

H

J



HE HAS COME FOR US

A MIDTOWN FELLOWSHIP
ADVENT GUIDE

P

L

H

J



HE HAS COME FOR US

A MIDTOWN FELLOWSHIP
ADVENT GUIDE

P

L

He Has Come For Us: A Midtown Fellowship Advent Guide

© 2023 by Midtown Fellowship. All rights reserved.

Published by Midtown Fellowship and Grace Church Print Shop

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, or by any information storage and retrieval system--except for brief quotations for the purpose of review, without written permission from the publisher.

Scripture, unless otherwise noted, taken from THE ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION ©2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

(Click to Advance)

WEEK 1

Advent Candle Devo	8
Week 1 Family Guide	12
Sunday	16
Monday	20
Tuesday	24
Wednesday	30
Thursday	36
Friday	40
Saturday	44
Week 1 Reflection	48

WEEK 2


Advent Candle Devo	50
Week 2 Family Guide	54
Sunday	58
Monday	62
Tuesday	68
Wednesday	74
Thursday	80
Friday	86
Saturday	90
Week 2 Reflection	98

WEEK 3

Advent Candle Devo	100
Week 3 Family Guide	102
Sunday	106
Monday	110
Tuesday	116
Wednesday	122
Thursday	128
Friday	134
Saturday	138
Week 3 Reflection	144

WEEK 4

Advent Candle Devo	146
Family Guide	150
Sunday	154
Monday	158
Week 4 Reflection	162
Appendix 1	166
Appendix 2	168
Appendix 3	169





THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

Advent is for adoring Jesus. For Christians it's a time to prepare room—to intentionally make space—in our minds and hearts to anticipate and celebrate the birth of Christ.

On the night of Jesus' birth, an angel appeared to the shepherds proclaiming: "Fear not for *behold*, I bring you *good news of great joy* that will be for all people." (Luke 2:10) Simply put: we want to behold our Savior and celebrate this good news of great joy! We want to make a focused effort, amidst all of the December rush, to prepare room for Him.

This book contains two parts with this goal in mind:

1. Daily Advent Devotions
2. Weekly Family Guides

THE SEASON OF ADVENT

The English word *Advent* comes from the Latin *adventus* which means "coming." Advent primarily focuses on the first coming of Jesus two thousand years ago. But Jesus' second coming is also anticipated during the season.

Advent begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. Depending on the year, Advent can range from 22 to 29 days. This year, Advent begins on Sunday December 3, 2023.

There's no biblical mandate to observe Advent. It is a tradition that developed over the course of church history with the first clear reference to it documented in the 6th century. While very early on the emphasis was more on penitence and fasting, the season now predominantly centers on hope and expectation for believers.

We will use the season of Advent to journey through the truths of Scripture that point to the birth of Jesus and the love that our Heavenly Father demonstrated through the gift of His Son. We'll study and celebrate that through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection we can be called children of God. We will look to the life-changing hope, peace, joy, and love that are available to us through Christ and we will practice spiritual disciplines that help us *behold* Jesus as Lord and abide in Him more fully.

THE LAYOUT

Our Advent Guide and Candle Lighting Devotions will follow these common themes:

Week 1: Hope

Week 2: Peace

Week 3: Joy

Week 4: Love

Christmas Eve: Christ Candle

DAILY ADVENT DEVOTIONS

The Daily Advent Devotions contain Scripture passages, questions, reflections, and prayer prompts all centered around each week's theme and spiritual discipline.

You'll notice that the Scripture passages are printed in the guide so that you can write directly on them. Similarly, blank lines have been provided so that you can write out your responses to questions directly in this guide. We hope this space serves as a starting place as you engage with the Scripture and steer your mind in a direction of prayer and repentance.

We've also created playlists that go with each week's theme. Our Spotify playlists can be found under [midtowncolumbia](#). There you will see the playlists for each week: "Songs of Hope," "Songs of Peace," "Songs of Joy," and "Songs of Love." There's also an additional playlist for the two days leading up to Christmas Day.

WEEKLY FAMILY GUIDES

The Weekly Family Guide includes an interactive candle lighting devotion to be used each Sunday of Advent (and a 5th one for Christmas Eve). In the Family Guide, you'll also find ideas for how to practice each week's spiritual discipline as a family as well as recommendations for books and links to other resources.



THE ADVENT WREATH

Our Weekly Family Guides center around the lighting of candles on an Advent wreath. Utilizing an Advent wreath in your home can serve as a great visual reminder and marker during the season and we would encourage all individuals using this guide to consider incorporating one.

The Advent wreath represents the passage of time over the four weeks of Advent. It is typically a circular wreath holding five candles, four in the wreath itself and one in the center. One candle is lit each Sunday, until all of the candles, including the center candle, are lit on Christmas Eve. The candles symbolize the light of God entering the world through the birth of Jesus. The light from the candles reminds us that Jesus is the Light of the World and He stepped into our darkness.

If you'd like to create an Advent wreath, be sure to gather your supplies and assemble your wreath before December 3. *(For a tutorial with pictures, check out how one LifeGroup turned this into a group activity and made small Advent wreaths for under \$5 at our [blog](#).*

1. A round wreath (any size)

You can also get greenery and assemble into a circle yourself.

2. A plate (or base of some sort)

A base of some sort on which your candles sit, surrounded by the wreath.

3. 5 candles

Typically the Christ candle is larger and sits in the center of the wreath while the four other candles are placed in the wreath itself

4. A lighter



AN ADVENT INTRODUCTION FOR CHILDREN

(Assemble your Advent wreath as a family and discuss prior to December 3)

This is an Advent wreath. This is a long time tradition that Christians use to remember and celebrate the gift of Christmas: that God gave us

His Son, Jesus, to step into our darkness and become our light.

What shape is the wreath?

Answer: A circle

Does it have a beginning or an end?

Answer: No.

It goes round and round forever. This reminds us that God's love goes on and on forever. It never ends.

What color is the wreath?

Answer: Green

The evergreens in the wreath never change; they are green all year. This reminds us that God never changes. We can trust who He is and His promises of what He says He will do.

Each week, we will light a candle in our Advent wreath and talk about the gift of Jesus that God gave us because of His love for us.

We will light an additional candle each week and we will remember that Jesus' light shines bright in our lives and in the world. We will celebrate that Jesus came into the world to save us and be our light.

A NOTE TO PARENTS:

The Advent season is a gift to Christian parents because it gives a focused opportunity to talk to our children about the most important things in life. All of the questions that this season addresses will be asked and answered by our children in some way:

- What is the season about?
- Why did Jesus have to come?
- What is it that I need?
- How will those needs be met?
- Who am I and what is my life about?
- How is it that I am supposed to live?¹

Culture will answer these questions and provide one narrative this season. As parents, we must recognize the false story that we (and our children) are exposed to all around us. This false story tells lies about who we are and what we need. It points to feelings, personal pleasure, and consumerism as the ultimate treasures to be stored up this holiday season.

¹ Paul Tripp, "Are There Lies In Your Christmas Tree?" *Desiring God*.
desiringgod.org/articles/are-there-lies-in-your-christmas-tree



We get to tell (and show!) our children a greater and truer story... and we tell them over and over again: We share the *good news of great joy* we've received. We rejoice in our Savior. We treasure Him above all else and we pray that our children will grow in their understanding of and love for Jesus Christ.

Teaching our kids God's truth and centering our lives around His great story does not mean that we don't engage in traditional American Christmas festivities. But it does likely mean that we have additional conversations about what parts do and do not reflect the gospel.

We also want to remember that we can't expect our children to fully rejoice in the faith when they are still learning to understand Christ. It's quite possible that, despite all our efforts this Advent season, our children are going to be more excited about presents than they are about Jesus. Don't shame them; teach them. Teach them that gifts are fun (and they can even serve as reminders of God's *giving* love!) but the joy that they provide is temporary. Point your children to the everlasting joy available to them in Christ. Strive to model that message through your own life this Advent season. Our children will hear our words but they will also look to how we live our lives for their answers to what this season is about, what they need, and what matters most.²

*In **Appendix 1 on page 166**, we've included a great article from the *Desiring God* website about questions to ask when evaluating Christmas traditions. We'd highly recommend reading it before Advent begins.*

² Adapted from Lindsay Carlsons's excellent article: "[3 Christmas Pitfalls for Parents.](#)" *The Gospel Coalition*.

SO WHERE DOES SANTA FIT INTO ANY OF THIS?

The question comes up often around families at Midtown. Should they do Santa? Not do it? Do it with qualifications? There are faithful members in our church who fall into all three of these categories. (For a point of reference, six pastors' families incorporate Santa to some degree into their family's traditions, and three do not.) The choice to include Santa is not a closed-handed issue for followers of Jesus, so we want to guard against treating it as such or becoming self-righteous toward parents who've taken a different approach than we have.

Instead, as parents who are a part of one body of Christ, we focus on the larger goal of putting Jesus and His beauty and worth on display to the children in our church family.

With that goal in mind, we do think it's wise to be intentional about your gift giving and what your practices could be communicating to your children. In her excellent article, "3 Christmas Pitfalls for Parents," Lindsay Carlson gives a helpful perspective for parents:

No child deserves presents. While Santa makes a "naughty" or "nice" list, Jesus doesn't. He gave His life for those in sin. He didn't dangle His redemption over our heads as a "behavior modification" tactic. God gave us the gift of Christ—his birth, death, and resurrection—by grace. All gifts we place under the tree or in the stockings should be given in the same manner that we receive Christ: freely.

Whether you choose to make Santa a part of your Christmas traditions or not, at the right time, we would encourage you to share with your children where the tradition of Santa Claus comes from: a *real* man, St. Nicholas, who followed Jesus and whose life was marked by the way he loved others.



ADVENT CREDO

Father Daniel Berrigan (born 1921)

It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed to destruction and loss—

This is true: For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction—

This is true: I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.

It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction rule forever—

This is true: Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, his name shall be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, the Everlasting, the Prince of peace.

It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world—

This is true: To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and lo I am with you, even until the end of the world.

It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the Church before we can be peacemakers—

This is true: I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions and your old men shall have dreams.

It is not true that our hopes for liberation of humankind, of justice, of human dignity of peace are not meant for this earth and for this history—

This is true: The hour comes, and it is now, that the true worshippers shall worship God in spirit and in truth.

So let us enter Advent in hope. Let us see visions of love and peace and justice. Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage: Jesus Christ—the life of the world.



SUNDAY FAMILY DEVOTION: THE FIRST CANDLE OF ADVENT

A Note to Parents: The “Light the Candle” devotions are written with the intent of being read out loud by a family member. We have placed any instructions (that don’t need to be read out loud) in italics. Certainly feel the freedom to simplify or expand the content based on your children’s age. Each weekly candle lighting will have a greater visual impact if it takes place in a darkened room.

Sit in darkness as a family. Ask a few age-appropriate questions about the darkness. How does the darkness make you feel? What is difficult to do in the dark? Are there times that you’ve been afraid to be in the dark?

No matter what you want to do in a room, you have to first turn on the light or you can’t see anything else.

Often, when the Bible uses the word *darkness*, it is referring to evil or ignorance (*not knowing something*). The prophet Isaiah lived about 700 years before Jesus was born. In Isaiah chapter 9, he writes about the darkness that the people were living in:

Have someone read [Isaiah 9:2](#) out loud.

Isaiah 9:2 (NIRV)

The people who are now living in darkness will see a great light.

They are now living in a very dark land. But a light will shine on them.

Isaiah says that the people lived in darkness; they were surrounded by evil. There was evil in their hearts, and there was nothing they could do to stop the darkness. They needed someone to save them! But according to Isaiah, a light was going to shine on the people:



Have someone read *Isaiah 9:6-7* and *John 1:9*.

Isaiah 9:6-7a (NIRV)

A child will be born to us.

A son will be given to us.

He will rule over us.

And he will be called

Wonderful Adviser and Mighty God.

He will also be called Father Who Lives Forever

and Prince Who Brings Peace.

⁷ There will be no limit to how great his authority is.

The peace he brings will never end.

John 1:9 (NIRV)

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

Because of God's love, He would send the people a savior—a rescuer to light up the whole world. And this savior would be *born* to them. The greatest gift would come to Earth as a baby. God's rescue mission to save the world from sin and darkness starts with a baby.

And just like those living 700 years before Jesus, we too are walking in darkness. Because of sin, not only do we do the wrong thing, but we often don't even know the right thing to do. Sin has separated us from God. We need to be rescued. We need Jesus to save us and be our light.



Light the first candle.

This first candle represents the **hope** that God's people had as they waited for God to send a rescuer to save them and to step into their darkness. As we light this candle of **hope**, we praise God for being trustworthy and always keeping His promises. During this Advent season, we celebrate that all of the promises of God find their "yes" in Jesus. We praise God for giving us His Son: the very best gift.



DISCUSS

During this season of Advent, let's be on the lookout for reminders of the truth that God sent Jesus to be our light:

- Where do we see extra lights during the Christmas season?
(Christmas lights on houses, lights on Christmas tree, star on Christmas tree, candles in windows, etc)
- How can these lights remind us of Jesus?
- When we see these beautiful Christmas lights around, we can use them as tiny reminders that Christmas is for celebrating Jesus: the Light of the World. Every time we see Christmas lights, we can celebrate Jesus!

PRAY

As a family, let's spend some time thanking God for sending Jesus to rescue us and become our light. Let's thank Him that His love never ends and that we can trust Him and His Promises. Let's ask Him to use this season of Advent to grow our hope in Him.



FAMILY GUIDE

WEEK 1

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE THIS WEEK

Below you will find 7 verses that go with our theme this week of waiting on Jesus and placing our hope in Him and His good promises. Your family could choose one verse to meditate on for the entire week or, you may choose to focus on a different verse each day.

2 Corinthians 1:20 (ICB)

The “Yes” to all of God’s promises is in Christ. And that is why we say “Amen” through Christ to the glory of God.

John 1:14 (ICB)

The Word became a man and lived among us. We saw his glory—the glory that belongs to the only Son of the Father. The Word was full of grace and truth.

Psalms 119:97 (ICB)

How I love your teachings!

I think about them all day long.

Psalms 1:1-3 (NIV)

Blessed is the one

who does not walk in step with the wicked

or stand in the way that sinners take

or sit in the company of mockers,

but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,

and who meditates on his law day and night.

That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,

which yields its fruit in season

and whose leaf does not wither—

whatever they do prospers.



Psalm 27:14 (ESV)

*Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord!*

Lamentations 3:23-24 (NIRV)

*His great love is new every morning.
Lord, how faithful you are!
I say to myself, "The Lord is everything I will ever need.
So I will put my hope in him."*

John 8:12 (ESV)

*Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the
world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life."*

SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE AS A FAMILY

1. Read the verse through several times as a family and then discuss these questions:

- *How does this verse show me something about God to praise?*
- *How does this verse show me something about myself that I need to confess?*
- *How does this verse show me something that I need to ask God for?*

2. Choose a verse to commit to memory as a family. Have family members write it out. Consider turning the verse into a Christmas decoration that you can see throughout the week.

