



Advent Guide

HOPE
PEACE
JOY
LOVE



Passion Creek
CHURCH

Advent Guide, 2024

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For permission requests, contact the author at caleb@passioncreek.church

This content was written by Pastor Caleb Martinez.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. The Story of Advent	4
2. How to Meditate on Scripture	6
3. All Readings	8
4. Week 1: Hope	10
Practice Generosity	12
Daily Readings	14
5. Week 2: Peace	21
Practice Peacemaking	23
Daily Readings	25
6. Week 3: Joy	32
Practice Gratitude	34
Daily Readings	35
7. Week 4: Love	42
Practice Hospitality	44
Daily Readings	46

THE STORY OF ADVENT

You and I live in the middle of an unfinished story that we know the ending to.

God will one day right all the world's wrongs, meet all peoples' needs, and restore his good creation back to the way it was meant to be. But knowing the end of the story doesn't make waiting for it any easier. The tension we live with, holding both future hope and present reality in both hands, reminds us that though the end is coming, we're not there yet. Evil, death, sickness, and tragedy are all reminders that the world is not yet as it should be. And yet, in the midst of this waiting, we celebrate.

Advent, from the Latin word meaning “arrival,” is a season of both waiting and celebration.

We longingly await Jesus' second coming, when God will right all the world's wrongs and put the world back to its original state by bringing together heaven and earth in full. Our deepest longings will be fulfilled, all of our prayers answered, and the malaise of living in the middle of an unfinished story will be cured. Because of this future hope, Advent is also a time of celebration. We joyfully orient our lives around the end of the story, keeping God's future promises at the front of our minds. We gather with friends and family, share meals, give generously, play, and laugh, all as a foretaste of our future, when Jesus will come again to fully rule and reign.

Christmastime is a season of joy as we reflect on the reality that God has come into the middle of the story with us.

But as beautiful, joyful, stressful, and restful as the Advent season can be, it's easy to let it slip by. To help you make the most of this season, we've created this Advent guide. In this booklet you'll find daily scripture readings as well as a suggested list of practices to help you make the most of this season. Each week and daily reading will reflect the four classic themes of Advent: Hope, Peace, Love, and Joy. We hope you're able to make the most of this Christmas season by reorienting yourself around the end of God's story.

HOW TO MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Each day in this guide has a reading that relates to the theme of the week. These readings are short and selected specifically to help you slow down, reflect, and reorient yourself around the themes of Advent.

To help you make the most of these readings, here's a simple template to guide you in meditating on (hagah) scripture:

1. Prepare to meet with God.

Turn your phone off. Get in a quiet, solitary place. Take a few moments to still yourself before God. Quiet your mind, heart, and body by taking a few deep breaths and inviting the Holy Spirit to guide you.

2. Read the passage slowly and carefully.

Take your time, and then read it again. Get a general feel for the passage, the main ideas it is communicating, and the flow of thought. As you move through the text, pay close attention to what words, phrases, and ideas draw your attention in unique ways.

3. Reflect.

Read through the text again, this time pausing at each word or phrase that stood out to you before. Allow the text to connect with you personally.

4. Respond.

Talk to God about what you're reflecting on. How are you responding to the promptings from the Spirit through God's word? Where do you feel joyful, resistant, or hesitant to obey God's direction?

5. Rest.

Before ending this practice and moving on with your day, pause for a moment to sit quietly in the presence of God.

DAILY READINGS

Week 1

- Sunday 12/1 — Psalm 33
- Monday 12/2 — Hebrews 6:13-20
- Tuesday 12/3 — Romans 5:1-11
- Wednesday 12/4 — 2 Corinthians 1:1-11
- Thursday 12/5 — Luke 1:46-55
- Friday 12/6 — Isaiah 40:25-31
- Saturday 12/7 — Jeremiah 29:4-14

Week 2

- Sunday 12/8 — Isaiah 9:2-7
- Monday 12/9 — John 20:19-23
- Tuesday 12/10 — Psalm 4
- Wednesday 12/11 — Philippians 4:4-20
- Thursday 12/12 — 2 Corinthians 5:16-21
- Friday 12/13 — Luke 2:1-20
- Saturday 12/14 — John 16:25-33

DAILY READINGS

Week 3

- Sunday 12/15 — Psalm 97
- Monday 12/16 — James 1:1-18
- Tuesday 12/17 — Psalm 16
- Wednesday 12/18 — Revelation 21:1-7
- Thursday 12/19 — 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28
- Friday 12/20 — 1 Chronicles 17:16-27
- Saturday 12/21 — Romans 8:31-39

