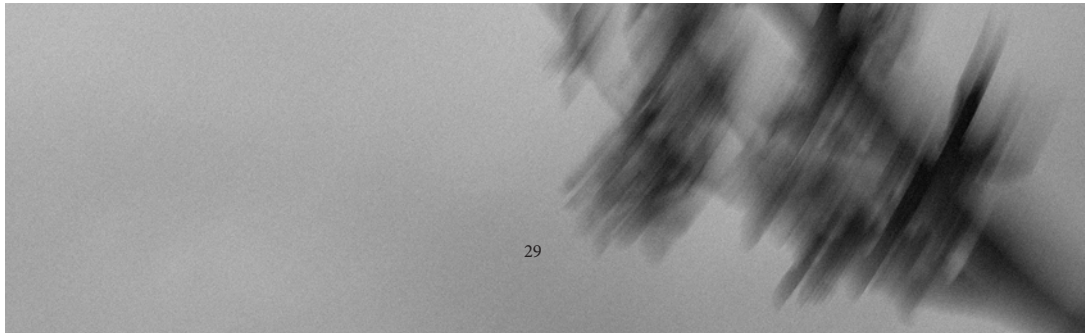
Is there a specific area in which you feel unsure, unsteady, confused?

Practice

Bring that area of your life to Jesus. Let this truth sink deep into your heart—not merely as something you know, but as something you believe: whatever comes, whatever changes, whatever the outcome, he is with you.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of hope and of despair, and to places known and unknown. Help us to receive your hope no matter how hopeless things feel. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who endured a crown of thorns knowing resurrection was coming.
Amen



Our Greatest *Comfort*



Farrah Angove

Pray

God of hope, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

Comfort, comfort my people,
  says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
  and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
  that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
  double for all her sins.

A voice of one calling:
"In the wilderness prepare
  the way for the Lord;
make straight in the desert
  a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be raised up,
  every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
  the rugged places a plain.
And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
  and all people will see it together.
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

— *Isaiah 40:1-5*

Read

A prophecy of comfort would have been welcome news to the nation of Judah, who suffered repeatedly at the hand of many captors. God's people, choosing to indulge in desires of the flesh, sought "comfort" in idolatry and sin, leading them to become captives of other nations.

As they waited, expecting their Messiah to come free them from earthly captivity, God was at work refining their hearts in preparation for freedom from a different kind of bondage. No longer would they be a slave to sin. Jesus was coming to pay for their sins once and for all.

In the same way, God purifies our unrepentant hearts. The forgiveness of sin, along with the anticipation that one day God's glory will be fully revealed to all mankind - that is comforting news indeed.

While we wait for Jesus to return again, and make all things new, there is work to do. We must do the work of becoming aware of who we are, how we have been formed (and malformed), and what our defaults are.

Pay attention to where your mind goes when you are anxious, scared, lonely, hurt. What or whom do you turn to besides God? We all do it. We are created to seek comfort and safety. Not all that we turn to is unhelpful - God may use it for our good. But his desire is to be our *greatest* source of love, of hope, of comfort. And we have access to this through Jesus.

Ask God to reveal any sinful ways you may default to when you need comfort.

Ask him to comfort you in an area you have felt anxiety, or hurt, tension, or fear.

Thank him for ways he has met you in a time of need in your past.

Respond

Reflect

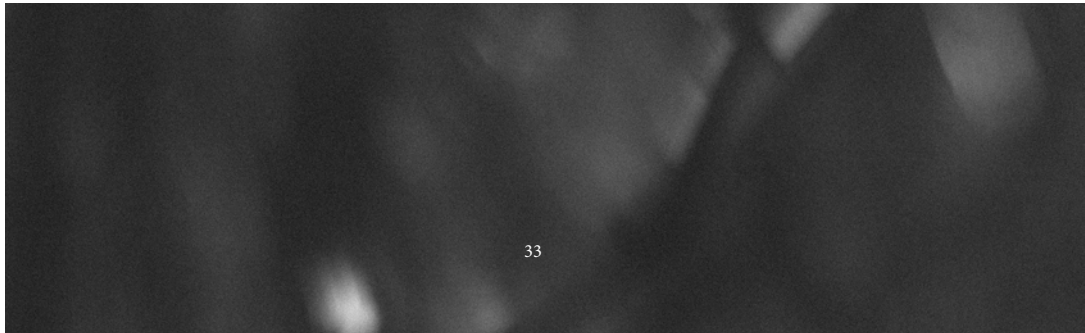
What do you turn to instead of Jesus when you're stressed or anxious?

Practice

Pay attention to where your mind and heart goes today when you're anxious, scared, lonely or hurt. Ask God to fill you with comfort.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of hope and of despair, and to places known and unknown. Help us to receive your hope no matter how hopeless things feel. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who endured a crown of thorns knowing resurrection was coming.
Amen



A First Step *Toward Hope*



Hannah Litwiller

Pray

God of hope, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

— *Romans 8:22-27*

Read

Anyone who has been in labor or been around those in labor can attest, it can get loud.

"Groan" doesn't seem to fully capture the magnitude of the noises mothers make when they are moments away from meeting their child. I say "meeting," but we know that the mother already knows her child. She knows what their kicks and hiccups feel like. She knows how many weeks the baby has been inside her. Her baby is a reality to her. However, there is also much she can only wait patiently for, like seeing those sweet baby toes or discovering how much hair her child has.

After birth, she gets to experience that reality in a whole new way. That is what Paul is describing here. We have the reality of Jesus now and patiently wait for the reality of Jesus to be experienced in a fuller way.

Perhaps you're not feeling very hopeful in this season. Can I encourage you and say that "groaning" can be the first step to hope? Hope that is seen is no hope at all, as our passage says. We first must experience the pains to be able to look forward to the time when the pains will cease, and new life will be brought forth.

Rest in the reality that Jesus has come. Know that there will be pains and loud groans, then let those move you to long for when Jesus returns. Then we get to experience the reality of Jesus in a whole new way as the beauty of new life follows those groans.

Respond

Reflect

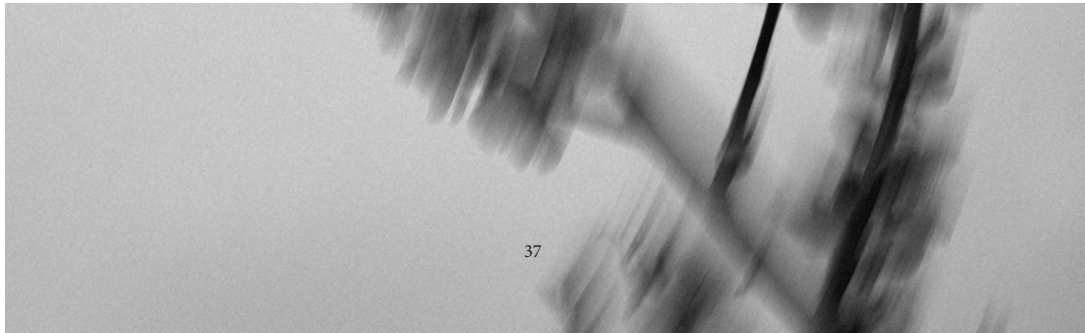
What's something you want to be more hopeful about this season?

Practice

Parents spend 9 months wondering what the full reality of their child will be like. Take a few moments right now to let your mind imagine what the full reality of Jesus might look like.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of hope and of despair, and to places known and unknown. Help us to receive your hope no matter how hopeless things feel. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who endured a crown of thorns knowing resurrection was coming.
Amen



Something *Brand New*



Mac McCarthy

Pray

God of hope, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

I am the Lord, your Holy One,
  Israel's Creator, your King."

This is what the Lord says—
  he who made a way through the sea,
  a path through the mighty waters,
who drew out the chariots and horses,
  the army and reinforcements together,
and they lay there, never to rise again,
  extinguished, snuffed out like a wick:
"Forget the former things;
  do not dwell on the past.
See, I am doing a new thing!
  Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
  and streams in the wasteland.
The wild animals honor me,
  the jackals and the owls,
because I provide water in the wilderness
  and streams in the wasteland,
to give drink to my people, my chosen,
  the people I formed for myself
  that they may proclaim my praise.

— *Isaiah 43:15-21*

Read

My favorite band was D.C. Talk. Yes, I grew up as a Christian kid in the 90's. I remember rollerblading around my neighborhood with a D.C. Talk cassette in my Walkman while sporting a neon green fanny pack. One of my favorite D.C. Talk songs was entitled Nu Thang. If you've never heard it, stop reading and look it up right now!

At the center of this passage is the announcement that God is doing something brand new. What if God were up to something brand new right now - in your life, in your family, in our community? Would you notice? All too often we get stuck going through life with our head down. We forget to look up, to pay attention, and we miss out on God's invitations to us.