3. Use your creativity to turn a verse (or a phrase of a verse) into a gift. Make Christmas ornaments or pictures displaying the verse, create jewelry, decorate a cake. And then, give the gift as a way to share the hope of Christ with someone else this Advent season. (Or, consider having the children make gifts for other family members or friends to open on Christmas morning)

DAILY ADVENT SUGGESTIONS

***The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd Jones**

If you're looking for an additional nightly reading option with your family during Advent, you can start at the beginning of the *Jesus Storybook Bible* on December 2nd, read one story each night, and you will reach the story of Christ's birth on the 23rd and "The Light of the Whole World" reading on the 24th.

Names of Jesus Christmas Tree

Using **Appendix 2 on page 168**, choose one name for Jesus a night that you are going to focus on during Advent. Talk about what that means. Maybe even make a simple ornament with each name and have a little tree or banner that you hang them on each day as you wait for and anticipate Christmas morning. Then, on Christmas morning, read all of the names of Jesus and celebrate all of the things He became for us when He came down at Christmas.

SONG RECOMMENDATIONS

Check out our ["Songs of Hope"](#) playlist on Spotify for the complete list of songs for the week.

PICTURE BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

The Christmas Promise by Alison Mitchell

The Garden, The Curtain, and The Cross by Carl Laferton



WEEK 1: HOPE

SUNDAY, DEC. 3: HOPE CAME DOWN AT CHRISTMAS

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

*Come. Come away from the complexities and confusion
and clutteredness of Christmas.*

*Come to the simple manger, come to the brutal cross,
and come to the empty tomb.*

*Come and receive again the good news of great joy
that is now for all people and all peoples.*

-Jon Bloom

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 9:2, John 1:1-4, John 1:14, 2 Corinthians 1:20

Isaiah 9:2

The people walking in darkness

have seen a great light;

a light has dawned

on those living in the land of darkness.

Advent is for adoring Jesus. For Christians, it's a time to prepare room—to intentionally make space—in our minds and hearts to anticipate and celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

On this, the first Sunday of Advent, we light what is often referred to as the “Prophecy Candle.” This candle represents *hope* or *expectation* in the coming Messiah. In Advent, we join with the prophets of the Old



Testament awaiting the promised Savior and we remember that we too are waiting even on this side of Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection.

We are waiting for Christ’s return when He will once and for all wipe away all sickness and sadness and sin and death. We wait with *hopeful expectation* for Christ’s second arrival when He will bring His Kingdom to Earth and make all things new. Like the Old Testament prophets, we set our hope and faith on the promises of our trustworthy God.

Today, we pause and reflect on the gift of God’s Son: the One who was with God from the beginning.



Light the first Advent Candle.

*(A family candle lighting devotion can be found in this week’s **Sunday Family Devotional on page 8**)*

READ AND RESPOND

Read John 1:1-4 and John 1:14. Note the attributes of Jesus that John chooses to highlight in the opening of his gospel account. Why might John want his readers to focus their minds on these particular characteristics?

John 1:1-4, 14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us!” This is what we anticipate during Advent and celebrate on Christmas: that Jesus Christ, who *was* God and was *with* God from the beginning, *came* to us.

In Him was life and that life is the light of men! In Him we set our hope.

Biblical hope differs from wishful thinking or optimism because it’s grounded in God’s character. God is faithful. He is truthful. He always keeps His promises. And we know this because He sent us Jesus, the fulfillment of all of His promises:

2 Corinthians 1:20

For all the promises of God find their yes in Him. That is why it is through Him that we utter our Amen to God for His glory.

In this season of Advent, we lean into the waiting as we call out to the One who came into our darkness and became our Living Hope. We wait. And we remember that there is meaning in our waiting.

Christians are people who wait.

In her thoughtful essay, “Sitting in Traffic: Liturgical Time and an Unhurried God,” Tish Harrison Warren describes waiting this way:

Waiting, therefore, is an act of faith in that it is oriented toward the future. Yet our assurance of hope is rooted in the past, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and in His promises and resurrection. In this way, waiting, like time itself, centers on Christ—the fulcrum of time. Because of Christ’s work, we wait with expectation. We replace the despair that the passing of time inevitably brings—“ashes to ashes, dust to dust”—with faith...In the midst of our culture’s tendency to embrace constant revelry that leaves us feeling hung-over and empty, we are people in training, together learning to wait.³

This week, we’ll explore how to wait. We will fight against the rush that this season often brings. We will practice the discipline of *waiting*—knowing that there we have the opportunity to encounter Christ and be more and more transformed into the likeness of God’s only Son, full of grace and truth.

³ Tish Harrison Warren. *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life*. InterVarsity Press, 2016.



He has come for us. *Hope Came Down at Christmas*. Let's meet with Him this Advent season.

PRAY AND REFLECT

Pastor and writer John Piper calls prayer a “response to promises and an assurance of God’s future grace.” He notes that prayer is not hoping in the dark that there might be a God of good intentions out there. Prayer banks on the promise of God, and goes to the bank every day and draws on stores of future graces needed for that day.

When we pray, we say “Amen” to God through Christ, because God has said a decisive “Amen” to all His promises in Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:20

For all the promises of God find their yes in Him. That is why it is through Him that we utter our Amen to God for His glory.

Reflect on the beauty and truth that all of the promises of God find their “yes” (or their “Amen”) in Jesus. Ask Him to help you steward this Advent season well. Confess to Him where you are anxious or hurried. And then, end your time of prayer with an “Amen”—an exclamation point of hope and warranted confidence in our faithful God.⁴

⁴ John Piper. [“Prayer’s Exclamation Point.”](#) *Desiring God*.

WEEK 1: HOPE

MONDAY, DEC. 4: WAITING WITH HOPE

*Time is a gift from God, a means of worship.
I need the church to remind me of reality:
time is not a commodity that I control, manage, or consume.
The practice of liturgical time teaches me, day by day,
that time is not mine.
It does not revolve around me.
Time revolves around God—
what He has done, what He is doing,
and what He will do.
-Tish Harrison Warren*

SCRIPTURE

1 Peter 1:3-5, Romans 8:23-25, Galatians 5:5, Matthew 11:28-30

READ AND RESPOND

Read [1 Peter 1:3-5](#). What stands out to you in this passage about Jesus, your *living hope*?

1 Peter 1:3-5

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be
born again to a living hope through the resurrection of
Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is
imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven
for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded
through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the
last time.*



The opposite of a *living* hope would be a *dead* hope. *Living* hope is hope that has power and produces change in our lives. Living hope is active; it has the ability to transform our lives. This week we are looking at the connection between *hope* and *waiting*. Through practicing the liturgical calendar and observing Advent, we have the opportunity to reorient how we view time and experience waiting.

We don't often view *waiting* as an asset. In our culture, waiting feels like the antithesis of productivity and productivity is often our idol of choice. Tish Harrison Warren expounds upon this tension:

We are impatient people. We want happiness now. Fulfillment and gratification now. Time is just another commodity that we seek to maximize. I get angry in traffic because it reminds me that time is not at my bidding...Every day I wait. I wait for help, for healing, for days to come, for rescue and redemption. And like all of us, I'm waiting to die. And I wait for glory, for the coming King, for the resurrection of the body. Christians are people who wait. We live in liminal time, in the already and not yet. Christ has come, and He will come again. We dwell in the meantime. We wait. But in my daily life I've developed habits of impatience—of speeding ahead, of trying to squeeze more into my cluttered day. How can I live as one who watches and waits for the coming kingdom when I can barely wait for water to boil?⁵

⁵ Tish Harrison Warren. *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life*. InterVarsity Press, 2016.

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Romans 8:23-25](#) and [Galatians 5:5](#). How do these verses depict the process of *waiting* in a believer's life? How do they differ from how you typically view waiting? How does each connect *waiting* with *hope*?

Romans 8:23-25

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. ²³ Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits—we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ Now in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ Now if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.

Galatians 5:5

For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.

Christians are people who wait. The Christian life is not one of perfection—at least not on this side of eternity. The Christian life is one of waiting eagerly for the day that the work Christ began in us will, by His grace, be complete.

So how do we wait eagerly on this side of eternity for righteousness? What do we do to fight against indifference? How does waiting become a means of sanctification in our lives?

Over the next five weeks, we will examine and practice several spiritual disciplines with the intention of maximizing our waiting. But today, we



want to begin with the end in mind: in all of this, being with Jesus and delighting in Him is the goal. He is inviting us into His presence. Author and podcaster Emily P. Freeman gives this encouragement:

It doesn't have to be fancy. It simply has to be. Jesus didn't give examples. Jesus is the example. His very life, the way He interacted with His disciples, with women, with children, with those in charge and with those in the margins, and with His Father in heaven. All of these interactions were and are the example we need to learn what it looks like to walk by faith. Creating space for the soul to breathe isn't the answer to our problem, not by itself. It's simply a way of setting the stage so that we can better see the answer—who is Jesus Himself—in whom all of our hope is found.⁶

All of this can be summarized in one of Jesus' kindest invitations when He said these words:

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

PRAY AND REFLECT

Re-read Jesus' invitation to you in [Matthew 11:28-30](#). How do you need to respond to this invitation today? Where is your soul heavy? Where has your view of time become disoriented? What is the "next right thing" that Jesus is calling you to do in love as you wait?

⁶ Emily P. Freeman. *The Next Right Thing Podcast*. "[Episode 90: Start With This Simple Rhythm.](#)"

WEEK 1: HOPE

TUESDAY, DEC. 5: MEDITATION AS A MEANS FOR HOPING

*The wonderful news is that Jesus has not stopped acting and speaking.
He is resurrected and at work in our world.
He is not idle, nor has he developed laryngitis.
He is alive and among us as our Priest to forgive us,
our Prophet to teach us, our King to rule us, our Shepherd to guide us.
—Richard Foster*

SCRIPTURE

John 17:13-19, Psalm 119:97-102, Psalm 1

READ AND RESPOND

Read [John 17:13-19](#). Summarize Jesus' prayer. What stands out to you in His request to His Father?

John 17:13-19 (NLT)

“Now I am coming to you. I told them many things while I was with them in this world so they would be filled with my joy. ¹⁴ I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵ I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. ¹⁶ They do not belong to this world any more than I do. ¹⁷ Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. ¹⁸ Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the



world. ¹⁹ And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth.

Jesus' prayer for us to be sanctified in the truth is a powerful request! Pastor and author Dr. Eric Mason expounds upon this in his book, *Unleashed: Being Conformed to the Image of Christ*:

His prayer for us to be sanctified in the truth is for us to be transformed in every sense of the word. We are now the recipients of this powerful prayer. Jesus prays that our lives would be saturated with the truth. This means all aspects of truth—information, internalization, transformation, and application. Because this is the will of God, we can dive into the Word of God with gospel confidence that the Spirit is working the Word into our hearts and minds for God's desired ends.⁷

One of the best ways for us to be saturated in the truth of God's Word and experience transformation is through meditating on Scripture.

While Eastern meditation is an attempt to empty the mind, Christian meditation is an attempt to fill it. Christian meditation is the ability to hear God's voice and obey His Word. Jesus modeled this life of hearing and obeying the voice of His Father for us and in meditation we are growing into what Thomas Kempis calls a "familiar friendship with Jesus."

The Bible uses two different Hebrew words to convey the idea of meditation and together they are used 58 times. While the words have slightly different meanings, in each case, there's a stress upon changed behavior as a result of our encounter with the Living God.⁸

⁷ Eric Mason. *Unleashed: Being Conformed to the Image of Christ*. B&H Books, 2015.

⁸ Richard Foster. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. HarperOne, 2018.

READ AND RESPOND

Read Psalm 110:97-102. What characteristics mark the person who meditates on the Word of God?

Psalm 119:97-102

Oh how I love your law!

It is my meditation all the day.

⁹⁸ Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,

for it is ever with me.

⁹⁹ I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation.

¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the aged,[a] for I keep your precepts.

¹⁰¹ I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word.

¹⁰² I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me.

Meditating on Scripture is a primary way that we create space to meet with God and be transformed by His Word. So what does it practically look like for us to dwell on God's Word in our hearts throughout the day? What does it look like for Jesus' prayer to be realized in our lives and for us to be sanctified by the truth?

In her book *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*, Ruth Haley Barton teaches that when we engage the Scriptures for spiritual transformation, we make it our top priority to listen to God relationally rather than seeking only to learn more about God cognitively. There's a slowness about our time....a waiting.



We savor each word and let it soak in. We aren't trying to rush to the next chapter or simply get through the reading assignment, instead we wait. We stay in the place where God is speaking to us. We mull over it. We intentionally slow and wait and listen. Then, as God speaks to us through Scripture, we respond not just with our intellect but with our hearts.⁹

In addition to questions we may normally ask when approaching Scripture, (*What does it say? What does it mean? How do I apply it to my life?*) as we meditate on it, other questions may guide us into a listening posture.

Throughout the week, we will try out practices that others use to meditate on Scripture. Some will probably resonate with you more than others. The hope in all of it is that you encounter new ways to delight in God's Word—to *hope* in Him day and night.

Today we will start by slowly reading Psalm 1 and using Barton's questions that she encourages using to engage our heart in a time of meditative Scripture reading.

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Read Psalms 1 slowly. This first psalm calls all people to emulate the “blessed one” whose “delight is in the law of the Lord and on the law they meditate day and night.” Read it slowly. Sit with it. Listen. Use Barton's questions below as a means to diagnose. Then talk to God about those things.

Psalm 1

Blessed is the one

who does not walk in step with the wicked

or stand in the way that sinners take

or sit in the company of mockers,

² but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,

and who meditates on his law day and night.

³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,

⁹ Ruth Haley Barton. *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*. InterVarsity Press, 2006.

*which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.*

⁴Not so the wicked!

*They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.*

*⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*

*⁶For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.¹⁰*

*Where do I find myself resonating deeply? Where do I find myself
resisting, pulling back, wrestling with what Scripture might be saying?*

*Why might I feel this way? What aspect of my life is being touched or
spoken to through this Scripture?*

¹⁰ If you'd like to really dig in and study this passage, check out John Piper's excellent "[Look in the Book](#)" teaching resources on Psalms 1.



What do my reactions tell me about myself—my attitudes, my relating patterns, my perspectives, my behaviors? Am I willing to look at that in God's presence?

PRAY

As you read through the psalm and addressed the questions, did anything come up that you need to talk to God about? Spend some time doing that now.

*The deepest mark of this happy person is that he delights in the Word
of the Lord.*

*Bible reading, and prayer and meditation are not a burden to him
but a pleasure.*

*We struggle with Bible reading and prayer and meditation
because we don't find pleasure in it.*

We have other things we want to get to more.

TV or breakfast or work or newspaper or computer.

Our hearts incline to other things and do not incline to the Word.

And so it is not a delight.

We must pray for God's enabling to help us delight in His Word.

-John Piper

Close your time today by asking God to help you delight in His Word.

WEEK 1: HOPE

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 6: HOPE IN HIS WORD

“So delight in the law of the Lord day and night.