Week 4

- Sunday 12/22 — Isaiah 40:1-11
- Monday 12/23 — 1 John 4:7-21
- Tuesday 12/24 — John 1:1-18
- Christmas Day 12/25 — Matthew 1:18-24
- Thursday 12/26 — 1 Corinthians 13:1-13
- Friday 12/27 — Jeremiah 31:1-14
- Saturday 12/28 — John 15:1-17

WEEK ONE: HOPE

Hope seems like one of those words that Christians throw around as a complacent response to tragedy, or a cliché answer to questions about suffering. It seems more like a meaningless placeholder than a value with substance. And most of us, if we're honest, have lived long enough with both despair and disappointment to know that things don't always get better. Sometimes God lets us down. Our expectations aren't met. What we thought would happen never happens, and life isn't what we had hoped it would be.

So we settle for life as it is and put our vague expectations of a better future in God's hands. But that's not hope.

There's a difference between hope and optimism. Optimism is undirected emotion with a vague foundation. It's a way of seeing and thinking that points us in a general direction of positivity, but with no real target. We "hope" for things like a better job, good weather, or just a normal day. Optimism has its place, but it can't withstand the weight of disappointment and despair. But hope can. Hope is concrete. Hope has a foundation in something. Even better, hope has a foundation in Someone. To hope is to center ourselves on both the presence and promise of God rather than on the despair and disappointment of our everyday circumstances.

Jesus came into our world offering hope.

He invited everyone he interacted with to live their lives focused on a future when his Kingdom would fully clash with earth, and when all of the day's troubles would be no more.

To have hope is to keep this future at the forefront of our minds.

To hope is to say, in the midst of disappointment and despair, that this is not the end of the story. We have hope when we point ourselves and others to God's promise that one day, all needs will be met, all pain will be resolved, and every tear will be wiped away.

Reflection

1. What do you think of when you hear the word "hope"?
2. What are some things you find yourself waiting for in this season of your life?
3. What grief are you holding before God this season?
4. What are some things that currently give you hope?
Are these things blessings from God, or idols used for escape?
5. How might God be inviting you to redirect your hope back toward him in this season of waiting?

PRACTICE GENEROSITY

One simple way to put hope into practice is to participate in generosity.

To give our time, our resources, our energy, and our attention to others is to participate in God's redeeming of our broken world today. To deny the impulse we all carry to hoard and receive more for ourselves is to rebel against the natural grain of the world and point, with our resources, to the future where God will provide for all in need.

If you've never practiced generosity, consider beginning sporadically:

- Give financially to a charity or organization that meets needs and blesses others this Advent season.
- Pay for the meal of a family or someone random the next time you eat out or grab coffee.
- Commit to carrying around spare cash in order to quickly bless the next person in need that you see.

If you already give sporadically, consider giving systematically:

- Begin tithing (giving 10% of your income/paycheck) or give a financial gift to your local church as a way to support the work of the ministry.
- Set up recurring or automatic giving to your local church and/or to a charitable organization.
- Give your time and energy by committing to serving regularly at your local church or with a charitable organization.

If you already give sporadically and systematically, consider these ways to start giving sacrificially:

- Bless someone you know who's in a season of loss or suffering by buying them groceries or dropping off a gift.
- Identify one or a few items you don't need and either give them away or sell them and use the money to bless someone else.
- As you do your Christmas shopping, consider additional ways to "give until it hurts" meaning, give in a way that requires just a bit of sacrifice on your part.

Monday, December 2nd
Reading: Hebrews 6:13-20

Thursday, December 5th
Reading: Luke 1:46-55

WEEK TWO: PEACE

“Peace on earth, and good will toward everyone!”

This is the message the angels give to a small group of scared shepherds huddled together in the middle of the night somewhere in a Bethlehem field. It's an odd thing to say, because much like our world today, Bethlehem in the first century was full of everything but peace.

For most of us, peace is defined by absence.

To have peace is to not have chaos, fear, disorder, or pain. We search for inner peace by removing anxiety, worry, and fear. And we lose our sense of peace when we experience conflict or trouble.

But the Bible has a radically different, far more holistic, and utterly beautiful definition of peace than we do.