Respond

Reflect

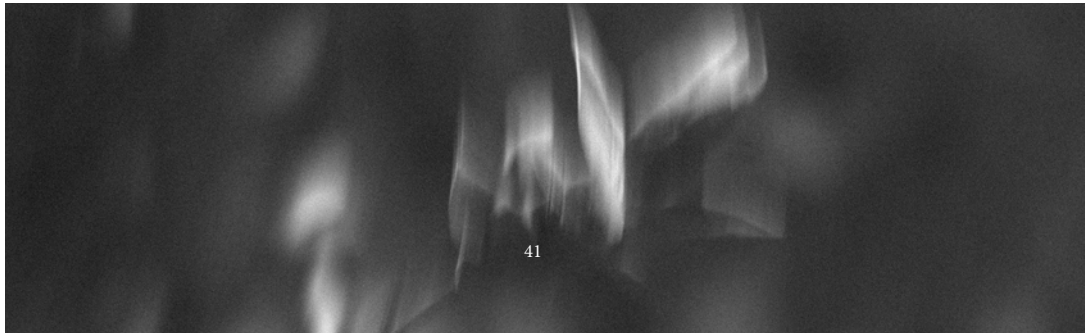
Where might God be doing a new thing in or around your life this year?

Practice

Open your eyes and look for God's activity as you go about your day.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of hope and of despair, and to places known and unknown. Help us to receive your hope no matter how hopeless things feel. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who endured a crown of thorns knowing resurrection was coming.
Amen





Week 2

Peace

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.

LUKE 2:14

WEEK 2 INTRODUCTION



Trading Worry for Peace

Christmas comes with an almost endless list of things to do and prepare for. Between presents to buy and wrap, parties to plan or attend, meals to cook and treats to bake (not to mention the cost of it all!), there is rarely a silent night to be had in December. All that frantic energy usually creates fun experiences, but it also brings a lot of worry and anxiety.

The peace God wants to give us speaks directly to our worry, but it is so much bigger than that as well. Biblical peace is about the restoration of all things. The prophet Isaiah foretold the coming of the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6), a Savior who would bring not just the absence of conflict, but a deep, abiding peace—peace with God, peace within ourselves, and peace with others.

Advent reminds us that whether we're experiencing worry in our mind or witnessing violence in our world, God is working to bring about peace. We won't get to experience the full reality of God's peace this side of heaven, but we can work towards that peace here and now.

This week's theme of peace isn't about a fake niceness, where we put on a smile and try to make everyone get along or be happy. It's about recognizing that God's vision for the world is one where things are made right on every level, and that this type of world-altering, life-changing peace can ultimately only come through Jesus.

Peace
From Within



Angie
Byers

Pray

God of peace, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

— *Philippians 4:4-6*

Read

I believe most of us desire peace. The issue we often experience isn't in having this desire, but in truly experiencing it. We feel like there's something getting in the way of peace and that it's up to us to figure out how to create it in our lives. So, we attempt to manage and control our circumstances to try and achieve peace. This is exhausting and only produces pseudo peace.

The good news is that we serve a loving God who wants immeasurably more for us than what we can conjure up on our own. He wants the kind of peace that is felt from within, from a place deep within us that knows we are held by a loving father.

God knows we worry and have anxiety, and he wants us to present these things to him through prayer and supplication. There is no worry too big or small for our God who covers it all. He invites us to be present with him amid our worry and allow him to work in us and show us his past faithfulness in our life. In this process, we exchange our worries for his abundant peace.

I invite you to create space to present a particular issue or worry to God. Imagine yourself sitting with him as you share about what is happening.

Next, present your requests to him. Ask him to provide what you are needing and be open to what this looks like.

Lastly, call to mind a time when God was faithful in your life and thank him. Notice what it feels like to remember how God has been present and working on your behalf.

Respond

Reflect

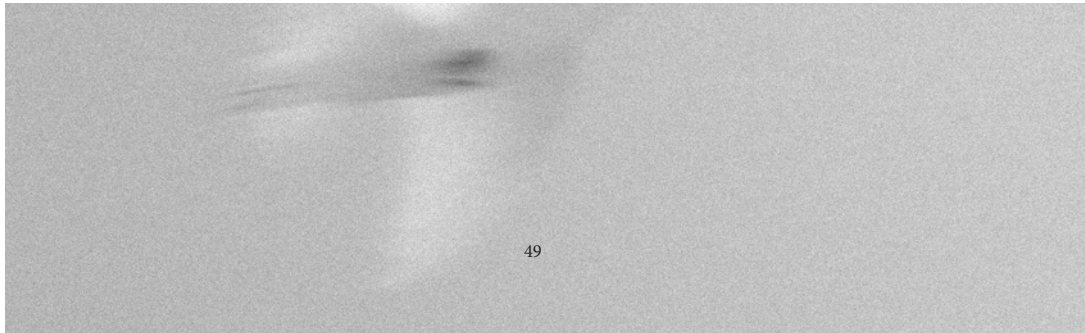
What is something you're worrying about today?

Practice

Take time to bring your issue or worry to God today. Remember, God is there waiting to be with you.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of peace and of discord, and to places known and unknown. Helps us to be at peace, and to spread your peace wherever we are today. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who commanded Peter to put away his sword in the garden. Amen



Providing
A Way





Sarah
Jones

Pray

God of peace, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

— 1 Peter 1:18-21

Read

God's design for redeeming and reconciling the world has always been through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. But this plan,"which for ages past was kept hidden in God" (Eph. 3:9), was only fully revealed in God's perfect time. We have the advantage of looking back in history to the birth of the Savior. But for thousands of years, God's people only heard bits and pieces about the coming Messiah and they had to trust that God would provide a way for their salvation.

Even before the very first humans chose their own way over perfect friendship with their creator, Jesus was chosen to bring restoration to the world. Our hope for any situation, no matter how bleak or discouraging it may be, can rest in the fact that God knows all things and nothing can take him by surprise.

Respond

Reflect

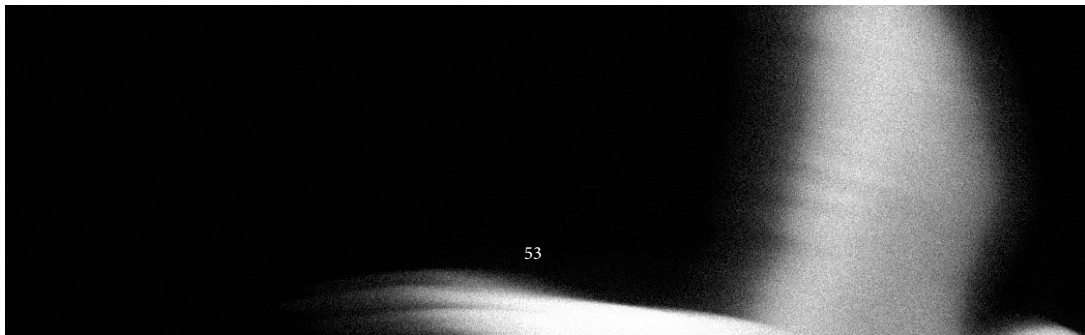
Where in your life do you struggle to trust God's provision?

Practice

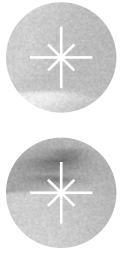
Take some time in prayer to ask God to show you how He is providing for you.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of peace and of discord, and to places known and unknown. Helps us to be at peace, and to spread your peace wherever we are today. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who commanded Peter to put away his sword in the garden. Amen



Participants *in Restoration*



Josiah Shirek & Cameron Lucas

Pray

God of peace, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

In the last days
the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established
  as the highest of the mountains;
it will be exalted above the hills,
  and all nations will stream to it.

Many peoples will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
  to the temple of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
  so that we may walk in his paths."
The law will go out from Zion,
  the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
He will judge between the nations
  and will settle disputes for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into plowshares
  and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
  nor will they train for war anymore.

Come, descendants of Jacob,
  let us walk in the light of the Lord.

— *Isaiah 2:1-5*

Read

If Advent is a season of waiting for God's people, what exactly are we waiting for? This passage begins to paint a picture of the day when everything will be made right, and creation will be restored to the way God intended it. As Jesus followers, we need to keep our eyes fixed on the vision this passage points to because it defines what it means to join God's work in the world.

Isaiah reveals that the victory of Jesus we are so eagerly waiting for isn't just about emerging victorious after battle, but reshaping the very tools we use to take life (swords) into tools used to give life (plows).

The land will be reshaped so the temple (representing God's special, relational presence) will rise above everything else.

People from all over the world will stream to this new mountain and be reshaped into a people who learn a new way of living. This reshaping of values and priorities and actions is what Isaiah means by *"walking in the light of the Lord."*

"Walking in the light of the Lord" is more than just keeping God's rules. It is participation in the divine restoration of all things in Jesus. We are partners, co-laborers, with Jesus in our every day life.