Read the Bible regularly.

Memorize verses about the character of God.

*Train your minds to discern what is true,
pure, lovely, and admirable—
and think about these things.*

*Be ready to speak God’s truth to your heart and mind
because you’ve already stored it up in your heart.”*

—Trillia Newbell

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 130:5-6, Psalm 27:14, Psalm 40:1-8

OPENING PRAYER

God, Help me to delight in your Word today.

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Read [Psalm 130:5-6](#) and [Psalm 27:14](#). What does the Lord want to say to you about *waiting* through these verses? What resonates deeply? Where are you resisting? What aspect of your life is being spoken to through these verses? What do you need to look at in the presence of God?

Psalm 130:5-6

*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;*



*6 my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.*

Psalm 27:14

*Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord!*

Our goal this week is to set our hope on Jesus Christ and all of the promises that find their “yes” in Him. We are intentionally creating space for our minds to dwell on our good Savior as we long for the transformation that Christ Himself made possible and prayed we would experience.

With the remainder of our week, we will meditate on Scripture that specifically addresses *waiting* and *hoping*. We will try out a variety of Scripture meditation methods that can be incorporated into your own practice. You will inevitably find some more helpful than others based on how you’re wired. It’s also possible that what you find most useful on a certain day or with one particular passage isn’t the method you need the next day or with a different passage. We encourage you to try everything this week, remembering that the ultimate goal is less about *doing* and more about *being* with Jesus—accepting His invitation to come to Him—to learn from Him, and ultimately, find rest for your soul.

Note: At the end of each week, you’ll find a reflection page to record your thoughts on the various spiritual practices used. Be sure to note what you might like to incorporate more consistently as we will return to these thoughts after Christmas.

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Read **Psalm 40:1-8**. First, read the passage slowly a few times. Sit with it. Remember we are waiting...*listening*. We are not rushing. The goal here is not productivity or quantity. As Richard Foster reminds us, “Our rushing reflects our internal state and our internal state is what needs to be transformed.”¹¹

After some time sitting with the passage, rewrite it in your own words in the space below:

Psalm 40:1-8 (NIV)

*I waited patiently for the Lord;
he turned to me and heard my cry.*

*² He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;*

*he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.*

*³ He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.*

*Many will see and fear the Lord
and put their trust in him.*

*⁴ Blessed is the one
who trusts in the Lord,
who does not look to the proud,
to those who turn aside to false gods.*

*⁵ Many, Lord my God,
are the wonders you have done,
the things you planned for us.*

*None can compare with you;
were I to speak and tell of your deeds,
they would be too many to declare.*

*⁶ Sacrifice and offering you did not desire—
but my ears you have opened—*

¹¹ Richard J. Foster. *Celebration of Spiritual Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. Harper One, 2018.



burnt offerings and sin offerings

you did not require.

7 Then I said, "Here I am, I have come—

it is written about me in the scroll.

8 I desire to do your will, my God;

your law is within my heart."

Re-read the passage again slowly. At this point, you may want to return to yesterday's questions:

Where do I find myself resonating deeply? Where do I find myself resisting, pulling back, wrestling with what Scripture might be saying?

Why do I feel this way? What aspect of my life is being touched or spoken to through this Scripture?

What do my reactions tell me about myself—my attitudes, my relating patterns, my perspectives, my behaviors? Am I willing to look at that in God's presence?

As you've been reading, mulling over the passage, and rewriting it in your own words, has there been a phrase that's stood out to you?

Spend some time there with the Lord.

Then, commit to carry this phrase with you throughout the day. Let it be in the "front burner" of your mind. Instead of allowing your hope to drift, carry this phrase with you and recall it throughout your day.

Perhaps you set a few alarms on your phone to go off at different times as reminders to recall this phrase and intentionally plant your hope on the One who rescued you from despair and gave you a solid place to stand.

Write the word or phrase you are going to carry throughout your day—to meditate on day and night.

PRAY AND REFLECT

One of the ways we hope in God is through reminding ourselves of all of the ways He's been faithful and kept His promises in the past. Spend some time recalling times in your own life when the Lord heard your cries from the "pit" and rescued you, giving you a firm place to stand. Recall times of waiting on Him. Rehearse His faithfulness in your life. Praise Him for it. Place your hope firmly in the God who rescued you and who always keeps His promises.



WEEK 1: HOPE

THURSDAY, DEC. 7: MEDITATION AS PRAYER

*“Our prayers should arise out of immersion in the Scripture.”
-Timothy Keller*

SCRIPTURE

Lamentations 3:21-24

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, Help me to delight in your Word.

Today as we examine a passage on hoping, we look to pastor and author Timothy Keller’s insight on Scripture meditation. Keller describes meditation as a blend of Bible reading and prayer and he notes that it is one of three types of prayer he tries to find time for every day. Keller likes to use Luther’s contemplative method that Luther outlined in his famous letter on prayer.¹²

The basic method is this: To take a scriptural truth and ask three questions of it:

1. How does this show me something of God to praise?
(*adoration*)
2. How does this show me something about myself to confess?
(*confession*)
3. How does this show me something I need to ask God for?
(*supplication*)¹³

We will use these questions as our guide today while we meditate on the truths found in this passage.

¹² Martin Luther. *A Simple Way to Pray*.

¹³ Timothy Keller. [“Scraps of Thoughts on Daily Prayer.” TimothyKeller.com.](http://TimothyKeller.com)



MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Read Lamentations 3:21-24 several times slowly. Ask these questions of the passage:

Lamentations 3:21-24

But this I call to mind,

and therefore I have hope:

²² *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;*

his mercies never come to an end;

²³ *they are new every morning;*

great is your faithfulness.

²⁴ *“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,*

“therefore I will hope in him.”

How does this passage show you something about God to praise?

How does this passage show you something about yourself to confess?

How does this show you something you need to ask God for?

Pastor, recording artist, and author Shai Linne reflected on this passage in Lamentations after the killing of George Floyd. In his poignant article, Linne writes of resonating with the Prophet Jeremiah, who, in

Lamentations 3:20, remembers his affliction and bitterness and gall and whose spirit is downcast within him. Linne remarks that he loves that the prophet didn't minimize the pain or act like it wasn't real. He notes that instead, "Jeremiah gives thoughtful meditation to the trauma he has experienced at the hand of the Lord. But then he does something remarkable in the next verse. He preaches to himself!"

And this is what we see in verses 21-24: Jeremiah's sermon to himself! John Piper once proclaimed that the best sermon you can ever preach to yourself only has three words: *Hope in God!*

Linne summarizes it this way:

Jeremiah makes a conscious decision to think about something that fuels his hope: God's character. He considers God's "great love," God's "compassion," and God's "faithfulness." He reminds himself that the Lord is his portion. Jeremiah knows he and Israel deserve to be consumed because of their sin—but he also knows that the God who disciplines is the God who saves (v. 26).¹⁴

What phrase from Lamentations can you preach to yourself today as you hope in God?

PRAY

Using the three questions above as your guide, spend some time in prayer.

How does this passage show you something to praise God for?

How does this passage show you something about yourself to confess?

How does this passage show you something you need to ask God for?

Consider setting an alarm on your phone for the middle of the day when you will intentionally take 5 minutes to return to these questions and answers and continue to meditate on today's verses and the truth you're preaching to yourself.

¹⁴ Shai Linne. "[George Floyd and Me.](#)" *The Gospel Coalition*.



WEEK 1: HOPE

FRIDAY, DEC. 8: SET YOUR HOPE ON GRACE

*Many of us can read deeply, even thoughtfully,
without ever allowing the Word of God to
penetrate our hearts or our lives.
-Barbara L. Peacock*

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 4:12, 1 Peter 1:13-21

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Hebrews 4:12](#). How have you seen this be true in your own life? How have you experienced this truth this week as you've spent time meditating on God's Word?

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Today we will practice a form of Scripture meditation that dates back to the very beginning of church history: *Lectio Divina*.



Lectio Divina (translated *divine reading*) is an approach to the Scripture that sets us up to listen to the Word of God spoken to us in the present moment. This practice is rooted in the belief that the Scriptures are alive and active as we engage them for spiritual transformation.

If you participated in our Lent study, you have already practiced a form of *Lectio Divina* and if you'd like to revisit those steps, you can find them on our spiritual practices website: followingjesustogether.com.¹⁵ Today, we will practice a slight variation of that process as we adopt the daily practice that Barbara L. Peacock outlines in her book, *Soul Care in African American Practice*.¹⁶

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Use [1 Peter 1:13-21](#) as you walk through Barabara Peacock's *Lectio Divina* steps broken down below:

1 Peter 1:13-21 (CSB)

Therefore, with your minds ready for action, be sober-minded and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. ¹⁵ But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; ¹⁶ for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy. ¹⁷ If you appeal to the Father who judges impartially according to each one's work, you are to conduct yourselves in reverence during your time living as strangers. ¹⁸ For you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb. ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was revealed in these last times for you. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

¹⁵ "What is Lectio Divina?" Midtown Fellowship.

¹⁶ Barbara L. Peacock. *Soul Care in African American Practice*. IVP, 2020.

Step 1: Silencio (*silence phase*)

Be still. Take some deep breaths to intentionally slow and calm your heart and mind.

As you read the passage, be mindful to read it slowly.

Spend some time praying the Scripture.

This is your time to still yourself, be silent, and wait on the Lord.

Step 2: Lectio (*reading phrase*)

With reverence, approach the text of 1 Peter 1:13-21.

Read it aloud slowly twice.

Focus on a phrase in the passage that speaks to you

Step 3: Meditatio (*meditation phrase*)

Spend 1-2 minutes in silence.

Then, read the passage again.

Reflect on the text.

What stood out during the sacred reading of the text?

Where do you sense God is leading you to take action?

Be silent a bit longer, this time for 2-3 minutes. Where does this reading touch your life?

Consider finishing the following statements:

I hear...

I sense...

I see...



Step 4: Oratio (*prayer phrase*)

Read the passage again. Be mindful to read it clearly, slowly, and passionately.

Be silent a little longer this time (3-4 minutes). Reflect on the question: “What do I sense God wants me to do related to _____?”

Consider finishing the following statements:

I sense God wants me to...

I sense God calling me to...

(Other reflection)

Step 5: Contemplatio (*contemplation phase*)

Praise God for this sacred time in his Word. Take the time to pause for a Selah moment. (a moment to reflect and soak in the truth you’ve just read) What are you noticing? What else are you hearing from God?

REFLECT AND PRAY

Remembering that Christian meditation is the ability to hear God’s voice and obey His Word, spend some time in His presence now processing what you sense Him calling you to do based on this passage.

WEEK 1: HOPE

SATURDAY, DEC. 9: MEDITATE ON GOD'S WORD DAY AND NIGHT

What is hour-by-hour walking in fellowship with the living God? The answer is: it is His speaking to you through His Word through your memory and meditation and illumination and application and your speaking to Him words of thanks and praise and admiration and desire and seeking for help and guidance and understanding. The Word is the basis for your hearing Him and His hearing you.

-John Piper

SCRIPTURE

James 1:22-25, Isaiah 42:6-7, Psalm 36:9, John 8:12, John 12:44-46, Ephesians 5:6-10

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, Help me to delight in your Word

READ AND RESPOND

Read [James 1:22-25](#). What two types of people does James characterize?

James 1:22-25

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law,



the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

We hope these practices have been helpful in your finding new ways to connect with God and be a *doer* of the Word—to be like the person in Psalm 1 who is firmly planted by the streams of water! Today, we want to look at one more critical practice as you set your hope firmly on Christ and that is the practice of Scripture memorization.

John Piper outlines the importance of memorizing God’s Word this way:

- The word “meditation” in Hebrew basically means to *speak* or *mutter*.
- When this is done in the heart, it is called *musings* or *meditation*.
- So meditating on the Word of God day and night means to speak to yourself the Word of God day and night and to speak to yourself about it.
- And unless you memorize Scripture, you do not meditate on it day and night.

Piper details his simple process for meditating on a chosen memorized passage throughout the week: The first step is to choose a passage of Scripture to memorize. This may be a verse but could even be a phrase—one that has stood out to you throughout the week and one you feel the Lord leading you to sit with for a while.

The story is told of someone coming to Saint Abba Pambo, asking him to teach him a psalm. Pambo began to teach the person Psalm 39, but hardly had he spoken the first verse, “*I will be watchful of my ways, for fear I should sin with my tongue,*” when the person said he did not wish to hear anymore. He told Pambo, “This verse is enough for me; please God may I have the strength to learn it and put it into practice.”¹⁷

17 Ruth Haley Barton. *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*. InterVarsity Press, 2006.

Similarly, Piper describes that as he reads, he will simply stop when he is moved by a passage. In order to memorize the passage quickly, he will read it out loud 10 times slowly then say it out loud 10 times; he will repeat this process until he has the passage or phrase memorized.

Once it is memorized, Piper will carry it around in the front burner of his mind for several days. As he carries the memorized passage around in his mind, he will ponder it, thinking about the implications of the text—both theological and practical. He will be “fed” by a particular text for several days before he moves on to another “front-burner text.”¹⁸

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE AND MEMORIZE

Jesus stepped into our darkness and brought light! Read through the following verses slowly. Perhaps spend some time using one (or several) of the methods from the week.

Then, choose a verse or phrase to memorize and carry in the front-burner of your mind throughout the day. Allow God to speak to you and you to Him through His Word.

Isaiah 42:6-7

*“I am the Lord; I have called you[a] in righteousness;
I will take you by the hand and keep you;
I will give you as a covenant for the people,
a light for the nations,
7 to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.*

Psalms 36:9

*For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light do we see light.*

¹⁸ John Piper. [“Meditate on the Word of the Lord Day and Night.”](#) *Desiring God*.



John 8:12

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

John 12:44-46

And Jesus cried out and said, “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. ⁴⁵ And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

Ephesians 5:6-10

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them; ⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

Write your verse (or phrase) from memory below:

Ground yourself in hope. Plant yourself by the stream. Delight in His Word day and night. Hope in our good God who always keeps His promises—We know this because He sent His Son, Jesus into our darkness. Hope in Him!

PRAY AND REFLECT

Ask God to give you the strength to learn His Word and put it into practice.

WEEK 1: HOPE

WEEK 1 REFLECTION

WAITING WITH HOPE

After the first week of Advent, what has stood out to you from these practices?

Have any of these practices been particularly challenging? Why is that?

What has the Lord been teaching you this week?



How might you and your LifeGroup spur one another on (Hebrews 10:24) to continue these practices as we head into week 2 of Advent?



SUNDAY FAMILY DEVOTION: THE SECOND CANDLE OF ADVENT

Last week we celebrated that God gave us Jesus to be our light and our hope.

Light the “Hope” candle from last week.



This week, we are going to celebrate that God gave us Jesus to be our peace and make a way for us to be right with God.

Let's look at what the angels said to the shepherds on the night that Jesus was born:

Have someone read Luke 2:8-15 out loud.