In fact, you could summarize the story of the Bible as a story about peace. Ultimately, peace isn't an idea or a concept. It's not the absence of chaos, conflict, or pain. Peace, according to the Biblical story, is the presence of a Person.

In Isaiah 9 Jesus is called the Prince of Peace, and in Matthew's gospel, he's called Immanuel, which means "God is with us." Peace then, isn't defined by the absence of chaos, but rather by God's presence with us in the midst of it. That Jesus brings peace doesn't mean he provides a way for us out of this world from a distance, peace via a lifeline. It means that God himself comes to be with us in the midst of

the chaos to calm our fear and remind us of who he is.

And when we celebrate Christmas we're not just singing songs to little baby Jesus. We're rejoicing with the angels, prophets, and saints, and we're declaring that God has come to take back creation and give us wholeness again. And when we read that the angels proclaim peace on earth to the shepherds somewhere in a Bethlehem field, we aren't reading about the eradication of all war, the end of all conflict, or the solution to global chaos.

But we are reading about the presence of Peace himself, Jesus, in our midst.

Reflection

1. What do you think of when you hear the word "peace"?
2. What chaos, pain, and conflict in your life are you currently seeking peace from?
3. What do you cling to in times of chaos or trouble?
4. How might God be inviting you to orient yourself around his presence with you this Advent season?

PRACTICE PEACEMAKING

After his resurrection, when Jesus appears to his disciples, the first thing he says to them is “shalom!” meaning “peace!” This word is both a declaration and a command. On one level, Jesus is simply declaring that through his death and resurrection, peace with God and with each other are possible. But on a deeper level, Jesus is sending out his disciples to go and spread peace by becoming peacemakers (John 20:21-22). Here are ways to practice peacemaking this week:

Peace with God

Practice breath prayers throughout your day. These are short prayers that help you reorient yourself around the peace and presence of God with you. Here are some examples:

- Lord, help me.
- Jesus, give me rest.
- Come, Holy Spirit.
- Here I am, Lord.

End your day by praying The Examen, an ancient prayer aimed at helping you end each day at rest and in peace with God and others:

- Reflect on your day by reviewing everything you did and everyone you talked to. Where did you feel God’s presence the most this day?
- Repent from any sins that God brings to mind as you think back on your day. Is there anyone you need to apologize to or make amends with?
- Rejoice and rest in the reality that you have freedom from sin and peace with God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Peace with others

Invite someone who you've lost connection with, have conflict with, or have a broken relationship with out for a meal.

- Don't try to address or fix any past hurt or conflict.
- Simply enjoy their presence and relationship.

Use the holiday season to practice forgiving someone you're holding bitterness or hurt against:

- Identify the hurt by naming it specifically.
- Meditate on the gospel and the fact that just as you've been sinned against, you've also sinned against God who still loves and forgives you.
- Commit to forgiving the person by releasing all expectations and judgment from them.
- Continue forgiving when emotions and expressions of hurt come up in your memory as you interact with or think about this person.

Sunday, December 8th
Reading: Isaiah 26:1-6

WEEK THREE: JOY

Joy is kind of like hope. When we read the command to “rejoice in all things” in the Bible (1 Thess. 5:16), it’s about as encouraging as a Hallmark card. What we tend to read instead is, “try to make the most of things, look on the bright side, and stay positive!” Easier said than done.

But like hope, this type of vague optimism isn’t joy.

When the Bible describes joy, it’s not a superficial suppression of reality. We’re not commanded to turn a blind eye to the pain, suffering, and injustice in the world. In fact, in the Bible, joy isn’t a sentiment at all. It’s not a feeling, a mantra, or a passive emotion of the heart.

Joy is an intentional act of the will.

To have joy is to intentionally orient ourselves, our whole selves, around the reality that Jesus will come again and to live as if this is really true. Joy is something that can be cultivated. It’s not a momentary feeling of happiness, but rather a continuous way of living our lives. Reorienting ourselves around the reality that Jesus has come, and will come again. Joy is choosing to live as if the worst things that happen to us are not the last things that will happen to us. Because they’re not. The end of the biblical story is Jesus coming back. It’s the end of our sorrow, grief, and waiting.

Joy is more than Christian virtue, a morning practice, or a devotional topic.

It is a quiet rebellion against the pull and sway of the world that tells us we aren't enough, we don't have enough, and we can't be enough. It's a strategy in the war for our souls that redirects our attention away from the fear, anxiety, and apathy we have around us and toward the eternal communion with God we have ahead of us.