Respond

Reflect

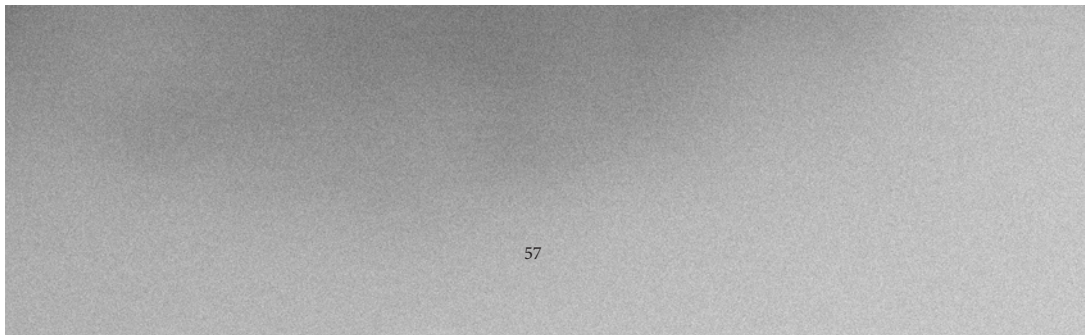
What is one part of your world that you think God wants to reshape to look more like the Kingdom of God?

Practice

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you something you can do today to participate in this peacemaking, restorative work.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of peace and of discord, and to places known and unknown. Helps us to be at peace, and to spread your peace wherever we are today. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who commanded Peter to put away his sword in the garden. Amen



Welcoming *the Outsider*





Josiah Shirek

Pray

God of peace, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep
darkness
a light has dawned.
You have enlarged the nation
and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice
when dividing the plunder.
For as in the day of Midian's defeat,
you have shattered
the yoke that burdens them,
the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor.
Every warrior's boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.
For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his
shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the greatness of his government
and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.

— *Isaiah 9:2-7*

Read

What does it mean for Jesus to be our Prince of Peace?

Jesus brings peace to us internally. In him, we are made right with God and can live at peace with ourselves, knowing we are loved.

Jesus also brings peace externally. In him, all wars, oppression, and injustice will one day end. Although we wait for the day when this will be complete, we get to be a part of that peacemaking every day! This is what it means for us to belong to God's kingdom; we are agents of his peace to the world around us.

In God's kingdom, the more the merrier isn't just a saying...it's reality. Advent isn't just about "our" waiting. The truth is, God has been waiting throughout all of history to see the kingdom of heaven fully established. It was never God's plan to stop with Israel. The heart of our father beats for those not yet included and eagerly awaits the joyful day when all will be reconciled though Jesus!

Inherently, all of us are outsiders who now find ourselves included; orphans welcomed into the family by a loving Father.

What would it look like for us to not embody the posture of one entitled, but of someone who can relate to the outsider?

What's not at peace within you?

Invite Jesus to be your Prince of Peace and reveal his presence in every part of your day.

Where might the Holy Spirit be inviting you to usher peace into someone else's life?

Respond

Reflect

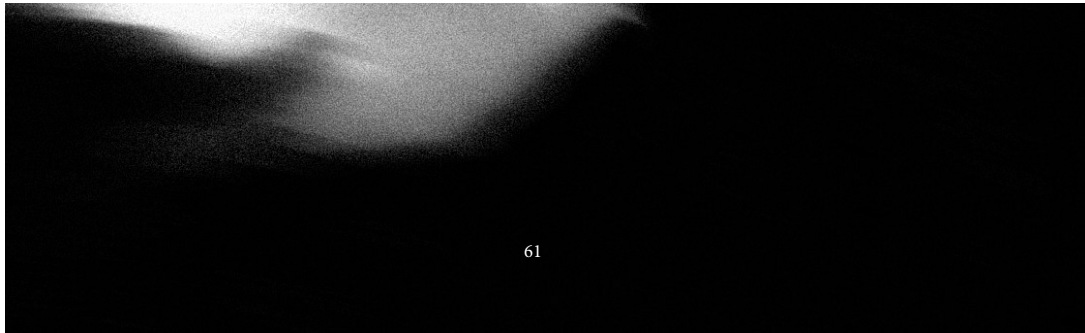
How is God's definition of peace different from the way we usually use the word peace?

Practice

Ask God to lead you toward someone who needs his peace today.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of peace and of discord, and to places known and unknown. Helps us to be at peace, and to spread your peace wherever we are today. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who commanded Peter to put away his sword in the garden. Amen



Participants *in Restoration*





Mac McCarthy

Pray

God of peace, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

A shoot will come up from the stump
of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on
him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of
understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of
the Lord—
and he will delight in the fear of the
Lord.
He will not judge by what he sees with
his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his
ears;
but with righteousness he will judge
the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for
the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod
of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay
the wicked.
Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his
waist.
The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the
goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling
together;
and a little child will lead them.
The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
The infant will play near the cobra's
den,
and the young child will put its hand
into the viper's nest.
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the
knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

— *Isaiah 11:1-10*

Read

Not too long ago I watched a docuseries on bear hunting in Alaska. In one of the episodes a bow hunter stalked a giant grizzly bear, but the grizzly ends up sniffing the hunter out. The hunter went from being on the prey to being the prey. The bear charged and the hunter barely escaped. It was terrifying! My hands are still sweaty!

Isaiah describes a time when animals will exist at peace with one another. The wolf and the lamb. The leopard and the goat. The calf and the lion. Isaiah is painting a picture of the kind of kingdom the promised Messiah will establish. It will be a kingdom of peace, of shalom. A kingdom where every curse is lifted and every division destroyed, where righteousness and faithfulness reign.

Jesus is the promised Messiah who is establishing God's kingdom of peace. As followers of Jesus, we are invited to join God's restorative mission of peace right now.

Respond

Reflect

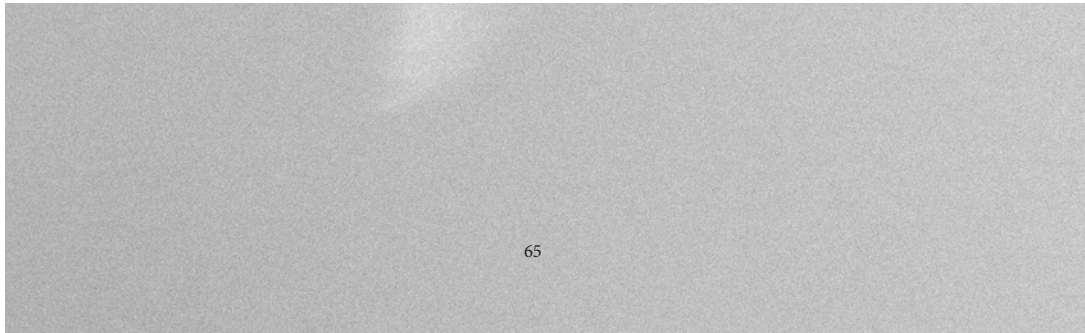
Where do you notice the need for God's peace?

Practice

Find a way to spread God's peace today.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of peace and of discord, and to places known and unknown. Helps us to be at peace, and to spread your peace wherever we are today. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who commanded Peter to put away his sword in the garden. Amen



A Kingdom *to Come*





Cameron Lucas

Pray

God of peace, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

Tell him this is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord. It is he who will build the temple of the Lord, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.'

— *Zechariah 6:12-13*

Read

I'm not very aware of the happenings of the world. I don't get national news updates, pay much attention to politics, or read the local paper. Yet even I know there's a huge amount of injustice in our world. I can't escape the fact that our world is broken in so many horrific and depressing ways.

Zechariah tells us about a man named The Branch who will grow up and build the temple. But he won't just be a builder, he will sit on the throne and be a priest… sounds familiar doesn't it? The book of Hebrews shows us that Jesus is the great priest-king the world has been waiting for. Unlike the priests of any earthly temple though, Jesus' sacrifice was perfect.

Jesus came and ushered in the Kingdom of God. And while it's undeniably here, it's also only a seed of what it will one day be. There is still more to come. Hebrews 10:12-13 says "But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool."

Like Jesus, we still wait for the day that God's Kingdom will completely replace the kingdoms of earth. When Jesus will "be a priest on his throne" and the earth will look exactly the way God wants it to.

Respond

Reflect

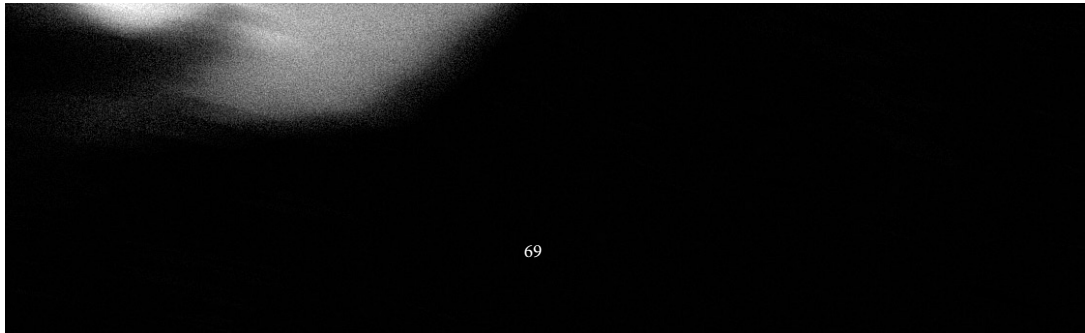
How is the brokenness of the world causing your heart to break this Advent season?