Luke 2:8-15 (ICB)

That night, some shepherds were in the fields nearby watching their sheep. ⁹ An angel of the Lord stood before them. The glory of the Lord was shining around them, and suddenly they became very frightened. ¹⁰ The angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, because I am bringing you some good news. It will be a joy to all the people. ¹¹ Today your Savior was born in David’s town. He is Christ, the Lord. ¹² This is how you will know him: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a feeding box.”

¹³ Then a very large group of angels from heaven joined the first angel. All the angels were praising God, saying:

¹⁴ “Give glory to God in heaven, and on earth let there be peace to the people who please God.”

¹⁵ Then the angels left the shepherds and went back to heaven. The shepherds said to each other, “Let us go to



Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened. We will see this thing the Lord told us about.”

What did the angels tell the shepherds? (*Don't be afraid! We are bringing good news! Today, your Savior has been born! Praise God! Because of Jesus, peace is possible!*)



Light the “Peace Candle”

The angels were so excited to tell the shepherds the good news that a savior, Jesus Christ, had been born.

Through Jesus, it is possible to have peace with God. Instead of being an enemy of God because of our sin, we can be adopted into God's family!

But that's not all! Because of Jesus, peace on earth is actually possible too!

Let's read what Jesus told His disciples and best friends before He died on the cross:

Have someone read John 14:27.

John 14:27

I leave you peace. My peace I give you. I do not give it to you as the world does. So don't let your hearts be troubled. Don't be afraid.

Jesus was leaving His followers—those who trusted in Him—His peace. And He told His friends that because they had His peace, they didn't have to be afraid!

The peace of Christ gets rid of our fears! We don't have to be afraid! Praise God for the gift of peace through Jesus!

DISCUSS

- When do you feel afraid? Because of Jesus, what can you do when you are afraid?
- As a family, how can we remember and celebrate the good news that Jesus brings peace this week?

◇ *Maybe every time you see Christmas lights this week, you remind each other that Jesus brings light and peace!*

◇ *Maybe any time someone expresses fear or uncertainty, you remind each other that you don't have to be afraid—that you can praise God because through Him, we have peace.*

PRAY

Lets thank God for the gift of peace through His Son, Jesus. Let's thank Him that we don't have to be afraid and that peace is possible. Let's ask God to help us trust Him and His promises. Let's ask Him to help us see the peace offered to us through Jesus as bigger and better than anything else that may or may not appear under our tree Christmas morning.



FAMILY GUIDE

WEEK 2

PRACTICE SLOWING AS A FAMILY THIS WEEK

Engage your family in a conversation about where *hurry* creeps in and what you all could do to eliminate hurry from your life! A few ideas might include:

- Wake up 15 minutes earlier than normal so that you can get ready, eat breakfast, and move at a slower pace, intentionally dedicating the day to the Lord
- Unplug and go for a family walk. See what you notice along the way
- If you're out running errands, intentionally choose the longest check-out line to practice slowing. Have good conversation while you wait
- Intentionally eat dinner slowly one night. Don't rush. Savor. Engage.

CRAFTING SLOWING PRAYERS (ALSO CALLED "BREATH" PRAYERS)

As a family, discuss when you feel hurried, afraid, and worried. Practice praying and giving those cares to God and then giving thanks to Him. Then, create slowing prayers that you all can recall when those hurried, fearful, or anxious feelings arise. Use the "**Names of God**" appendix on page 168 to choose a name for a member of the trinity and a prayer that you all can recall throughout your day:

Examples:

You are the Light of the World; You show me the way when I am afraid.

Prince of peace, I give you my worries and you give me your peace.

You are the Solid Rock; I can put my trust in you.



MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Below you will find 7 verses that go with our theme of peace. Your family could choose one verse to meditate on for the entire week, or you may choose to focus on a different verse each day. For a few suggestions on how to meditate on Scripture as a Family, please refer to the Week 1 Family Guide.

Romans 5:1 (NIRV)

We have been made right with God because of our faith. Now we have peace with him because of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:13-14a (ICB)

Yes, at one time you were far away from God. But now in Christ Jesus you are brought near to God through the blood of Christ's death. Because of Christ we now have peace.

Psalms 46:1 (ICB)

God is our protection and our strength.

He always helps in times of trouble.

Isaiah 26:3 (ICB)

You, Lord, give true peace.

You give peace to those who depend on you.

You give peace to those who trust you.

1 Peter 5:7 (ICB)

Give all your worries to him, because he cares for you.

Philippians 4:6-7a (NIRV)

Don't worry about anything. No matter what happens, tell God about everything. Ask and pray, and give thanks to him. Then God's peace will watch over your hearts and your minds. He will do this because you belong to Christ Jesus.

2 Corinthians 13:11 (NIRV)

Finally, brothers and sisters, be joyful! Work to make things right with one another. Help one another and agree with one another. Live in peace. And the God who gives love and peace will be with you.

SONG RECOMMENDATIONS

- Check out our [“Songs of Peace”](#) playlist on Spotify for the complete list of songs for the week.
- Watch the following animated music video from The Rizers: [John 14:27 \(Do Not Be Afraid\)](#):
- Watch (or listen) to Ellie Holcomb’s song, [“Fear Not”](#) based on Isaiah 43:1:

MOVIE CONNECTION

Watch the short (30 minute) animated classic, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. As you watch, pause and talk about Linus and his security blanket. And then pay attention to what happens as Linus recites Luke 2:8-14. *(Spoiler alert: He drops his security blanket—the one he’s famous for always having with him. As a family, pay attention to the exact moment that he drops it and be ready to discuss!)*

You can check out Jason Soroski’s excellent article about the moment in the film here: Jason Soroski. [“Just Drop the Blanket.”](#) Gospel Coalition.



WEEK 2: PEACE

SUNDAY, DEC. 10: PEACE CAME DOWN AT CHRISTMAS

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

*We cannot seek peace out of our own strength.
But God has reconciled us to Himself, and He brings reconciliation
and peace to every sphere of life.*

-Tish Harrison Warren

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 9:6-7, Luke 2:8-14

Light the first Advent candle, the candle of HOPE.



READ AND RESPOND

Read [Isaiah 9:6-7](#). What stands out to you from this portion of Isaiah's prophecy?

Isaiah 9:6-7

For to us a child is born,

to us a son is given;

and the government shall be upon his shoulder,

and his name shall be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 Of the increase of his government and of peace



*there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*



Light the second Advent candle.

*(A family candle lighting devotion can be found in this week's **Sunday Family Devotional on page 50**)*

This week we light the second candle that represents the peace of Christ. This candle is often referred to as the “Angel Candle” as it is used as a time to remember the message the angels proclaimed to the shepherds on the night of Christ’s birth:

Luke 2:8-14

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

The angels proclaimed what Isaiah prophesied. The news had two parts: glory to God in the highest and *peace* on earth.

The word *peace* is common in most languages. Typically, it refers to the absence of conflict. The Bible certainly uses this meaning of the word *peace*, but it also points to the presence of something better in its place.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*. *Shalom* means “complete” or “whole.” We see the word used to refer to objects

in a state of perfection with no cracks or missing parts. But we also see it used as a verb. To bring *shalom* means to make complete or restore. For the ancient Jews, *shalom* was much larger than simply ending conflict; *shalom* signified a future reality when all of creation would be restored and made whole.

The hope of *shalom* was set on a coming savior.

In Luke 2, Jesus' birth is announced as the arrival of peace. Jesus comes, and He offers His peace (John 14:27)—God's all-consuming, all redeeming-peace: peace that has the power to heal all that is hurting and restore all that is broken.

It is only through Jesus Christ's birth, death, and resurrection that we are reconciled to God, and once we've received peace with God, we become Christ's ambassadors of peace—called to be peacemakers, bringing *shalom* and carrying on the work of reconciliation.

This week, we'll explore the discipline of *slowing*. We will see how our ruthless elimination of *hurry* is key in our efforts to seek peace and pursue it. And as we slow, we will fill our hearts and minds with the truth of the gospel as we celebrate the reality that *peace came down at Christmas*.

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE AND PRAY

Reread [Luke 2:8-14](#) and use Tim Keller's meditation questions as your guide (*How does this passage show me something of God to praise? How does this show me something about myself to confess? How does this show me something I need to ask God for?*)



WEEK 2: PEACE

MONDAY, DEC. 11: PEACE IS POSSIBLE

*What is the beauty?
What is the magnificence that has come?
That God, in the sending of Christ and in the coming of Jesus,
makes peace with mankind.
-Matt Chandler*

SCRIPTURE

Romans 5:1-11, Ephesians 2:12-17, Luke 2:10-11

SLOWING PRAYER

We invite you to begin each day this week with a simple, slowing prayer (sometimes referred to as a “welcoming prayer”) aimed at becoming attentive to God in what is happening now. Feel free to adopt one of the provided providers or create your own.

“Lord, gather me now to be with you as you are with me”¹⁹

Jesus’ birth was announced as the *arrival of peace*. When Christ came, He made peace possible: first and foremost peace with God. Peace with God is foundational to all other peace we pursue. Our passages today explain how we receive this peace.

READ AND RESPOND

Read Romans [5:1-2, 6-11](#) and [Ephesians 2:12-17](#). Mark repetition and

¹⁹ Ted Loder. *Guerrillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle*. Augsburg Books, 1981.

Ephesians 2:12-17

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

What language do these passages use to describe what God did to save us?



Mark where you see the words *peace*, *faith*, and *hope* in these texts. What connections do you see between them?

How do we get this peace that Jesus Christ made possible through His birth, death, and resurrection? We *believe*. We believe in Jesus as the Savior. We admit that we are, by nature, in conflict with God. We put our faith in the saving work of the Messiah. We trust that Jesus' death and resurrection were enough to make us right with God. When we rest in what Jesus has accomplished, we are united to Him and His righteousness is counted as ours. We are justified before God.

The result of placing our faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ is *peace* with God.

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Today's passages contain so much glorious truth for us to set our hope in! Choose one passage now to spend some time meditating on using one (or a combination) of the practices that you found helpful last week.

In order to meditate on God's peace "day and night", choose a verse or phrase and commit it to memory, carrying it around in the front burner of your mind this week. Consider setting alarms on your phone or leaving post-it notes to yourself as reminders to return to this truth throughout your day.

PRAY AND REFLECT

Luke 2:10-11

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

We no longer have to be afraid. We are no longer separated from God. Through Christ, peace is possible. Instead of trembling in fear, we *behold* our Savior—we look to Him—and celebrate the beautiful reality that He made possible: *God and sinners reconciled!*

Spend some time thanking God for saving you and making peace possible.

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

*Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled."
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With th' angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!"*



WEEK 2: PEACE

TUESDAY, DEC. 12: PURSUING PEACE THROUGH SLOWING

I cannot live in the kingdom of God with a hurried soul.

I cannot rest in God with a hurried soul.

-John Ortberg

SCRIPTURE

Romans 15:13, Psalm 46:1-3, Psalm 46:10

SLOWING PRAYER

It's you I behold; You bring me peace.

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Romans 15:13](#). Based on your understanding and study of yesterday's reading in Romans 5, how would you explain this verse? What is the connection between *peace*, *believing*, and *hope*?

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you may abound in hope.



Four times in the New Testament God is called the *God of Peace* (Romans 16:20, Philippians 4:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 13:20). The angels declared that Christ's birth would bring peace. And in the final days of His life, Jesus shared with His disciples that He would leave His peace with them—a peace that is much different than what the world has to offer (John 14:27). With Christ's peace comes righteousness. Through Christ, we are invited into the very peace that He has with His Father!

So what often keeps us from fully experiencing this peace that Jesus purchased for us?

In his book *The Dusty Ones*, A.J. Swoboda observes that the American gospel has become “blessed are the busy ones”²⁰ and in her podcast, *The Next Right Thing*, Emily Freeman laments how she's grown weary of the *busy to hurry to sick* cycle. She comments that “Stay productive” has begun to sound less like an invitation and more like a threat!²¹

In her podcast, Freeman explores the difference between *busy* and *hurried*. She notes that her fear and anxiety (and lack of peace) creep in when she's unable to distinguish between the two.

John Ortberg distinguishes the two this way:

Being *busy* is an outward condition, a condition of the *body*. It occurs when we have many things to do...There are limits to how much busyness we can tolerate, so we wisely find ways to slow down whenever we can...By itself, busyness is not lethal.

Being *hurried* is an inner condition, a condition of the *soul*. It means to be so preoccupied with myself and my life that I am unable to be fully present with God, with myself, and with other people. I am unable to occupy this present

20 A.J. Swoboda. *The Dusty Ones*. Baker Books, 2016.

21 Emily Freeman. “Episode 16: Walk Slow and Carry Questions.” *The Next Right Thing*.

moment. Busyness migrates to hurry when we let it squeeze God out of our lives.²²

Dallas Willard once called *hurry* the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. And said, “You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”

A recent 5-year, worldwide study conducted by professor Michael Zigarelli, called “Obstacles of Spiritual Growth,” speaks to the danger that today’s frantic pace of life has on the Christian’s ability to walk as Jesus did and experience the abundant, joyful, and victorious life He offers. Zigarelli findings conclude that:

It may be the case that (1) Christians are assimilating to a culture of busyness, hurry and overload, which leads to (2) God becoming more marginalized in Christians’ lives, which leads to (3) a deteriorating relationship with God, which leads to (4) Christians becoming even more vulnerable to adopting secular assumptions about how to live, which leads to (5) more conformity to a culture of busyness, hurry and overload. And then the cycle begins again.

Slowing is certainly a counter-cultural discipline and one we must intentionally practice. Setting out to ruthlessly eliminate hurry from our lives is no small task...especially not during the month of December that tends to bring its own unique brand of *busy*. Is it even possible that we could approach this season with an *unhurried soul*?

We want to examine that this week. We want to intentionally *slow*... literally slow the pace that we move through our day. There’s a reason people talk about *walking* with Jesus, not *running* with Jesus. It’s because He is love. If we want to live as Jesus did, we must learn to keep pace. And He walks more slowly than we’re used to.

The late Japanese theologian, Kosuke Koyama sums it up like this:

God walks “slowly” because He is love. If He is not love, He would have gone much faster. Love has its speed. It is an inner speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind

²² John Ortberg. *Soul Keeping: Caring for the Most Important Part of You*. Zondervan, 2014.



of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed. It is “slow” yet it is lord over all other speeds since it is the speed of love.²³

Hurry and love are incompatible. So we must work to ruthlessly eliminate hurry from our lives—even, and especially, as we prepare our hearts and souls for Christmas. As we slow, we are able to choose the one thing that really matters—beholding our Prince of Peace.

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Meditate on [Psalm 46:1-3](#) and [Psalm 46:10](#). Slow. Listen.

Psalm 46:1-3,10

*God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.*

*Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the
sea,*

*though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling.*

*“Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!”*

*God never guides us into an intolerable scramble of panting
feverishness.*

-Thomas Kelly

²³ Kosuke Koyama. *Three Mile and Hour God*. Orbis, 1980.