In a world that celebrates personal achievement and success, we take joy simply in who we are in Christ. In a world fearful of what's to come, we can rejoice in our confidence in the future. We know the full story. In a world that says chasing pleasures is what brings happiness, we joyfully renounce that lie because we know if we're not happy in this life, we'll certainly be happy in the next. Our joy is anchored in the hope and reality of Jesus' final victory and future return.

Reflection

1. What do you think of when you hear the word "joy"?
2. What are some things that bring you joy in your life right now?
3. What are some things robbing you of joy in your life right now?
4. How might God be inviting you to cultivate joy by choosing to be joyful?

PRACTICE GRATITUDE

The simplest and most effective way to cultivate joy in our daily lives is to practice gratitude.

When we choose to focus on the things God has blessed us with rather than on the things we don't have, joy is the natural outcome. Consider utilizing this Gratitude Ritual to start or end each day this week:

1. What has God given me?

- Think about the things God tangibly blessed you with. Your belongings, relationships and friendships, your family, your home, your job; think of all the real things that bring you joy.

2. What has God done for me?

- Think about the things God has done in your life. Give thanks to God for the prayers he's answered, for the ways you've experienced his presence in your life, and the things he's rescued you from.

3. Where am I discontent?

- Reflect on the areas and circumstances in your life that you wish were different, and give these up to God.

Monday, December 16th
Reading: James 1:1-18

Tuesday, December 17th
Reading: Psalm 16

WEEK FOUR: LOVE

Maybe the most radical and scandalous part of Advent is the claim that God — the all-powerful, holy, Creator of the universe — came near to humanity by becoming a part of humanity.

No other worldview, spirituality, or religion has a transcendent God step into the human world, let alone become a human himself. And yet, this movement toward humanity is the heart of the gospel.

In our own lives, it can feel inconvenient and uncomfortable showing up for others in need. We don't like entering broken emotional space, or we feel unsure of how to best help those in pain. And yet, this is exactly what God does for us. Even in our active rebellion against God, as we struggle with the illness of sin that infects our souls, God is still near to us. He demonstrates his love both by sacrificing for us, and by promising his presence to us.

Christmas is a celebration of God's nearness to us, his proximity to humanity.

It's God's presence with us, his full participation in the human experience that is the truest demonstration of his love. That God steps into the messiness of the human experience, fully entering our broken world of sin and pain, and then giving his life to rescue humanity from this sin demonstrates the truest expression of love. All we have to do is accept it. As we celebrate Christmas this week, we celebrate love in its truest form — the self-sacrificing holy God coming into human space to be near to us and rescue us from our sin.

Reflection

1. What comes to mind when you think of the love God has for you?
2. Is there anything in your life making you doubt God's genuine love for you?
3. What often blocks or prevents you from reflecting God's love to others?
4. How might God be inviting you to accept God's love for you in your own life and extend that love to others?

PRACTICE HOSPITALITY

As you celebrate the last week of this Advent season, one of the easiest ways to reflect the love of God to others is through the practice of hospitality.

Just as God came near to humanity in the person of Jesus, we also move near others in proximity and relationship.

This Christmas season, practicing hospitality is how we both proclaim and demonstrate the gospel message to those around us — just as God moves near to us, we also move near to others, inviting them into a space where they're served by our sacrifice. Here are some ways to practice hospitality this week:

Hospitality to the saints

- Invite some other people from your church community into your home for dinner or a game night.
- Get lunch after church with someone in your church community who you don't know that well.
- Invite someone along as you run any last minute errands or Christmas shopping before Christmas.

Hospitality to the strangers

- Identify someone in your network of relationships (friends, neighbors, coworkers, etc.) who's in need and do something small yet tangible to help meet that need.
- Invite a neighbor or co-worker over for dinner, or to come along with

you to any holiday events you might be planning to host or attend.

- Reach out to someone on the fringes of your community and invite them to participate in some holiday activity with you this week like last minute shopping or running errands. Think of single moms or dads, college students, those who might be alone or lonely this Christmas, or those who are in their later years of life.

Hospitality to the sinners

- Prayer walk your neighborhood or workplace and ask God for opportunities to bring you near to the lost who need to hear the hope of the gospel.
- Meet regularly with someone far from God to deepen your relationship with them.
- Reach out to someone you know who is pulling away from you and/or God or someone who's just living in isolation. Invite them to share a meal for you to check in on them.