Practice

Ask God how you might be able to participate in His restorative work while you wait for the Kingdom to come in its fullness.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of peace and of discord, and to places known and unknown. Helps us to be at peace, and to spread your peace wherever we are today. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who commanded Peter to put away his sword in the garden. Amen



Rooted
in Peace

Pray

God of peace, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says to all the captives he has exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem: "Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce. Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away! And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare."

— Jeremiah 29:4-7 (NLT)

Hannah
Litwiller

Read

Let's pause and take a closer look at the first line from this passage.

"This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says to all the captives."

What do you imagine the Lord of Heaven's Armies would say to his people taken as captives? I imagine a divine battle plan. A bold, courageous, and cunning plan brimming with military might. This is the Lord of Heaven's Armies we're talking about after all. However, what comes next is startlingly different from my expectations.

First off, the text says, "to all the captives he has exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem." We see that this captivity is part of a divine plan. Ordained captivity is far from what I would expect, but if this is allowed by God there must be some unexpected good that he has planned.

Secondly, the Israelites are informed that the Lord's battle plan within their captivity is for them to... settle in and live normal lives, seeking the peace and prosperity of the very people who took them captive. Far from an act of military might to end their captivity and bring peace, God establishes a radically different idea for peace.

Finally, at the end of the passage God says to pray for Babylon and links the welfare of Babylon and the Israelites together essentially saying "You will grow as they grow." Instead of confrontation or even avoidance, the Lord of Heaven's Armies is prescribing a patient rootedness in this unwanted place where the Israelites find themselves.

Respond

Reflect

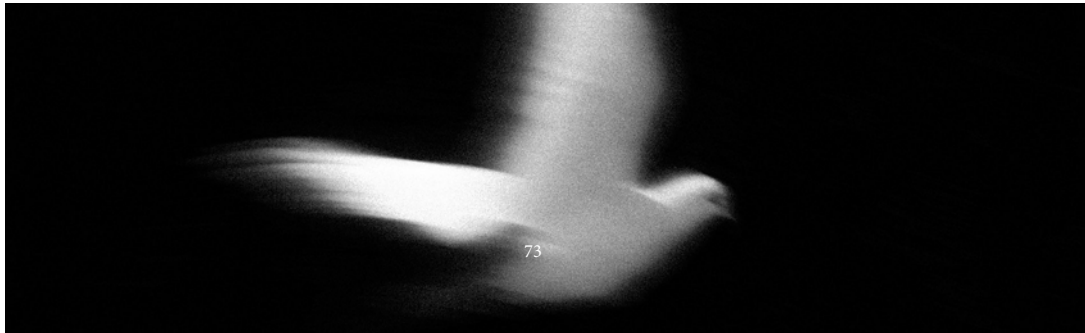
How have you grown in a situation or season that you felt stuck in?

Practice

Ask God how He is wanting to bring peace to your life through being rooted where you are right now.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of peace and of discord, and to places known and unknown. Helps us to be at peace, and to spread your peace wherever we are today. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who commanded Peter to put away his sword in the garden. Amen





Week 3

Joy

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

ISAIAH 12:34

WEEK 3 INTRODUCTION



Fulfilling Joy

As much as Christmas is about family, faith, and togetherness, it sure seems like the main point of Christmas has become getting us to buy more stuff. Everything from decorations that will make our home feel just right (bonus points if you can post it on Instagram) to finding the perfect gifts that will show people just how much we love them.

In these consumeristic impulses we're looking for something that will leave us feeling happy and fulfilled. And it does...for a while. Eventually the technology stops working, the shine wears off of the new thing you just had to have, or the perfect pair of barrel pants goes out of style.

The problem is that no amount of stuff can fill us up the way God can.

Don't get me wrong, most of this stuff is good. But Advent is a time we remember not to settle for good when Jesus has something better.

This week's theme of joy isn't about filling our life up with good things, hoping that the sheer quantity of stuff will fill our souls.

It's about recognizing that the things God wants to give us are better, because he knows what our soul needs more than an algorithm does. It's about trusting that God wants to fill you with joy this Christmas season, and that this joy ultimately comes through Jesus.

Joy Is *A Verb*



Brittany Knuteson

Pray

God of joy, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

The Lord is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?

When the wicked advance against me
to devour me,
it is my enemies and my foes
who will stumble and fall.
Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me,
even then I will be confident.

One thing I ask from the Lord,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord
and to seek him in his temple.
For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.

Then my head will be exalted
above the enemies who surround me;
at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make music to the Lord.

— *Psalm 27:1-6*

Read

I can only imagine how Mary felt leading up to Jesus' birth: exhausted from traveling to Bethlehem, the profound weight of Gabriel's prophecy for her child, the stress of being displaced, having no proper place to give birth, and the overall uncertainty of how everything would play out. If anyone had an excuse to be afraid, doubtful, and anxious, it was Mary. While none of us have been chosen to bear the Son of God, we can all relate to Mary's feelings.

David too was in a season of wrestling between his fears and his faith in Psalms 27. In verse 6, David proclaims: "I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord." Joy isn't a feeling; it is a verb. It's an action and declaration that God is faithful, even when circumstances feel uncertain - even when there is no room at the inn. Like David, Mary trusted God's light to guide her path.

In this Advent season, we too can choose joy in whatever we are waiting on. Each carol sung, candle lit, and prayer whispered can be a joyful offering to the Lord. We can rejoice because Jesus has already come, and he promises to come again.

Lord, teach me to offer you joy this advent season. No matter what earthly experiences I am having, let me see them through the lens of your joy. Take every fear captive and allow me to feel peace from your Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Respond

Reflect

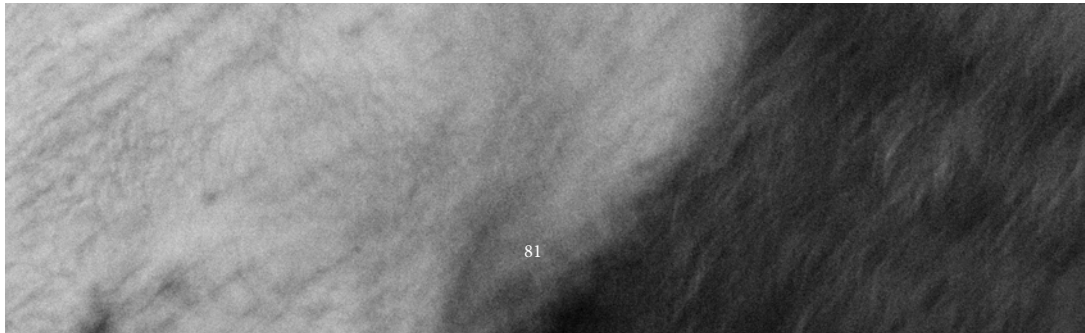
What do you think it means to choose joy?

Practice

Write down a few times in your life where you experienced fear and anxiousness in a situation. Pray over each of those and ask God to show you how he was faithful and present in each one. Proclaim joy over all the ways that he was faithful!

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of joy and of sorrow, and to places known and unknown. Help us have a spirit of joy so that we might be a light and blessing to the people we encounter. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who welcomed people to the table, and was criticized because of how freely he enjoyed life and shared it with others.
Amen



Eyes for *God's Work*



Melanie Hammer

Pray

God of joy, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

And Mary said:
"My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors."

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

— *Luke 1:46-56*

Read

In Mary's hymn, Luke shows us that she is very familiar with God and his work of redeeming the whole world to Himself. She is part of this bigger story. The news that she will be a mother to the Son of God prompts her song, but not to simply celebrate her miraculous fortune. She immediately understands that this baby, this Son, this person, will embody God's redemption and be a radical departure from the culture of power and oppression that dominates her world.

She was certain because of what she had already experienced with God.

She was uncertain because she didn't know how it would happen.

Still, she rejoiced. The pastor and writer, Mimi Dixon, said, "In the uncertainty and suspense of not knowing, we learn to keep our eyes wide open, scanning the horizon of our experience of God's leading."

Respond

Reflect

When did you choose joy even when things felt uncertain?

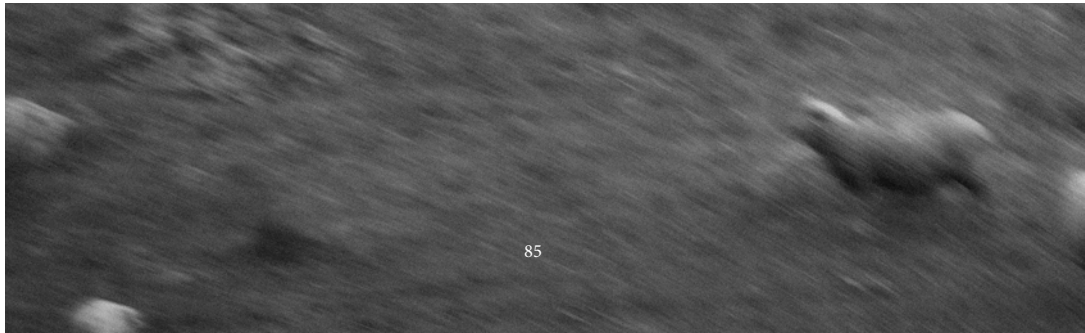
Practice

Name three ways you have experienced God's work of redemption in your world.