REFLECT AND PRAY

Take some time to do an honest assessment of the pace of your life. Feel free to use Ruth Haley Barton's list as a starting point to confess. And then, repent: choose to actually slow down this week as you seek peace and pursue it.

10 Signs You're Moving Through Life Too Fast:²⁴

1. Irritability/grouchiness
2. Hypersensitivity
3. Restlessness
4. Compulsive over-working
5. Emotional numbness (*main feelings are anger & anxiety with little or no capacity for empathy because empathy takes time*)
6. Escapist behaviors (*social media, tv, excessive drinking/eating*)
7. Disconnected from identity and calling (*get sucked into the "tyranny of the urgent"*)
8. Unable to give in to basic needs (*don't get enough sleep, exercise, etc*)
9. Hoarding energy (*have to say "no" to things in order to save energy for future things*)
10. Slippage in spiritual practice (*this is the exact opposite of what we see in the life of Jesus!*)

*We need to learn the slow habits of loving God and those around us.
-Tish Harrison Warren*

²⁴ Ruth Haley Barton. *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*. IVP Books, 2018



WEEK 2: PEACE

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 13: CHOOSE THE GOOD PORTION

*As the world careens on in all its frenetic madness,
and many demands insist on our attention,
we can become people who choose to be still,
sit at the Lord's feet, and listen to His voice.*

For it's in His word that we will receive the good portion we need most.

-Lisa Chan

SCRIPTURE

Luke 10:38-42, Psalm 16:8-9, Psalm 73:28

SLOWING PRAYER

O God, gather me now to be with you as you are with me.

Even as I may be busy on the outside, don't let hurry overwhelm me on the inside.

Remind me to move at a walking pace.

Let your peace rule within me.

Quiet me in the midst of the chaos in your name.²⁵

Today we will look at a biblical picture of *slowing*.

The story of Mary and Martha is one often simplified or misunderstood. We know that Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus were friends with Jesus. In fact, they are three of a select group of people mentioned by name that Jesus loved. The story is often depicted on Sunday School

25 Emily P. Freeman. "[Episode 16: Walk Slow and Carry Questions.](#)" *The Next Right Thing* Podcast.

It's important to realize that Martha was distracted by a *good* thing: serving. There were 100+ people in her home. Martha wasn't simply busy baking cupcakes or making sure her charcuterie board was insta-worthy. She was doing *much serving*. She was opening her home so that a large group of people could hear from Jesus—a man that she faithfully followed. Martha was doing *good* work.

Yet Jesus points out that Martha is *anxious and troubled about many things*—beyond the necessary preparations for that day's events. And then Jesus reminds her of the one thing that is necessary—and He points to Mary, the sister who has chosen to sit at His feet.

It would have been incredibly controversial that Jesus was in a woman's home, allowing women to sit under His teaching. This was a role reserved for men. And yet, as we see in the text, Mary sat at Jesus' feet, listening to His teaching. It's incredibly meaningful that Jesus would take the side of Mary when she was acting like a male disciple would act. But He says that she's *chosen the good portion*—that being near Him is exactly where she needs to be—and that it's the only thing that really matters and will matter for eternity.

Jesus' gentle rebuke of Martha was an act of love—to her and to us. No matter how much we want to be like Mary all the time, it's likely that we often find ourselves falling into the same traps that Martha did—doing *good*, even important work, but with a *hurried* spirit and an *anxious* soul. In order to experience the peace of Christ and the depths of His love for us, we must take our cue from Mary and those in the Bible who *slow*, knowing that *it's good to be near God*. (Psalm 73:28)

The invitation today (and every day) is to *choose the good portion*. As Jesus tells us, the good portion is both necessary and it is a *choice*. It will require *slowing*. It may mean spending less time on a *good* thing in order to spend time in the presence of the perfect King. It will certainly mean laying your distractions and worries and hurry at the feet of the Prince of Peace.

REFLECT AND PRAY

One thing is necessary. Do you actually believe this? Is it reflected in the way you view your time? What is one practical step you could take this week for your schedule to reflect this belief?

What would it practically look like for you to slow down (yes, even during the busiest time of the year!) and *choose* Him? Ask Jesus for His help.

What *good* things are you caught up in that keep you from being with Jesus? Spend some time examining those in the presence of God.



WEEK 2: PEACE

THURSDAY, DEC. 14: OUR PEACE IS THE GREATNESS OF GOD

*“You are the one in whom Christ dwells.
You live in the strong and unshakeable kingdom of God.”
-Dallas Willard*

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 26:3, Psalm 116:7, 1 Peter 5:6-7, Psalm 62:8, Philippians 4:4-7

SLOWING PRAYER

*Lord, help me to slow.
I choose you, the good portion.*

It’s often been said that *anxiety* is the opposite of *peace*.

To be clear, we are not talking about clinical anxiety; we are talking about the anxieties of life that we all experience. In [Luke 10:38-42](#) when Jesus tells Martha that she is “anxious about many things,” the word He uses is “*remna*” which means “*to be in pieces*.”

Martha’s mind was divided and distracted. It’s not that Martha’s serving was wrong, it’s that Martha was trying to do too many things—*she wasn’t single-minded* and by juxtaposing Martha with Mary, it’s as if Jesus was saying, “Martha, you’re in trouble until I’m your one thing—I’m the *good portion*—this is where your single-mindedness ought to land.”



The same can be said for many of us today: *we are anxious about many things*. We're always on edge. Always so busy. Always have a list of things that are going wrong or that we are worried about. Sometimes we even wear our worry as a badge of honor. We're chaotic, hectic, *hurried*.

When Christ came, He made peace possible. Certainly and most importantly this includes our peace with God, but this extends to peace with ourselves and within our minds—perhaps the very place that many of us feel the most broken.

God's picture for us and the world is not one of broken pieces, it's one of *shalom*: complete and perfect peace.

The secret to experiencing this peace is *being abandoned to God*—to single-mindedly *choosing* Him as your portion over and over again.

Dallas Willard writes:

The person who is heartily abandoned to God knows that all shall be well because God is in charge of his or her life. My peace is the greatness of God. Because He, who not only loves me but *is* Love is so great, I live beyond harm in His hands; and there is nothing that can happen to me that will not turn out to my good. *Nothing*. (Romans 8:28; Isaiah 26:3)²⁶

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Slowly read through [Isaiah 26:3](#), [Psalm 116:7](#), [Psalm 62:8](#), [1 Peter 5:6-7](#), [Philippians 4:4-7](#). Use the space provided to respond to these verses however the Lord leads you in your time of listening to Him. Maybe you paraphrase each. Perhaps you note what praiseworthy attributes of God they possess, or something you need to confess to Him or something you need to ask of Him.

After you go through each verse individually, consider meditating on one slowly using a form of *Lectio Divina*. Perhaps you say it out loud until you can recite it from memory in order to meditate on it day and night and remind yourself of the truth that your peace is the greatness of God.

²⁶ Dallas Willard. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. NavPress, 2012.

Isaiah 26:3

*You will keep the mind that is dependent on you in
In perfect peace,
For it is trusting you.*

Psalms 116:7

*Be at rest once more, O my soul,
for the Lord has been good to you*

1 Peter 5:6-7

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand
of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,
casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for
you.*

Psalms 62:8

*Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart
before him; God is a refuge for us.*



Philippians 4:4-7

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!
5 Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The
Lord is near. 6 Don't worry about anything, but
in everything, through prayer and petition with
thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the
peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will
guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

When we see Christ for who He is and we trust Him as the one in control, we are able to do two things:

- 1. Cast our cares and anxieties on Him
- 2. Give thanks to God

And when we actively and continuously cast our cares on the Lord and give thanks to Him, we are habitually acknowledging with our lives that He occupies the throne...*not us*. We are repeatedly choosing Him, the good portion over our worries and fears. Guarded with the truth that Christ, who is our peace, now sits at the right hand of God, we can rest. We can let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.

REFLECT AND PRAY

Spend time now giving your cares and anxieties to God. Tell Him about them. He cares for you! And then, give thanks to God: for Who He is and all He has done.





WEEK 2: PEACE

FRIDAY, DEC. 15: PRAYERS OF RECOLLECTION

All the productivity and perseverance we strive for find their fuel in our perspective on true rest. When we see how much we're provided for in Christ, we can be fruitful in His glory because He's fruitful in us, and we can rest because His rest is productive
-Ruth Chou Simons

SCRIPTURE

Philippians 4:6-7

SLOWING PRAYER

O God, gather me now to be with you as you are with me.

Even as I may be busy on the outside, don't let hurry overwhelm me on the inside.

Remind me to move at a walking pace.

Let your peace rule within me.

Quiet me in the midst of the chaos in your name.²⁷

Yesterday we examined and practiced the biblical mandate to give our cares to the Lord, knowing that He cares for us! *The New Living Translation* paraphrases Philippians 4 this way:

Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace,

²⁷ Emily P. Freeman. "[Episode 16: Walk Slow and Carry Questions.](#)" *The Next Right Thing* Podcast.



which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

What stands out to you in this translation?

Today we want to look at a specific type of prayer that helps us *slow* and submit our worries and anxieties to Christ, allowing Him to fill us up with the peace that only He can provide.

PRAYER OF RECOLLECTION

A *recollected* soul is the opposite of a *distracted fragmented* soul. It is a soul collected and at rest in God. Because it is natural for our often hurried and worried souls to be distracted, we need a prayer that recalls our soul to its center in God.²⁸ Though there is not one formula for this type of prayer, today we will look at a type of recollection prayer that allows us to put part of the work described in Philippians 4:6, 1 Peter 5:7 and Psalm 62:8 into practice.

PALMS DOWN/PALMS UP PRAYER

While there are a few variations of palms down/palms up prayer, the steps we are using are adapted from Richard Foster's description of the practice in his book, Celebration of Discipline.

- Slow. Be still. Intentionally place yourself in the presence of Jesus.
- Place your hands on your knees **palms down** and begin to drop your cares, worries, agendas, and expectations into Jesus's hands. Let go of all that is heavy and burdensome. Placing your palms down is a symbolic indication of your desire to turn over any concerns you may have to God. In this case, "pouring your heart

28 Adele Ahlberg Calhoun. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*. InterVarsity Press, 2015.

out to God” and “casting your cares on Him” may take the form of statements like

- ◇ *Lord I release my fear of...*
- ◇ *Lord I give you my anger toward...*
- ◇ *I release my frustration over...*
- ◇ *I give you my anxiety over...*

- Whatever it is that weighs on your mind or is a concern to you, release it to God.
- When you have given your cares to Jesus, after several minutes of surrender, turn your **palms up** to receive God’s presence, words, and love. Listen. Placing your palms down is a symbol of your desire to receive from the Lord. Perhaps you will pray silently specific statements that correlate to the concerns you released such as
 - ◇ *Lord I would like to receive your peace about...*
 - ◇ *Lord I would like to receive your divine love for...*
 - ◇ *Lord I would like to receive your patience for...*
 - ◇ *Lord I would like to receive your joy for...*
- Spend the remaining moments in complete silence. Do not ask for anything. Allow the Lord to commune with you, to love you.

REFLECT AND PRAY

Use the space below to write down your anxieties. Consider using some of the prompts outlined above or creating your own. Once you’ve taken the time to identify your worries and fears, practice the *Palms Up/Palms Down* prayer method.



WEEK 2: PEACE

SATURDAY, DEC. 16: BEING PEOPLE OF PEACE

I am increasingly aware that I cannot seek God's peace and mission in the world without beginning right where I am, in my home, in my neighborhood, in my church, with the real people right around me.

-Tish Harrison Warren

SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 5:16-21, 2 Corinthians 13:11, Luke 8:40-53

SLOWING PRAYER

Begin with a prayer of recollection. Consider using the palms down/palms up method that we practiced yesterday.

This week we've studied the gift that is the peace of Christ. We've been reminded of the good news that the angels proclaimed to the shepherds: *peace is possible*: peace with God, peace with ourselves, and today, we'll look at a third kind of peace that Jesus brings: *peace with others*.

Through Christ, we have received peace with God—we are justified and made right before God. And if we believe and place our faith in what Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection accomplished, we become new creations. And as new creations, who have been transformed by the Prince of Peace, we are now called to be *peacemakers*—doing our part to bring God's heart for *shalom* to earth.



MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Read through **2 Corinthians 5:16-21** and **2 Corinthians 13:11** slowly. What specifically can you praise God for? What attributes of Jesus are displayed? What can you thank Him for? What does this passage reveal is true about you in light of what Jesus has done? Is there anything you need to confess? Anything you would like to ask God for?

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling[c]the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 13:11

Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Because we are broken people in a broken world, pursuing peace always involves forgiveness and reconciliation. And our ability to forgive and reconcile with others is only possible because of Jesus Christ's forgiveness of us. Tish Harrison Warren puts beautiful language around this great debt we've been forgiven:

In the end, God is the peacemaker. It is not simply "peace" that we pass to each other. It is the peace of Christ, the peace of our peacemaker. Christ's peace is never a cheap peace...It's a peace that is honest and hard-won, that speaks truth and seeks justice, that costs something, and that takes time. It is a peace that offers reconciliation. We cannot seek peace out of our own strength...But God has reconciled us to himself, and He brings reconciliation and peace to every sphere of life. He is bringing peace to city streets and out in the wilderness and on farms and in the suburbs and in my kitchen. He is reconciling us to Himself, to each other, and to the earth. God's ministry of reconciliation works its way into all of life, even into these small moments of our day.²⁹

Jesus both is the way and He modeled the way during His life on earth. We know that Jesus was busy in ministry. But He was not in a hurry. Though we could study any number of passages (and we'd encourage you to do so!), today we'll look at just one day in the life of Jesus.

²⁹ Tish Harrison Warren. *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life*. IVP Books, 2019.



READ AND RESPOND

Read [Luke 8: 40-53](#). While these may be two stories that you're very familiar with in the life of Jesus' ministry, look at them today through a different lens. As you read, mark any indications that while Jesus was busy, He was not in a hurry. What might have been different in both of these instances if He had been?

Luke 8:40-53

Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. ⁴¹ Then a man named Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house ⁴² because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying.

As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. ⁴³ And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. ⁴⁴ She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

⁴⁵ "Who touched me?" Jesus asked.

When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you."

⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me."

⁴⁷ Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. ⁴⁸ Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

⁴⁹ While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," he said. "Don't bother the teacher anymore."

⁵⁰ Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed."

⁵¹ When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child's father and mother. ⁵² Meanwhile, all

the people were wailing and mourning for her. “Stop wailing,” Jesus said. “She is not dead but asleep.”

⁵³ They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead.

⁵⁴ But he took her by the hand and said, “My child, get up!” ⁵⁵ Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up.

Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. ⁵⁶

Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.

As Emily Freeman reflected on this passage, she let her mind wander around in the question: What did “productive” look like for Jesus?