Rejoice with God over this and today, keep your eyes wide open for how he is still working.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of joy and of sorrow, and to places known and unknown. Help us have a spirit of joy so that we might be a light and blessing to the people we encounter. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who welcomed people to the table, and was criticized because of how freely he enjoyed life and shared it with others.
Amen



Our Source
Of Joy



Anna
Meister

Pray

God of joy, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

Keep me safe, my God,
for in you I take refuge.

I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord;
apart from you I have no good thing."
I say of the holy people who are in the land,
"They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight."
Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more.
I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods
or take up their names on my lips.

Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup;
you make my lot secure.
The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance.
I will praise the Lord, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.
I keep my eyes always on the Lord.
With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure,
because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,
nor will you let your faithful one see decay.
You make known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

— *Psalm 16*

Read

The Christmas season is the time we celebrate the birth of our savior. This should feel joyous! But often this time of year can feel chaotic and overwhelming. Why?

The world gives us ideas of what the "perfect" Christmas might look like. Our houses should be decorated like a Pottery Barn catalog. We are told to attend the right events so that Christmas feels magical. We must select just the right gift for each person on our list. I could go on. Culture tells us there is goodness and joy in these things so we should seek after them. Now, there is nothing wrong with a beautiful home or a special gift; but if we are trusting in these things to bring us joy we most likely will be disappointed.

In Psalm 16 David shows us a different way. In verses 1-2 he says, "Protect me God, for I take refuge in you. I say to the LORD, you are my Lord; I have no good apart from you." David understands that true goodness is only found in God. He is the source of true joy. Verse 9 says, "Therefore, my heart is glad and my whole being rejoices; my body also rests securely."

What good news! Instead of exhausting ourselves trying to chase what the world tells us is good, we can look to God for rest and be confident that his direction for us is good.

Respond

Reflect

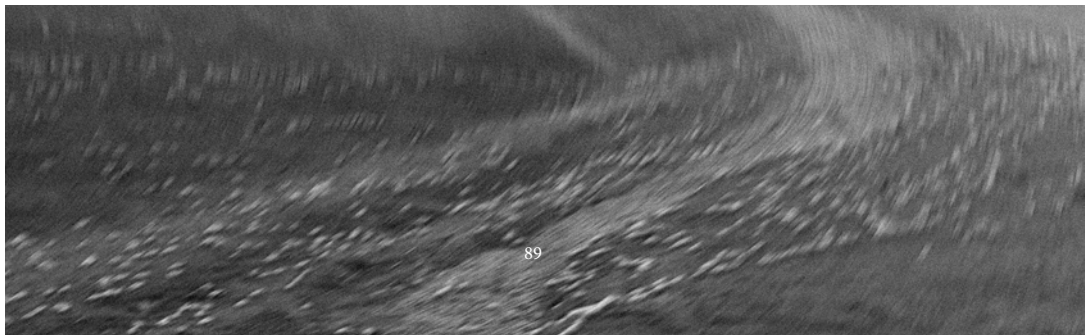
What do you think it means that God is the source of true joy?

Practice

Take time today to rejoice in these truths. Praise God for his goodness and provision, and know that in him we can rest and experience his joy.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of joy and of sorrow, and to places known and unknown. Help us have a spirit of joy so that we might be a light and blessing to the people we encounter. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who welcomed people to the table, and was criticized because of how freely he enjoyed life and shared it with others.
Amen



Hope To A *Broken World*



Cameron Lucas & Katie Ignatowski

Pray

God of joy, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

How beautiful on the mountains
  are the feet of those who bring good news,
who proclaim peace,
  who bring good tidings,
  who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
  "Your God reigns!"
Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices;
  together they shout for joy.
When the Lord returns to Zion,
  they will see it with their own eyes.
Burst into songs of joy together,
  you ruins of Jerusalem,
for the Lord has comforted his people,
  he has redeemed Jerusalem.

— *Isaiah 52:7-9*

Read

Good news can come in many forms. Getting a college acceptance letter, finding a $20 bill, the birth of a baby, hearing a loved one is safe and doing well, a pothole is finally being filled, school is canceled because of snow, someone's bringing their famous cookies to the Christmas party, this year's Black Friday will be better than ever - all of these are pieces of good news we might hear this year.

At the time this passage was written, people didn't have email or smartphones or smartwatches to receive messages. It had to be brought to them by messengers who often traveled long distances to reach them. These messages could either be good news, such as an announcement of the birth of an heir or future king, or bad news, such as defeat in battle.

Isaiah reminds us that worldly good news pales in comparison to the Good News, the best news: that God is redeeming His people.

The Good News that Jesus has redeemed us and invites us into a new way of living in relationship with God, others, and the world is why we celebrate Christmas.

When we live as Christ followers who are on mission with God, we too bring Good News to the world around us. As kingdom-bearers to a broken world, we get to proclaim peace, redemption, and hope. Our context may be different than that of Isaiah, but the need for this Good News remains unchanged.

Respond

Reflect

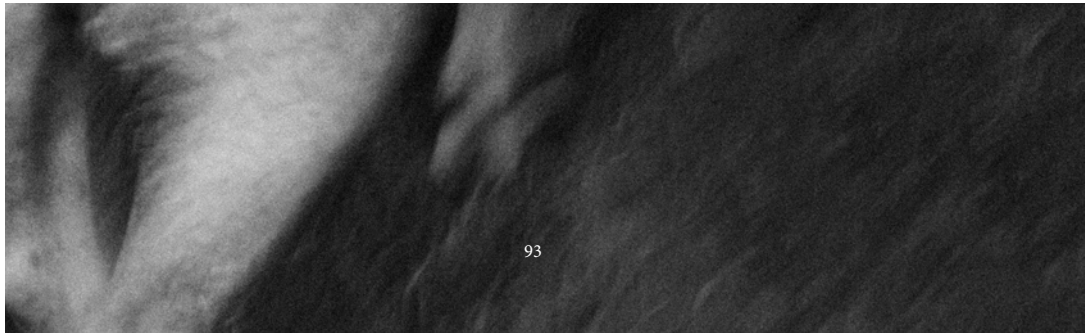
What does the Good News of Jesus mean to you?

Practice

Find a way to embody the Good News to the people around you today.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of joy and of sorrow, and to places known and unknown. Help us have a spirit of joy so that we might be a light and blessing to the people we encounter. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who welcomed people to the table, and was criticized because of how freely he enjoyed life and shared it with others.
Amen



Prepare
The Way



Margo
Fieseler

Pray

God of joy, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch.
The nations will see your vindication,
and all kings your glory;
you will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.

Pass through, pass through the gates!
Prepare the way for the people.
Build up, build up the highway!
Remove the stones.
Raise a banner for the nations.

The Lord has made proclamation
to the ends of the earth:
"Say to Daughter Zion,
'See, your Savior comes!
See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.'"

— *Isaiah 62:1-2, 10-11*

Read

What a proclamation—a notification—a pronouncement—from the mouth of God through the mouth of the prophet, Isaiah. Now everyone knows! The word is out! The invitation has been extended!

The procession of God's righteousness has come forth and the shepherds, wise men, apostles, and disciples will actually witness the Lord's message that has been sent to every land, "Look, your Savior is coming."

And 2800 years after Isaiah spoke God's message, we continue to celebrate the Savior's coming! We call it Christmas. The Good News of Jesus Christ—the baby born to die so you and I might live!

So when we personally accept the Savior, Jesus, we then have the incredible privilege of inviting others to join us in the journey of real hope, joy and peace with God. The Lord says, "Prepare the highway for my people to return! Smooth out the road; pull out the boulders; raise a flag for all the nations to see."

What are we waiting for? We get to share the Best News Ever—the Savior has come and he brings his reward with him! Hallelujah!

Respond

Reflect

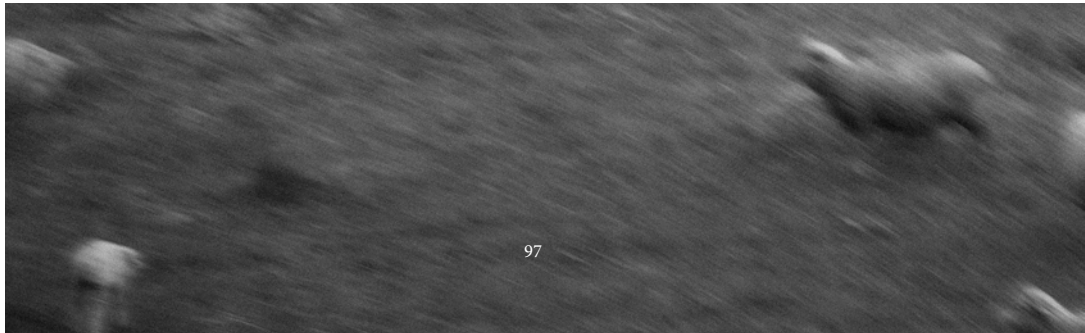
How would you explain the Good News of Jesus to someone?