I wonder if He made a to-do list that morning? Was Jairus’ daughter’s name on it? What about the bleeding woman? Or maybe for Him, “staying productive” meant *abiding* in His Father no matter what. Maybe He simply woke up as a child in the presence of his Father and walked along with Him into the next ordinary moment, whether that moment was filled with crowds of people, an important official, a sick woman, or no one at all. Maybe He simply trusted that His Father understood every possible future and His job as a Son was to simply listen, follow, and be present. That’s a full job, to be sure. But it isn’t a *hurried* one.

Jesus was *busy* but He was not in a *hurry*. How do we know? Because He stopped for both of them: the official and the woman. He did not see this man, woman, and little girl as interruptions to his day, but rather, as people He loved...people He would soon die for because of His love for them.



C.S. Lewis once famously wrote: The great thing, if one can, is to stop regarding all the unpleasant things as interruptions of one’s “own” or “real” life. The truth is of course that what one calls the “interruptions” are precisely one’s real life—the life God is sending you day by day.³⁰

As peacemakers, our work of bringing *shalom* starts right where we are, with the people and places we encounter every day. We must fight against our hurried spirits. We must re-orient ourselves to view the everyday moments that make up our lives as the very moments that God wants to use to establish his Kingdom of Peace.

Are you willing to carry peace with you into the next room even when the beds aren’t made, the t’s aren’t crossed, and your to-do list is piling up? What about if you suddenly find yourself working from home while simultaneously teaching your children in the middle of a pandemic and everything feels crazy?

Will you take your role as Ambassador for Christ seriously enough that you’ll slow down? That you’ll relentlessly and counter-culturally fight to eliminate hurry in order to protect your soul and the souls of those in your sphere? Will you pursue and prioritize daily time with Jesus, your Prince of Peace, knowing that the more you sit at His feet, not only will you be transformed by His presence but so will everyone you encounter.

REFLECT AND PRAY

Spend some time now in prayer, listening to God. Who are the people in your everyday life that He has called you to extend His peace to? Where does pursuing peace start for you? Where are you the most resistant? Confess. Repent. Join God in His work of reconciling the world to Himself.

³⁰ from a 1943 letter from C.S. Lewis included in *Yours, Jack: Spiritual Direction From C.S. Lewis*. HarperOne, 2008.



*We are quarreling people, but God is reforming us to be people who,
through our ordinary moments, establish his kingdom of peace.
Believing this is an act of a faith.
It takes faith to believe that our little, frail faithfulness can produce fruit.
It takes faith to believe that laying down my sword in my kitchen
has anything to do with cosmic peace on earth.
And it takes faith to believe that God is making us into people—
slowly, through repentance—
who are capable of saying to the world through our lives, “Peace of Christ
to you.”
-Tish Harrison Warren*



WEEK 2: PEACE

WEEK 2 REFLECTION SLOWING FOR PEACE

After the second week of Advent, what has stood out to you from these practices?

Have any of these practices been particularly challenging? Why is that?

What has the Lord been teaching you this week?



How might you and your LifeGroup spur one another on (Hebrews 10:24) to continue these practices as we head into week 3 of Advent?



SUNDAY FAMILY DEVOTION: THE THIRD CANDLE OF ADVENT

During the first week of Advent, we celebrated that God gave us Jesus to be our light and our hope.

Light the “Hope” candle.



Last week we celebrated that God sent Jesus to bring peace and make peace with God possible.

Light the “Peace” candle.



This week we will celebrate that Jesus brings joy! This third candle is often called the “Shepherd’s Candle” because with it, we remember how the shepherds rejoiced when they saw Jesus with their own eyes.

Do you remember what the angel said when he appeared to the shepherds in the field? He said, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news. It will bring 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. Here is how you will know I’m telling the truth, you will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:10-11)

When the angels left, the shepherds decided to go to Bethlehem because they wanted to see for themselves this baby that the angel had told them about:

Luke 2:16-20

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby. The baby was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ After the shepherds had seen him, they told everyone. They reported what the angel had said about this child. ¹⁸ All



who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them... ²⁰ The shepherds returned. They gave glory and praise to God. Everything they had seen and heard was just as they had been told.

When the shepherds saw Jesus, they rejoiced. And when they left, they couldn't keep this amazing gift to themselves; they went and told everyone of the great joy they'd found lying in a manger.

And even when they returned home, what did they do? They praised God for sending them Jesus—a Savior! They gave thanks to God because they had experienced this good news of great joy for themselves!



Light the “Joy Candle”

When Jesus was born, his birth fulfilled God's promise to send a Savior—a messiah who would make a way for us to be right with God. And that good news should fill us with joy, just like it did for the shepherds long ago. Once we know and experience the love God has for us, our response is to rejoice!

Jesus is who we celebrate this Christmas. True joy is found in Him and Him alone!

DISCUSS

- What do you think it would have been like to be one of the shepherds who met baby Jesus?
- How has Jesus been good news in your life specifically? Take some time to celebrate His work in the lives of your family.
- Do you ever find yourself forgetting that Jesus is who we celebrate at Christmas? When does this tend to happen?
- What can we as a family do over the next 2 weeks to make sure we are anticipating and celebrating Jesus above anything else this Christmas season?

PRAY

Let's spend some time thanking God for sending Jesus—our great joy! Let's confess anywhere that we are looking to this season to bring us the kind of joy that only He can. Let's ask God to help us see the gift of Jesus as the biggest and best gift.

FAMILY GUIDE

WEEK 3

CELEBRATE THE LORD TOGETHER THIS WEEK

Read Philippians 4:8. Discuss why it's important to set our minds on things that are excellent and worthy of praise. As a family, create a list of things you can think about to direct your joy to Jesus. Place the list in a central location that you all can refer to throughout the week. Rejoice!

Philippians 4:8 (NIRV)

Finally, my brothers and sisters, always think about what is true. Think about what is noble, right and pure. Think about what is lovely and worthy of respect. If anything is excellent or worthy of praise, think about those kinds of things.

SLOWING PRAYERS

Revisit your slowing prayers from last week, or spend time as a family crafting new ones that help you celebrate the good news of Jesus!

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Below you will find 6 verses that go with our theme of joy. Your family could choose one verse to meditate on for the entire week, or you may choose to focus on a different verse each day. For a few suggestions on how to meditate on Scripture as a Family, please refer to the Week 1 Family Guide.

Luke 2:10-11 (NIRV)

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring



you good news. It will bring 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.

Philippians 4:8 (NIRV)

Finally, my brothers and sisters, always think about what is true. Think about what is noble, right and pure. Think about what is lovely and worthy of respect. If anything is excellent or worthy of praise, think about those kinds of things.

Luke 1:46-47 (NIV)

Mary said, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

Psalms 34:3 (ESV)

*Oh, magnify the Lord with me,
and let us exalt his name together!*

Luke 12:15 (NIRV)

Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against wanting to have more and more things. Life is not made up of how much a person has."

1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV)

give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Psalms 136:1-3 (ICB)

Give thanks to the Lord because he is good.

His love continues forever.

Give thanks to the God over all gods.

His love continues forever.

Give thanks to the Lord of all lords.

His love continues forever.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

- *God's Very Good Idea* by Trillia Newbell
- *The Christmas Promise* by Alison Mitchell

SONG RECOMMENDATIONS

Check out our [“Songs of Joy”](#) playlist on Spotify for the complete list of songs for the week.



WEEK 3: JOY

SUNDAY, DEC. 17: JOY CAME DOWN AT CHRISTMAS

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

*“Joy is the serious business of heaven.”
-C.S. Lewis*

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 51:11, Luke 2:8-14

Light the first Advent candle, the candle of HOPE.



Light the second Advent candle, the candle of PEACE.



This week we light the third candle that represents the *joy* of Christ. This candle is often referred to as the “Shepherds’ Candle,” as we, like the shepherds, rejoice in response to Christ’s birth.

It is fitting that we look at the gift of joy *after* examining the gift of peace because the two are intertwined. Without the peace of Christ, we cannot experience the joy of Christ; our inner joy is a result of our objective peace with God.

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Isaiah 51:11](#). Paraphrase Isaiah’s prophecy. What did he say would be the reaction of God’s rescued people?



Isaiah 51:11

Those the Lord has rescued will return.

They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads.

Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.



Light the third Advent candle.

*(A family candle lighting devotion can be found in this week's **Sunday Family Devotional on page 100**)*

When Jesus came, His birth was announced as “good news of great joy.” The Good News of Christ—the *gospel*—is one of joy.

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Meditate on [Luke 2:8-14](#). Is there a particular line or phrase that you feel led to memorize and carry in the front burner of your mind this week?

Consider asking the following questions of the passage:

- How does this show me something of God to praise?
- How does this show me something about myself to confess?
- How does this show me something I need to ask God for?

Luke 2:8-14

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,*

¹⁴ *“Glory to God in the highest,*

and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

This week, we will spend time reading through the events surrounding Jesus’ birth and we will study various people’s reactions to this good news of great joy. We will note what we can learn from their rejoicing. And most importantly, we will join them in *celebrating* not only Christ’s birth, but also His death and resurrection—a death that He endured because of the *joy* set before Him. (Hebrews 12:2)

Jesus Christ’s joy is our redemption.

And so we celebrate that *joy* came down at Christmas.

REFLECT AND PRAY

Where have you been guilty of making joy too small a thing?

Pray this week that your joy in Christ will increase as you trust Him more.



WEEK 3: JOY

MONDAY, DEC. 18: CELEBRATING AS A PATHWAY TO JOY

Celebration brings joy into life and joy makes us strong.
-Richard Foster

SCRIPTURE

Romans 15:13, Philippians 4:4-9

SLOWING PRAYER

“Lord, gather me now to be with you as you are with me”³¹

Throughout His time on earth, Jesus rejoiced in His Father, placing His hope in the Father’s promises and love. In Jesus, we see an essential connection between Jesus’ joy in God and His trust in and obedience to God.

The writers of the Bible Project sum up biblical joy this way: Joy is an attitude that God’s people adopt, not because of happy circumstances, but because of their hope in God’s love and promise. The result of trusting in God ultimately leads to *rejoicing* in Him.³²

- We *rejoice* in who or what we trust.
- We *obey* who or what we trust.
- We *celebrate* who or what we trust.

³¹ Ted Loder. *Guerrillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle*. Augsburg Books, 1981.

³² “Chara: Joy.” *The Bible Project*.



With this principle in mind, re-read Paul’s prayer to the early Christians—a prayer that extends to us today:

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Slowly read [Romans 15:13](#) and use one of our meditation methods from Week 1.

Romans 15:13 (NIV)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

One way that we intentionally set ourselves up for joy is through the spiritual discipline of *celebration*. Though not always thought of as a spiritual practice, *Celebration of Discipline* author Richard Foster argues that celebration is actually central to all spiritual disciplines because without it, the other disciplines become “dull-breathing tools in the hands of modern Pharisees.”

Because our *rejoicing* is so connected to our *trusting*, in order for genuine celebration to occur, *obedience* must work itself into our daily lives. Foster explains the connection this way: “Joy is found in obedience. When the power that is in Jesus reaches into our work and play and redeems them, there will be joy where once there was mourning. To overlook this is to miss the meaning of the Incarnation.”³³

This week we will look at some of the key people in the story of Christ’s birth and how they each respond when God “broke into the routine experience of their daily existence.” We’ll pay close attention to this pattern of joy being found in obedience and trust and how that joy expresses itself in celebration.

³³ Richard Foster. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. HarperOne, 2018.

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Philippians 4:4-7](#). Last week, we studied this passage and applied Paul's instructions for how to deal with our anxiety. As you reread this passage today, think about the connection between joy and trust. What new insight can you gain from this passage?

Philippians 4:4-7

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.
 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

In the Old Testament, all of the stipulations of the year of *Jubilee*—cancelling all debts, planting no crops, returning property to the original owner—were a celebration of God's provision. God could be trusted to provide what was needed. Freedom from anxiety (or *care* as some translations say) forms the basis for celebration.³⁴

Paul does not end there though. The peace of God results in a certain kind of thinking and a certain kind of practicing.

READ AND RESPOND

Prayer and trust make up the first part of Paul's instructions for how to *Rejoice Always*. Read [Philippians 4:8-9](#). and summarize his final instructions:

³⁴ Richard Foster. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. HarperOne, 2018.



Philippians 4:8-9

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Paul makes the point that the peace of God produces active minds and active bodies. The peace of God guards our hearts and minds and one of the ways it guards our minds is by telling us where our thoughts should dwell. Foster shows how this intentional direction of our minds is directly connected to our joy:

The decision to set the mind on the higher things of life is an act of the will. That is why celebration is a discipline. It is not something that falls on our heads. It is the result of a consciously chosen way of thinking and living. When we choose this way, the healing and redemption in Christ will break into the inner recesses of our lives and relationships, and the inevitable result will be joy.

Choosing Christ as the good portion includes choosing to set our minds on certain things and in doing so, we are placing our trust in Jesus. Instead of allowing our minds to be full of care or anxiety, we intentionally set our minds above and on the things that God calls excellent and praiseworthy. This is how we cultivate a life marked with genuine celebration and true joy.

REFLECT AND PRAY

Paul gives believers these categories to set our minds on. Spend some time with this list.

Maybe you even write out things in each category that you can set your mind on and intentionally praise God for.

Consider what the opposite of each category is and where you are tempted to let your mind wander and land. For instance: Where are you tempted to dwell on or savor things that aren't true? Dishonorable or shameful? Do you have a tendency to focus on the bad and ugly in a situation? Spend time with this list in the presence of God. Journal. Confess. Repent. And change your mind!

True:

Honorable:

Pure:

Just:



Lovely:

Commendable:

Excellent:

Praiseworthy:

WEEK 3: JOY

TUESDAY, DEC. 19: RESPONDING IN FAITH

*Mary shows us that responding in faith
is a whole-person experience that includes the intellect.
-Timothy Keller*

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:28-38

SLOWING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.

Yesterday we introduced the discipline of celebration and saw how celebrating is grounded in trust and obedience. Today and tomorrow we will look at Mary, the mother of Jesus, and very clearly see this connection when the angel, Gabriel, visited her and brought the news that the savior of the world would call her *Mom*.

But we will also notice that Mary's acceptance of God's plan for her life didn't come all at once.

Luke 1:28-29

And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

These words change Mary's entire life. With these words, God breaks into the routine experience of her daily existence. The angel, Gabriel, calls Mary *favored*—God's presence is with her. *Immanuel*. In other



translations, Gabriel's greeting begins with "Rejoice!" Why? Because the Lord is with her. The Lord's presence in her life is what brings about transformation and gives her cause for celebration.

But Mary's initial response is not one of joyful delight...as ours probably would not have been either at such unbelievable news! Mary was *greatly troubled* as she tried to make sense of what the angel was telling her. The "discern" here in other translations is replaced with "wondered" but the original Greek word means to "make an audit." It's an accounting word and it means to be adding things up, weighing, pondering. As Timothy Keller notes, it's *intensely rational*.³⁵

In her article, "Saying Yes to God's Unexpected Plan", Melissa Kruger writes of the encouragement she personally finds in Mary's initial response of being *greatly troubled*:

Often, our lives do not turn out the way we expect. There's room to ponder and wonder at what the Lord is doing as we attempt to discern His plans for us. We're also allowed to question and ask God to give us understanding for what we simply can't comprehend.³⁶

The passage in Luke continues with Gabriel's response to Mary. Notice that there's no rebuke for Mary questioning God's plan. Instead, Gabriel describes how God's plan will unfold.