Practice

Find a way to share the Good News of Jesus today.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of joy and of sorrow, and to places known and unknown. Help us have a spirit of joy so that we might be a light and blessing to the people we encounter. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who welcomed people to the table, and was criticized because of how freely he enjoyed life and shared it with others.
Amen



He Sees *Your Battles*



Pattie Burns

Pray

God of joy, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

Sing, Daughter Zion;
shout aloud, Israel!
Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,
Daughter Jerusalem!
The Lord has taken away your punishment,
he has turned back your enemy.
The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you;
never again will you fear any harm.
On that day
they will say to Jerusalem,
"Do not fear, Zion;
do not let your hands hang limp.
The Lord your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing."

— *Zephaniah 3:14-17*

Read

At times I find myself a bit confused in the pages of the Old Testament. The frequent battles and calls for war and vengeance feel foreign and hard to understand. The description of God being a "mighty warrior" feels worlds apart from the Jesus I tend to stay close to in the pages of the New Testament. Jesus, who is our Prince of Peace, who arrives as an infant, who lays down his life, and who breaks hearts open with his words of life and peace instead of a sword.

Here in Zephaniah, we see signposts, hints of Jesus - the coming King. He is there, pointing to a new way of being in this world. He is a king who will lay down his life for his people. A comforting king. A rejoicing king. A king who sings over his people.

God sees all of our battles. There are very real wars being fought in our world. But also, day in and day out, there are battles big and small, seen and unseen, that effect everyone; the relational rift with a loved one, the bills that go unpaid one more month, another agonizing day waiting for a diagnosis, the test you need to pass, one more hour of therapy, one more morning waking up saying you're not going to do (fill in the blank) again.

Not a single one goes unnoticed. The Lord your God is in it with you. He gathers you in, he rejoices over you.

Respond

Reflect

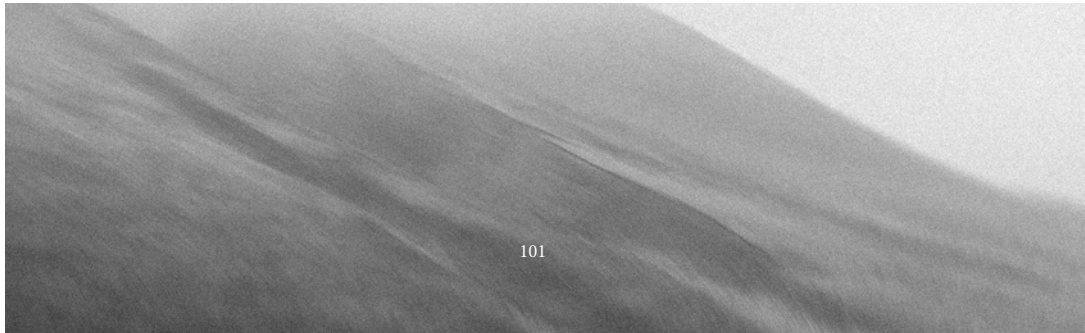
Where are you struggling to live into joy?

Practice

Spend time with God sharing your struggles and asking for his help.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of joy and of sorrow, and to places known and unknown. Help us have a spirit of joy so that we might be a light and blessing to the people we encounter. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who welcomed people to the table, and was criticized because of how freely he enjoyed life and shared it with others.
Amen



Present
In Pain



Anna
Meister

Pray

God of joy, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

— *James 1:2-5*

Read

Have you ever witnessed someone who seems to radiate joy, even in the midst of struggle? It can be hard to comprehend. During my great aunt Eve's battle with cancer, she sent emails updating our family on her health. She reported on the terrible realities of how the disease affected her. But mostly, her emails were filled with gratitude. Gratitude for her patient husband, family visits, and phone calls. Even gratitude for being able to eat a few bites of Thanksgiving dinner. She would always give praise to God. I often wondered how someone so sick could have such a beautiful, joy-filled outlook.

Reflecting on Eve's journey, I see how she lifted her eyes to the Lord. She had reason to be joyful despite this horrible ordeal because she knew and trusted in God. She knew he loved her, and she recognized his goodness and blessing even in her suffering. She knew he didn't cause her pain and that he wanted her healthy and whole. Her joy wasn't dependent on her circumstances because her hope was in the Lord.

No one enjoys suffering; and I don't believe James is telling us to feel happy about our trials. My aunt wasn't saying, "Thank you, God, for this cancer"— of course not. It's okay to grieve your circumstances and to be honest with God about your hurt, frustration, and pain. In fact, He welcomes your lament. Whatever you might be going through, remember that God loves you. He doesn't cause your pain, but he is there with you in it.

Respond

Reflect

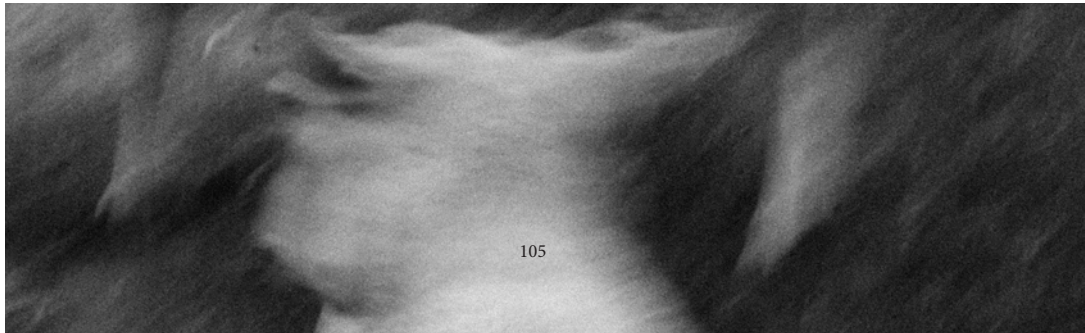
What can you praise God for in your life today?

Practice

As you go about your day look around and pay attention to what you can praise God for…and then do it!

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of joy and of sorrow, and to places known and unknown. Help us have a spirit of joy so that we might be a light and blessing to the people we encounter. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who welcomed people to the table, and was criticized because of how freely he enjoyed life and shared it with others.
Amen





Week 4

Love

And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

LUKE 2:12

WEEK 4 INTRODUCTION



Moved By Love

Christmas can become a very selfish holiday, focused on what we want or what we think will make the "perfect" Christmas. It can also become a season filled with 'selfless' hustling to try and keep other people happy that ultimately leads to exhaustion and resentment. Both extremes fall short of what Christmas actually represents: love.

The Advent season ends with the theme of love, because love is what this whole thing is all about. Love is why Jesus came in the first place. Love is meant to be the focus of our whole life. However, love is not something we can earn or buy, it's something we receive.

Advent reminds us that it's about receiving God's love for us. The baffling love that would lead Jesus to leave heaven and come to earth and draw near to us. Then allowing that same love to bleed out into all of our interactions. To love and serve the people in our world with the same type of love God freely extends towards us in Jesus.

Sufficient
To Sustain



Katie
Ignatowski

Pray

God of love, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

Yet this I call to mind
and therefore I have hope:

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."

— *Lamentations 3:21-24*

Read

Every fall our garden ends up with more tomatoes, zucchini, and lettuce than we can use. One garden phrase I learned recently was 'cut-and-come-again', referring to vegetables or flowers that grow back after you cut them. So whenever I go to pick lettuce for my salad or other dish, I love knowing that it will grow back by the time I need it again.

Like my 'cut-and-come-again' lettuce, God's mercies are continually renewing. Lamentations tells us that his mercies are new every morning, that we can never outuse his mercy. Advent reminds us that no matter what this past year brought, no matter how far we feel we've strayed from God, no matter how much we feel like we've used up our second chances, God will always be waiting for us to turn back to him. There is nothing we can do that will make him turn his back on us, nowhere we can go that is out of reach of his mercy.

Advent is the perfect picture of how great God's love for us truly is. That he would choose to inhabit this life as a living, breathing, human being who would endure all the struggles of humanity and would overcome them. It's because of his great love – a love that overcomes evil – a love that conquers fear – a love that claims victory over death – that we are not consumed.

Advent allows us to rest in the fact that his mercies are sufficient to sustain us through whatever tried to beat us down in the past year, and they're sufficient to carry us through whatever comes our way in the next.

Respond

Reflect

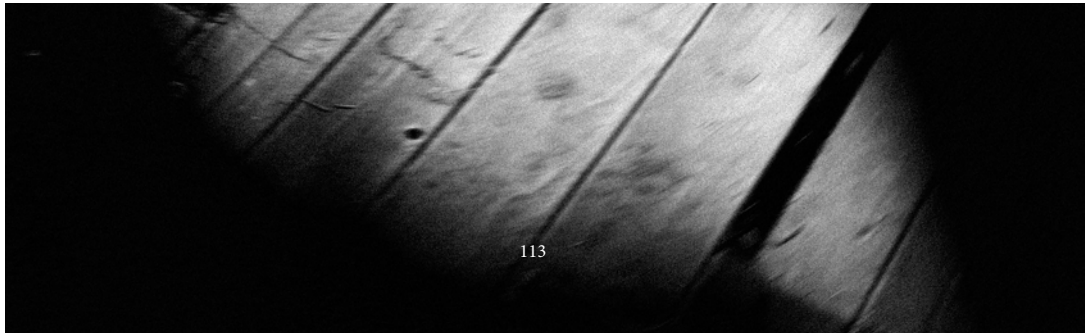
What do you think it means that God's love is 'new every morning'?

Practice

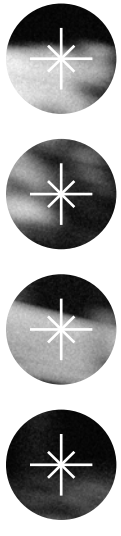
As you go about your day, meditate on the thought that every day, God's mercy is fresh and new, endless in supply.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of love and of hate, and to places known and unknown. Help us to know the shining light of your love and reflect it to the people we see today. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who loved generously across all human barriers and borders.
Amen



Love That *Transforms*



Josie McCarthy

Pray

God of love, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

You who bring good news to Zion,
go up on a high mountain.
You who bring good news to Jerusalem,
lift up your voice with a shout,
lift it up, do not be afraid;
say to the towns of Judah,
"Here is your God!"
See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power,
and he rules with a mighty arm.
See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.
He tends his flock like a shepherd:
He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.

— *Isaiah 40:9-11*

Read

In weightlifting we use the term "Core to Extremity." It's this concept that strength comes from the center of our body. The stronger your core is, the more weight you can lift. You may be bigger and taller than the next person, but that doesn't necessarily mean that you are more powerful.

I think this illustrates a more accurate view of power than we are accustomed to. Isaiah talks about how the promised Messiah will come with power saturated in love. Like a shepherd to his sheep, he will tend to them with care. He will provide for them and pay particular attention to those who are most vulnerable. He will gather them in his arms and carry them close to his heart.

Earthly power comes through empire, but God's power comes with a love that transforms and restores us from the inside out.

Respond

Reflect

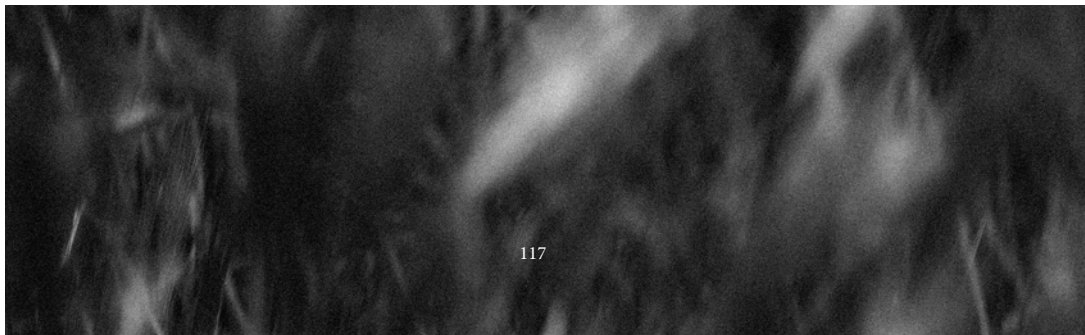
How do you think about power?

Practice

Spend some time repenting of your desire for earthly power and embrace the God who wields his power with love.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of love and of hate, and to places known and unknown. Help us to know the shining light of your love and reflect it to the people we see today. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who loved generously across all human barriers and borders.
Amen



He Sees *Our Heart*



Pattie Burns

Pray

God of love, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

Samuel did what the Lord said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, "Do you come in peace?"

Samuel replied, "Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord."

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

— 1 Samuel 16:4–7

Read

The Lord looks at the heart. What would it be like to see and fully understand the contents of someone's heart? God holds the truth of every second of our life; all that has been done to us, and all that we have done to others, failures and accomplishments, joys and heartbreaks, trauma and happiness, and every secret that we've never spoken out loud. He knows who we really are.

People look at the outward appearance. We make assumptions and form all types of judgments within seconds of looking at someone for the first time. Physical appearance informs who we are attracted to, vote for, hire, choose as friends, or pick to be on our team in gym class. It is the way of the world and our natural inclination as people. We look at people and think we know who they are.

The Lord does not look at the things people look at.

Respond

Reflect

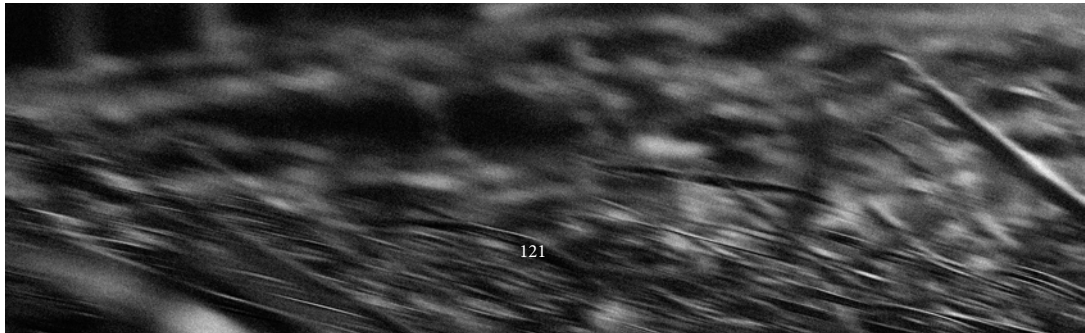
Who do you have a difficult time showing Godly love to?

Practice

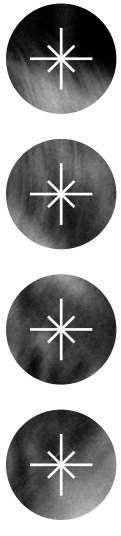
Spend time praying that God would help you see people the way he sees them.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of love and of hate, and to places known and unknown. Help us to know the shining light of your love and reflect it to the people we see today. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who loved generously across all human barriers and borders.
Amen



Love
Revealed



Katie
Ignatowski

Pray

God of love, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

— John 3:16-17

Read

This passage was the first Scripture I ever memorized. But I've heard it so many times that I can easily fail to grasp the depth of what it's saying.

For God so loved the world...

The very thing we celebrate at Advent—the birth of Jesus—was ultimately a demonstration of God's love for his people. God's heart is for the world. He longs to see the lost found, the broken restored, the wounded redeemed. And the way he brings about this redemption is through Jesus.

Advent tells us that God's love doesn't remain distant or abstract. It takes on flesh. The eternal Son steps into the world as a fragile child, entering our mess and our pain. The manger shows us a God who doesn't shy away from suffering but moves toward it in love.

Jesus gives us the perfect picture of God's love. He lived a self-sacrificial life serving others. He not only endured a cross-shaped death—he lived a cross-shaped life. Every act of healing, every word of truth, every expression of compassion pointed to the fullness of God's love. And in the end, he bore the burden of sin, darkness, and oppression in order that we might share in his life and victory forever.

John reminds us that God's mission in sending Jesus was not condemnation but salvation. At Advent we remember: God came near, not to condemn us but to rescue us, not to shame us but to redeem us, not to reject us but to love us into life.

God's love is perfectly revealed in Jesus.

Respond

Reflect

How is God's love better than the love we see in our world?

Practice

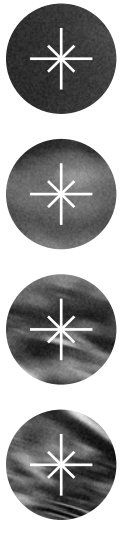
Spend a few moments thanking God for his indescribable love that compelled him to send Jesus, our Savior.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of love and of hate, and to places known and unknown. Help us to know the shining light of your love and reflect it to the people we see today. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who loved generously across all human barriers and borders.
Amen



God's Love *Is Faithful*



Sarah Jones

Pray

God of love, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

I will sing of the Lord's great love forever;
with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known
through all generations.
I will declare that your love stands firm forever,
that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself.
You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to David my servant,
'I will establish your line forever
and make your throne firm through all generations.'"

— *Psalm 89:1-4*

Read

These verses tell us that God's love is faithful. Faithful is defined as "steady in allegiance or affection; loyal; constant, reliable, and trusted."

Faithfulness seems rare these days. When the focus of our culture is looking out for yourself and doing what's best for you, it's easy for people to justify leaving difficult relationships behind or moving on quickly from a challenging situation. Sometimes it can feel like we're begging for people's loyalty and that we could lose their affection at any moment with one wrong move.

But God's love is steady. God's love is constant. God's love "stands firm forever." Have you ever thought about how long forever is? When I try to dwell on the idea of eternity, it makes my brain hurt. But God has always had an eye on eternity. He worked through history to bring about the King of Kings, the Savior of the world.