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Luke 1:30-33](#). How does Gabriel describe Jesus?

Luke 1:30-33

And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

³⁵ Timothy Keller. *Hidden Christmas: The Surprising Truth Behind the Birth of Christ*. Viking, 2016.
³⁶ Melissa Kruger. "[Saying Yes to God's Unexpected Plan](#)." *The Gospel Coalition*.

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Luke 1:34-38](#). What stands out to you in Mary's question and her response? Where are you encouraged? Where are you challenged? What do you notice about Gabriel's response to Mary's question?

Luke 1:34-38

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.



In the older translations Mary says, “Be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38 KJV). In his book, *Hidden Christmas*, Timothy Keller points out that these words are extremely close to the words her son, Jesus would one day say to His Heavenly Father before enduring the cross: “Not as I will, but as you will (Matthew 26:39).

Yet Mary made this surrender *before* knowing what her son was going to do for her. For Mary, her response of “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word,” was one of faith.

REFLECT AND PRAY

Pastor and author Timothy Keller recalls being at a Christian conference many years ago and hearing a talk about doing Christ’s will for our lives and not our own. At the end of the talk, the speaker challenged the audience with two questions:

1. Are you willing to obey anything the Bible clearly says to do whether you like it or not?
2. Are you willing to trust God in anything He sends into your life, whether you understand it or not?

The speaker concluded by telling the audience that if they can’t answer these two questions in the affirmative, while they may believe in Jesus in some general way, they have never said to Him, “I am the Lord’s servant.”

Spend some time with these questions before the Lord.

May it be according to your word.

Let that be our daily prayer, for this season and the entire year.

*There is the kind of doubt that is the sign of a closed mind,
and there is a kind of doubt that is the sign of an open mind.
Some doubt seeks answers,
and some doubt is a defense against the possibility of answers.
There are people like Mary
who are open to the truth
and are willing to relinquish sovereignty over their lives
if they can be shown that the truth is other than what they thought.
And there are those like Zechariah
who use doubts as a way of staying in control of their lives
and keeping their minds closed.
What kind of doubt do you have?
-Timothy Keller*



WEEK 3: JOY

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 20: MAGNIFYING THE LORD

*The only people whose soul can truly magnify the Lord
are people like Mary—
people who acknowledge their lowly estate
and are overwhelmed by the condescension of the magnificent God.
-John Piper*

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:46-55, Psalm 34:3

SLOWING PRAYER

May it be according to Your word.

Yesterday we looked at Mary's response to the news that she would be the mother of Jesus. We traced how she progressed from a place of questioning how what the angel told her was possible to accepting it in faith as she proclaimed, "*Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be according to your word.*"

Today we pick up just a few verses ahead in the story and we find Mary so moved by the vision of God that she breaks out into a song that has come to be known as the *Magnificat*.

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Spend some time now meditating on Mary's, *Magnificat* found in [Luke 1:46-55](#).



Luke 1:46-55

And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

*For behold, from now on all generations will call me
blessed;*

*49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.*

*50 And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.*

*51 He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their
hearts;*

*52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;*

*53 he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.*

*54 He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,*

*55 as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”*

Mary's praise consists of 3 parts:³⁷

1. Mary's expression of what she feels in her heart

Read and Respond: Reread Luke 1:46-47. What does Mary feel in her soul?

2. Mary's praise for what God has done specifically for her as an individual (vs. 48-49)

Read and Respond: Reread Luke 1:48-49. What does Mary list as specific things that God has done for her?

3. Mary's description of God in general (vs. 49-55)

Read and Respond: Reread Luke 1:49-55. What attributes of God does Mary name as her soul magnifies God?

³⁷ John Piper. "[Meditation on the Magnificent.](#)" *Desiring God*.



Mary had a real encounter with the presence of God and it transformed her—it changed everything about her life...and her response was one of *thoughtful trust* and *joyful obedience*.

And so she *celebrated*.

What can we learn from Mary's magnification? There are certainly many applications but here are a few for us as we seek to celebrate and magnify the Lord this week:

1. Mary is rooted in Scripture—so that's where her praise comes from. The first section of Mary's song (vs. 46-53) builds on Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 after Hannah was told she would conceive Samuel. The last section of Mary's song alludes to predictions of Isaac's conception found in Genesis 17:19. What a challenge to all of us to fill our hearts with Scripture—to meditate on it day and night—so that the words and thoughts of Scripture fill our mouth as naturally as they did Mary's!
2. Mary recounts specific things that God had done for her. By recalling God's faithfulness in the past, we are reminded that He is faithful, good, trustworthy, and worthy of our obedience.
3. Mary rejoices in who God is. She praises Him for all of the ways that He is God and she is not.

We can also magnify God by rejoicing in Him. In fact, we are commanded to do so.

When we hide God's Word in our heart, and recount the specific ways He's been faithful to us—His lowly servants—and when we behold God and set our eyes on Him—the founder and the finisher of our faith—we can be happy in the mercy of God. *That* is what magnifies God most.

REFLECT AND CELEBRATE

Psalm 34: 3

Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!

Modeled after the 3 parts of Mary's prayer:



1. What Scripture(s) can you call to mind as a way to magnify the Lord and rejoice in Him? Are there a few “front burner” texts that you want to keep in your mind to meditate on and praise God for this week?

2. What has Christ done for you specifically? How is your life different because Jesus reconciled you to Himself? How has your life been/how is it being transformed?

3. What attributes of God can you magnify and celebrate this week? How might you share this good news of great joy with others?



WEEK 3: JOY

THURSDAY, DEC. 21: TELLING AND TREASURING

*Though the shepherds lived most of their lives on the outside looking in, they would not be outsiders to this gift.
They were the recipients of it.
-Russ Ramsey*

SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:8-20

Yesterday we looked at how the surprising news that Mary would be the mother of the Son of God led to her magnifying the Lord.

The shepherds, like Mary, were given an angelic message. So what did *celebration* look like for them?

To fully understand the shepherds' response, it's helpful to have some background into a shepherd's role. Shepherds' lives were ironic:

Their job was to care for the animals that would be sacrificed to atone for the sins of the people. Yet because of their handling of these dirty creatures, they themselves were unclean and thus prevented from keeping the ceremonial law. And because they were ceremonially unclean, they were often regarded as untrustworthy, irreligious, and poor in reputation.

Nevertheless, it was also expected that one who did his job well, a good shepherd, would be willing to lay down his life for his sheep. (John 10:11) A good shepherd was someone who cared deeply for the lambs under his watch, many of which



were appointed to die on the altar of the Lord for the sins of the very people who looked down on the shepherds.³⁸

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Luke 2:8-20](#). Consider the historical context and the role of the shepherds in society. Note your observations. Pay attention to the angel's message and the shepherd's response.

Luke 2:8-20

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

³⁸ Russ Ramsey. *Behold the Lamb of God*. Rabbit Room Press, 2011.

God's choice to appear to the shepherds was, of course, intentional. Nashville Pastor Russ Ramsey puts such beautiful language around what this encounter may have been like for the shepherds:

The angels gave the shepherds a sign that left them speechless. Their Messiah and Savior could be found where the young lambs were kept. He would be the one not covered in wool, but wrapped in a swaddling cloth.

Where the lambs are kept? This they needed to see.

When they found Jesus in the manger as the angel said, the very location of His birth was drenched in significance. The Savior had been born into their unclean world in the same manner as a lamb. The symbolism was not lost on them.

When the shepherds saw Jesus there, they saw not only that He had come, but they got a hint as to why. He came to be the perfect lamb, the ultimate, lasting sacrifice. This baby's coming was to accomplish and establish peace between the God of all creation and his image-bearers who habitually rejected Him.

And so it would be all His days.

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Reread [Luke 2:8-20](#). What does this passage reveal to you about God? What aspects are to be praised? Stop and do that now. Does this passage give you anything to confess? If so, talk to God about it. Rejoice! magnify the Lord!



While this passage primarily centers around the shepherds, Luke provides one verse from Mary’s perspective in verse 19: *But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart*. Of all the things the Bible could have included about Mary from that night, this is one of the few pictures we are given: her reaction to all that had taken place that evening—including the visit from a group of shepherds, rejoicing in her newborn Son: the Perfect Lamb.

Scholars say that the Greek word here for *ponder* means to “put in context,” “to connect,” to “think something out.” There’s a *slowing* and unfolding of information. Mary intentionally processes everything with her *mind*.

But she also *treasures* what she heard in her heart.

Timothy Keller differentiates between the two words this way:

Taking the message into my heart means not just to interpret it but to let it affect me deeply. It means, in a sense, preaching to myself, reminding myself of the preciousness, the value, the wonder, and the power of the particular truth I am treasuring. It is to ask myself questions: “How would my life be different if I really believed this from the bottom of my heart? How would it change my thinking, feelings, actions? How would it change my relationships? How would it change my prayer life, my feelings, and my attitude toward God?” If you don’t do both of these things—ponder and treasure the Word of God—you will not truly hear the message. Your ears will hear it but not your mind and heart. It won’t sink in, comfort, convict, or change you.³⁹

³⁹ Timothy Keller. *Hidden Christmas: The Surprising Truth Behind the Birth of Christ*. Viking, 2016.

REFLECT AND PRAY

In this section from Luke, we see multiple reactions that make up rejoicing: the shepherds glorified and praised God for what they'd seen and heard and they told everyone! Mary slowly pondered and treasured. All of these embody the spirit of celebration!

Spend some time now celebrating God. Perhaps you spend time *pondering* the significance that shepherds were some of the very first people to see the Messiah. Consider what it looks like this week for you to *treasure* the good news of Christmas. Maybe you pray through the treasuring questions that Keller provides above. Spend time now *praising* God for who He is. Is there someone the Lord has put in your life that He's leading you to *tell* this good news to? Someone that you could share the *joy* of Christmas with and the glorious gospel new that *joy came down at Christmas*?

Ponder:

Treasure:

Praise:



Tell:

WEEK 3: JOY

FRIDAY, DEC. 22: TREASURING LEADS TO GIVING

*We are treasure seekers each and every day,
What we chase shapes our race,
so don't simply let your heart be your guide.
Align your heart with the treasure of Christ,
and He will shape your desires and guide your pursuits.
—Ruth Chou Simons*

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 2:1-12, Luke 12:15, Matthew 6:19-21

SLOWING PRAYER

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

When Mary experienced the presence of the Lord and received the news that she would carry God's Son, she magnified the Lord. Later, at His birth, her celebration took the form of *treasuring* and *pondering*. For the shepherds, their rejoicing involved telling everyone. And as we look at another group of people, we will see a similar theme when they encounter the Messiah.

The wise men were sent to find Jesus in response to a *troubled* King Herod and *troubled* masses. While the circumstances surrounding their encounter with and transformation by Christ may be very different, their response is not.



READ AND RESPOND

Read **Matthew 2:1-12**. How would you compare and contrast the wise men's response to those of Mary and the shepherds? What applications can be gained from their rejoicing?

Matthew 2:1-12

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

⁶ "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.

⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."

⁹ After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Writer Greg Morse describes the wise men's response this way:

When the wise men saw the star, they did what all awakened by God do: they rejoiced *exceedingly*, went to the Christ, fell down, and *worshiped Him*. He was a King to be worshiped, a king worthy of their treasures for He *was* their treasure. They saw what the others could not: a king born without a crown, a throne standing as tall as a manger, a kingdom with farm animals standing guard. They saw who had come: the King of kings.⁴⁰

In our reading yesterday, we saw that Mary treasured the events of Christ's birth in her heart, and here we see mention of the wise men treasuring Christ. And for these three men, the way that they treasured was to offer gifts.

But why give gifts to the Giver of every good and perfect gift? Surely, the Creator of the Universe doesn't see these gifts of oil as *essential*. So what gives?

John Piper explains the meaning of the wise men's gifts this way:

Gifts given to wealthy, sufficient people are echoes and intensifiers of the giver's desire to show how wonderful the person is. In a sense, giving gifts to Christ is like fasting—going without something to show that Christ is more valuable than what we are going without. When you give a gift to Christ like this, it's a way of saying, "The joy that I pursue is not the hope of getting rich by bartering with you or negotiating some payment. I have not come to you for your things, but for yourself. And this desire I now intensify and demonstrate by giving up things, in the hope of enjoying you more, not things. By giving to you what you do not need, and that I might enjoy, I am saying more earnestly and more authentically, "You are my treasure, not these "things."⁴¹

40 Greg Morse. ["The Weary World Rejoices: Four Ways to Receive the King."](#) *The Gospel Coalition*.

41 John Piper. ["We Have Come to Worship Him."](#) *Desiring God*.



READ AND APPLY

Look at a few of Jesus' teachings on possessions in [Luke 12:15](#) and [Matthew 6:19-21](#). Where do these teachings (and the wise men's response) challenge you? Where do you sense God leading you? How does your attitude, especially as we approach Christmas, need to shift when it comes to thinking about your possessions and what you treasure most?

Luke 12:15

And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Matthew 6:19-21

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

REFLECT AND PRAY

Spend some time confessing to God where your *treasuring* may be off. What does repentance look like for you? Ask God for His help to see Him rightly and treasure Him as the best gift.

WEEK 3: JOY

SATURDAY, DEC. 23: GIVING THANKS

*Gratitude is rooted in the reality, that “bidden or unbidden,
God is present.”*

*Thanksgiving is possible not because everything is perfect,
but because God is present.*

-Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 136:1-4, 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Luke 22:19, Romans 1:21, 2
Corinthians 9:15, Philippians 3:1

SLOWING PRAYER

Lord, you are the treasure I seek.

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Spend some time meditating on [Psalm 136:1-4](#).

Psalm 136:1-4

*Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.*

*² Give thanks to the God of gods,
for his steadfast love endures forever.*

*³ Give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for his steadfast love endures forever;*

*⁴ to him who alone does great wonders,
for his steadfast love endures forever;*



Throughout the Bible, God’s people are commanded to give thanks—
regardless of their circumstances:

1 Thessalonians 5:18

*Give **thanks** in all circumstances, for this is the will of
God in Christ Jesus for you.*

How is it possible to obey 1 Thessalonians 5:18 and “give thanks
in all circumstances” especially if our circumstances are horrible?
What fuels thanksgiving when life seems to be one discouragement,
disappointment, disease, disaster, and death after another?

There is only one way. And Jesus both *is* the way (John 14:6) and shows
the way. Look at this description of Jesus’ last meal with his closest
friends as told in the Gospel of Luke:

Luke 22:19

*And He took bread and when He had given **thanks**, he
broke it and gave it to them saying, “This is my body
which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”*

The Greek word for “thanks” is *eucharisteo* and unpacking this word is
key to our ability to give thanks in all circumstances.