One of King David's descendants was Jesus, who is God in the flesh. Jesus tells us in John 14:9 that, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." And Hebrews 1:3 says, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word."

Jesus shows us God's character. God loves you the way Jesus loves people.

Respond

Reflect

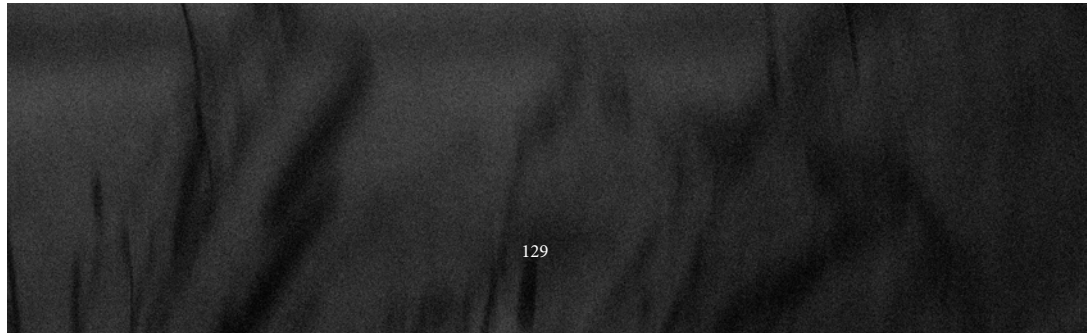
Why is faithfulness an important part of love?

Practice

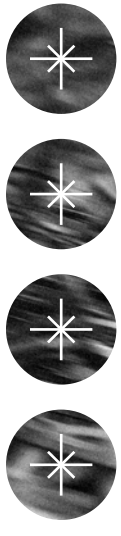
Think of a time when you felt undeserving of God's love. Now, take a few minutes for some imaginative prayer. Using the description of God's love from these verses, and taking what you know about Jesus, imagine God's posture toward you during that time.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of love and of hate, and to places known and unknown. Help us to know the shining light of your love and reflect it to the people we see today. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who loved generously across all human barriers and borders.
Amen



The Last *Word*



Mac McCarthy

Pray

God of love, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

"Cursed are you above all livestock
and all wild animals!
You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.
And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and
hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel."

— *Genesis 3:8-15*

Read

A couple weeks ago my son brought home a math test with a pretty low score. My initial response was to get intense and demand an explanation. This is not acceptable work and you can do better! My wife responded differently. She gave him a hug and told him it would be okay. Facepalm.

The first thing God says after Adam and Eve sinned was "Where are you?" This question is just one word in Hebrew *(ayyekkah)*, but is packed with theological truth. God comes looking for us when we sin. God welcomes us to confess our wrongdoing. God desires to forgive us and restore us.

God goes looking for Adam and Eve with a desire to give them a hug and tell them it would be okay. Yes, their actions would bring negative consequences. But God's love would get the last word. Love would defeat the serpent.

Respond

Reflect

How do you imagine God relates to you when you make a mistake?

Practice

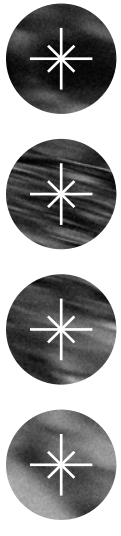
Bring a mistake or failure to God in prayer. Imagine Jesus giving you a hug and telling you it's going to be okay.

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of love and of hate, and to places known and unknown. Help us to know the shining light of your love and reflect it to the people we see today. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who loved generously across all human barriers and borders.
Amen



God's Love *Is Faithful*



David Pritchard

Pray

God of love, we put ourselves before you in this moment with an open heart.
Quiet the restlessness of our minds and bodies.
Help us hear your voice through your Word and church.
Fill us with courage so that we might live more fully into your Kingdom today.
Amen.

Scripture

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

— 1 John 3:16-18

Read

We are so privileged to have such a clear example of what love is. Jesus Christ's sacrifice is so vivid it cuts through our world of self-focus, allowing God to fill us with love for others. He helps us see how we can use what he has given us materially and spiritually as tools to meet the needs of others.

We demonstrate love for others by serving people with our gifts and talents. How rich that love is when it involves sacrifice on our part! We then know it cost us something, which reminds us that it cost Jesus everything.

That is how we put sacrifice into practice, which in time becomes a habit. All of this causes a ripple effect that multiplies Jesus' initial sacrifice a hundredfold and more. Jesus inspires me, through the Holy Spirit, to give gifts from my heart when I see my brothers or sisters in need. So how can I start?

Consider stepping into moments of prayer with someone as soon as you hear of a need. Our words can be simple and few. No one is an expert. Today, when you meet someone in need, instead of feeling pity, look at your own life and resources and see what you can offer to help.

This is a gift that keeps on giving...and giving...and giving. This gift of love, coupled with God's help, is an effective sacrificial practice which glorifies Jesus' own sacrifice for each of us.

Respond

Reflect

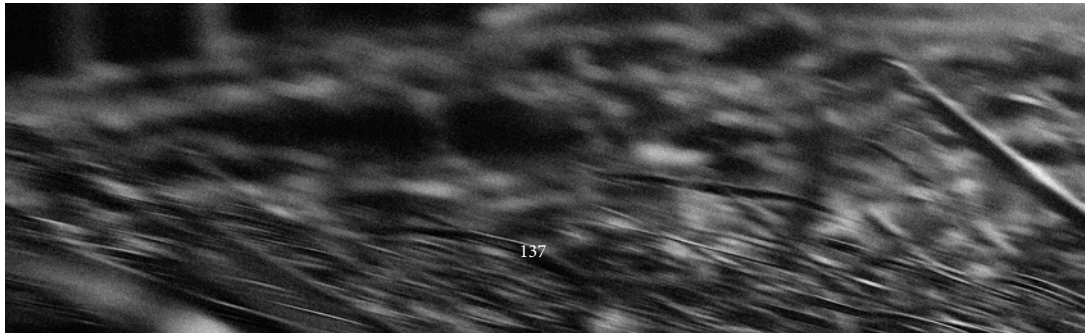
Why is it important to think of love as an action instead of just a feeling?

Practice

Today, when you meet someone in need, instead of saying, "I'll pray for you," offer, "Can I pray for you right here and now?"

Pray

O Lord, you who go before us and behind us, be with us this day, as we travel to work and to school, to places of love and of hate, and to places known and unknown. Help us to know the shining light of your love and reflect it to the people we see today. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the One who loved generously across all human barriers and borders.
Amen





Christmas Day

Introduction

by Josie McCarthy

The birth narrative is one of my very favorite passages in the Bible. What intrigues me most is the gentle and humble way that Christ arrives to rescue the world. He is born as a helpless infant to a family that isn't well known and is without great means. He isn't born in a palace, but in a barn where animals live. The first people that hear the good news are a bunch of shepherds who didn't have privilege, wealth, or status. Jesus' humble entry is precisely what highlights the fact that he came to rescue *all* people.

No matter what your standing in society, what job you have, whether you have friends in high or low places, what you have accomplished or failed to accomplish this year, Jesus came for you!

So today allow God's transforming light to reach all of the dark and dusty corners of your heart and embrace the God who moves towards you in love.

As you read the Christmas Story on the following page, try to imagine yourself in the story. Imagine yourself with Mary and Joseph as they try to care for this baby they've been entrusted with. Imagine yourself beside the shepherds as angels appear to them. Imagine the thoughts and emotions you would experience as you peer into a dimly lit manger, seeing and hearing for the first time a baby who is to be the Savior of all.

Sit and reflect on the beauty and wonder of a God who continually chooses to be near and with you.

The Christmas Story

Luke 2:1-20

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Reflection

by Mac McCarthy

The phrase "Love Came Down at Christmas" is the opening line of a poem by the English poet Christina Rossetti (1830–1894). Her poem was later set to music and has become a well-known hymn, celebrating the startling truth that God, who is self-giving love, came down at Christmas in the person of Jesus.

Jesus, who is Immanuel (God with us), shows us what true love looks like. When love comes down at Christmas, it doesn't arrive among the powerful or important, but among the lowly and forgotten — those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The kind of love Jesus reveals, far from being sentimental or sappy, is subversive and disruptive: it challenges those in power, upends the value system the world runs on, and embodies a radically different way to live.

The first followers of Jesus were called "followers of the Way" (Acts 9:2). Following Jesus requires following the way of Jesus, which is the way of love. And, just like Jesus, our love is meant to be gritty and tenacious, bold and courageous. We are called to turn the world's value system upside down by embodying a different way — a way that challenges power by going to the margins with self-giving love.

Who are the marginalized and forgotten around you?

How does Jesus' love challenge common conceptions of love today?

In what ways can you follow the way of Jesus by loving like Jesus today?



Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love Divine,
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and Angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,
Love Incarnate, Love Divine,
Worship we our Jesus,
But wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token,
Love be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.

"LOVE CAME DOWN AT CHRISTMAS"
BY CHRISTINA ROSSETTI (1830-1894)