The root word of *eucharisteo* is *charis* which means “grace.”

The derivative of *charis* is the Greek word *chara* which means “joy.”

Charis. Grace.

Eucharisteo. Thanksgiving.

Chara. Joy.

And so, as Ann Voskamp so eloquently explains it:

Deep chara joy is found only at the table of the *euCHARiesteo*; the table of thanksgiving. The holy grail of joy, God set it at the very center of Christianity. The Eucharist (communion) is the central symbol of Christianity.

This is why, as a church family, we participate in communion every week at our gatherings. Communion is a time that we collectively place the whole of our lives into the context of thanksgiving. It is here we celebrate with great joy the greatest grace gift we could ever receive: Jesus Christ. He both models for us how to give thanks *and* His life, death, and resurrection are the reason we can give thanks in all circumstances.

As Jesus spent the last meal with His disciples and modeled the giving thanks and breaking of bread, He told His friends to *Do this in remembrance of me*. He instructed them to remember Him and give thanks. *Eucharisteeo*.

Voskamp explains why this remembering and giving thanks is the crux of Christianity:

Why is remembering and giving thanks the core of the Christian faith? Because remembering with thanks is what causes us to trust; to really believe. Remembering, giving thanks, is what makes us a member again of the body of Christ. Remembering, giving thanks is what puts us back together again in this hurried, broken, fragmented world.⁴²

We can give thanks, *eucharisteeo*, in all circumstances when we remember Christ—when we joyfully remember the grace gift of our salvation.

Jon Bloom gives a powerful list of reasons why believers in Christ have every reason to be thankful. For an empty cross and empty tomb speak this to us:⁴³

- In all our trouble, God makes known the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10).

⁴² "Don't Worry, Be Thankful: Eucharisteeo with Ann Voskamp."

⁴³ Jon Bloom. "How a Heavy Heart Gives Thanks." *Desiring God*.



- He is working all things together for our good (Romans 8:28).
- He will complete the good work He began in us despite how things look now (Philippians 1:6).
- If we trust the Father in the worst, darkest, most horrible troubles we face, He will make us more than conquerors (Romans 8:37-39).
- Every troubled tear we shed over the effects of the fall are kept in God's bottle (Psalm 56:8) and will be wiped away forever (Revelation 21:4).

When we understand this, we can begin to understand how people like the apostle Paul, despite his many reasons to complain, were constantly giving thanks to God (and instructing believers in Christ to do the same!) And when we look at what Paul “gives thanks” for throughout his letters, it’s not mainly food or safety (though both are worth remembering and giving thanks). Rather, Paul gives thanks for what writer Jon Bloom calls “triumphs of the gospel” and he places these “gospel gifts” into three categories:

1. gospel faith
2. gospel partnerships
3. gospel victories⁴⁴

Paul made it a habit to consistently notice and thank God for all of the ways He was at work in, through, and around Paul. Paul constantly gave thanks for His salvation and the salvation of others, the people God gave Him to do ministry with and work together to further the gospel, and for all of the many ways He saw God’s transforming work in His own life and in the lives of those he encountered.

Gospel faith. Gospel partnerships. Gospel victories.

When Paul focused on those three categories, he had an endless list of reasons to thank God.

⁴⁴ Jon Bloom. “Grace, Gratitude, and the Glory of God.”

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Read each of these verses on *giving thanks* that Paul shared with early believers. What insights do you gain? Choose one to meditate on and give thanks!

Romans 1:21

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

2 Corinthians 9:15

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift

Philippians 3:1

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

REFLECT AND PRAY

Using Paul's "gospel gifts" categories, spend time now reflecting on all you have to be thankful for and thank God for those things.

Gospel Faith: What did Christ do to save you? What did He rescue you from? Thank God for reconciling you to Himself through Jesus. Thank Him for the salvation of others. Be specific. Thank Him.



Gospel Partnerships: Who is the community of believers that the Lord has surrounded you with? Who have you been able to join together with in order to bring the hope, peace, and joy of Christ to others? How has the Lord used your LifeGroup and other believers in your life? Thank God for these people and these partnerships.

Gospel Victories: Where has Christ been victorious in your life? What sins have you been able to put to death because you are a new creation through Him? What idols or sin patterns are you able to fight because of His strength and His redeeming work in your life? Where have you seen the fruit of the spirit growing in your life? What gospel fruit is evident? Where have you seen Him at work in the lives of those around you? The list and ways are endless. Thank Him for them. And continue to give thanks!

WEEK 3: JOY

WEEK 3 REFLECTION CELEBRATING WITH JOY

After the third week of Advent, what has stood out to you from these practices?

Have any of these practices been particularly challenging? Why is that?



CHRISTMAS EVE FAMILY DEVOTION: THE CHRIST CANDLE

Throughout Advent, we have studied and celebrated the promises of God that were made true in Jesus.

We've celebrated that Jesus is our hope.

Light the hope candle.



We've celebrated that Jesus brings peace and through Him, peace with God is possible.

Light the peace candle.



We've celebrated that true joy is found in Jesus.

Light the joy candle.



And this week, we've celebrated God's love—a giving love—that gave us Jesus.

Light the love candle.



Today we celebrate that the waiting is almost over! Today we celebrate Christ and that in Him, all the promises of God come true! Let's read the story of Jesus' birth together!

47 Today's reading is taken from Sally Lloyd Jones' Jesus Storybook Bible: "He's Here." Animated readings of the Jesus Storybook Bible can be found on youtube: ["He's Here -Jesus Storybook Bible, Sally Lloyd-Jones"](#)



As a family, take turns reading these excerpts from the Jesus Storybook Bible:

Now, Mary and Joseph had to take a trip to Bethlehem, the town King David was from. But when they reached the little town, they found every room was full. Every bed was taken. “Go away!” the innkeepers told them. “There isn’t any place for you.”

Where would they stay? Soon Mary’s baby would come.

They couldn’t find anywhere except an old, tumbledown stable. So they stayed where the cows and the donkeys and the horses stayed.

And there, in the stable, amongst the chickens and the donkeys and the cows, in the quiet of the night, God gave the world his beautiful gift. The baby that would change the world was born. His baby Son.

Mary and Joseph wrapped him up to keep him warm. They made a soft bed of straw and used the animals’ feeding trough as the cradle. And they gazed in wonder at God’s great gift, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.

Mary and Joseph named him Jesus, Emmanuel—which means “God has come to live with us.”

Because, of course, He had.



Light the Christ Candle.

That same night, in amongst the other stars, suddenly a bright new star appeared. Of all the stars in the dark vaulted heavens, this one shone clearer. It blazed in the night and made the other stars look pale beside it.

God put it there when his baby son was born—to be like a spotlight. Shining on him Lighting up the darkness. Showing people the way to him: the Promised Child. Heaven’s son. The Maker of the Stars. A baby sleeping in his mother’s arms.

This baby would be like that bright star shining in the sky that night. A light to light up the whole world. Chasing away darkness. Helping people to see.

Emmanuel—God has come to live with us.

SONG RECOMMENDATIONS

Check out our [“Songs of Love”](#) and [“The CHRISTmas Experience”](#) playlists on Spotify for our complete list of songs for the week.



FAMILY GUIDE

WEEK 4

CELEBRATE CHRIST'S LOVE THIS WEEK

A few additional activities to celebrate Christ's love and anticipate Christmas this week:

- As a family, bake and decorate a birthday cake for Jesus on Christmas Eve. Remind the children that Christmas is about celebrating Christ's birth. Use this cake as a tangible way for (especially young) children to anticipate celebrating Christ's birth and life. Set aside time on Christmas Day (perhaps after your big meal) to enjoy the cake (maybe even sing Happy Birthday) and celebrate His birth!
- Read the Christmas story under the Christmas tree, (perhaps while sipping hot chocolate!) and as you do, remind each other that Jesus is the greatest gift and the reason we celebrate this week!
- Create your own "CHRISTmas experience" family playlist filled with Christmas songs that help your family worship Jesus in spirit and in truth. Play it throughout the week. Have dance parties to it. Plan a karaoke night using it. Get creative as you fill your home with the sounds and stories of Jesus' love!
- If you've been participating in the "Names of Jesus" ornament initiative described in Week 1, re-read the names on your tree or banner and use it as a time to worship Jesus for all that He is and all that He became for us.
- Have each family member make a Christmas ornament and write on it one way they have experienced Christ's love this year. (Imagine if you did this every year and then a tradition became reading and celebrating Christ's love and faithfulness in your family's life!)
- If God's love is a giving loving, what, as a family, could you do this week to reflect that giving love? Is there another family or person you could love sacrificially this week?¹

¹ On Christmas Eve, light the final Christ Candle on your Advent Wreath. (A Christmas Eve Candle Lighting Devotion can be found on page 146)



MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Below you will find 8 verses that go with our theme of love. Your family could choose one verse to meditate on for the entire week, or you may choose to focus on a different verse each day. For a few suggestions on how to meditate on Scripture as a Family, please refer to the Week 1 Family Guide.

John 3:16 (NIRV)

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life.

1 John 4:14-16 (ESV)

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

Ephesians 3:17-19 (ICB)

I pray that Christ will live in your hearts because of your faith. I pray that your life will be strong in love and be built on love. And I pray that you and all God's holy people will have the power to understand the greatness of Christ's love. I pray that you can understand how wide and how long and how high and how deep that love is. Christ's love is greater than any person can ever know. But I pray that you will be able to know that love. Then you can be filled with the fullness of God.

1 John 4:9-10 (ICB)

This is how God showed his love to us: He sent his only Son into the world to give us life through him. True love is God's love for us, not our love for God. God sent his Son to die in our place to take away our sins.

Romans 5:6-8 (ICB)

Christ died for us while we were still weak. We were living against God, but at the right time, Christ died for us. Very few people will die to save the life of someone else. Although perhaps for a good man someone might possibly die. But Christ died for us while we were still sinners. In this way God shows his great love for us.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 (ICB)

The love of Christ controls us. Because we know that One died for all. So all have died. Christ died for all so that those who live would not continue to live for themselves. He died for them and was raised from death so that they would live for him.

1 John 4:18a (ICB)

Where God's love is, there is no fear, because God's perfect love takes away fear.

John 15:9-10 (ICB)

I loved you as the Father loved me. Now remain in my love. I have obeyed my Father's commands, and I remain in his love. In the same way, if you obey my commands, you will remain in my love

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

- Read Sally Lloyd Jones' children's book: *The Song of the Stars*. (A YouTube version with her narrating is available at "[Sally Lloyd-Jones Reads Song of the Stars: A Christmas Story](#).") Discuss how this story connects to our waiting and anticipating of Jesus's birth this Advent season.
- *A Noisy Christmas* by Tim Thornborough

DISCUSS

- What do you think it would have been like to be Mary and Joseph?



WEEK 4: LOVE

SUNDAY, DEC. 24: SALVATION CAME DOWN AT CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS EVE

*Whom God loves, He loves to the end:
And not to their end, and to their death,
But to His end.
And His end is that He might love them more.
-John Donne*

SCRIPTURE

1 John 4:9-10, Romans 5:6-8

SLOWING PRAYER

Lord, I rejoice in the wonders of your love.

Light the first candle of Advent, the candle of HOPE.



Light the second candle of Advent, the candle of PEACE.



Light the third candle of Advent, the candle of JOY.



Light the fourth candle of Advent the candle of LOVE.



Jesus didn't just *teach* on love—He *lived* it. Jesus perfectly loved God and others. He was constantly loving and serving the marginalized and hurting around Him. And when it came to His enemies—Jesus allowed them to nail Him to a cross and kill Him—because He loved them.

Light the center fifth candle of Advent, the CHRIST candle.





(A family candle lighting devotion can be found in this week's **Christmas Eve Family Devotional on page 146**)

READ AND RESPOND

Read Romans 5:6-8 and 1 John 4:9-10. What do these verses teach us about the power of God's love?

1 John 4:9-10 (NIV)

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Romans 5:6-8 (HCSB)

For while we were still helpless, at the appointed moment, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. ⁸ But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!

In the incarnation, the Son of God became a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). But we are not justified or adopted into God's family, or sanctified, or glorified simply because the Son of God shared our flesh and

our sorrows. Yes, that means He can sympathize with us in our weakness because He experienced it. But He came to accomplish much more—something we could never do for ourselves—He came to *die* for us. Only when we can say “He was wounded for our transgressions” have we grasped the meaning of the gospel and the wonder of love.⁴⁵

This is what we should never forget on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day: The Son of God was born for us in order to die for us. When we see that, we will have begun to understand love.

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Jesus Christ came down at Christmas to die for us. Choose one of the previous verses to meditate on throughout your day. Carry it with you in the front burner of your mind.

REFLECT AND PRAY

Praise God for His love. Be captivated by the wonder and beauty of it this Christmas Eve.

⁴⁵ Sinclair Ferguson. *Love Came Down at Christmas*. The Good Book Company, 2018.



WEEK 4: LOVE

MONDAY, DEC. 25:

ALL THE PROMISES OF GOD

CHRISTMAS DAY

*Mary and Joseph named Him Jesus, Emmanuel
—which means “God has come to live with us.”
Because of course, He had.
- Sally Lloyd Jones*

SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:1-7, Romans 15:8-13, 2 Corinthians 1:19-20

SLOWING PRAYER

Hallelujah! Christ has come.

Merry Christmas! The waiting is finally over.

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Read Luke’s account of Christ’s birth in [Luke 2:1-7](#). Celebrate. Give thanks. Store up the glories and the wonders of His love.

Luke 2:1-7

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from



the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

God always keeps His promises. He is trustworthy. He is good. If ever we find ourselves doubting this reality, we remember Christmas.

Romans 15:8-13 (NIRV)

I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews. He teaches us that God is true. He shows us that God will keep the promises he made to the founders of our nation. ⁹ Jesus became a servant of the Jews. He did this so that the Gentiles might give glory to God for his mercy. It is written,

“I will praise you among the Gentiles.

I will sing the praises of your name.” (2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49)

¹⁰ Again it says,

“You Gentiles, be full of joy.

Be joyful together with God’s people.” (Deuteronomy 32:43)

¹¹ And again it says,

“All you Gentiles, praise the Lord.

Let all the nations sing praises to him.” (Psalm 117:1)

¹² And Isaiah says,

“The Root of Jesse will grow up quickly.

He will rule over the nations.

The Gentiles will put their hope in him.” (Isaiah 11:10)

¹³ May the God who gives hope fill you with great joy.

May you have perfect peace as you trust in him. May the power of the Holy Spirit fill you with hope

2 Corinthians 1:19-20

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ...was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. ²⁰ For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

The incarnation—the birth of Jesus Christ—is, as we have seen, the ultimate “Yes” to the promises of God. Christ’s birth means that God has kept his *oldest promise* recorded in Genesis 3:15. And if God kept his oldest promise, we can be sure that He will keep all of His promises. Read these words from Sinclair Ferguson:

But the incarnation not only means the longest-standing promise of God has been fulfilled. Second, it means the *costliest promise* of God has been fulfilled. God keeping His promise meant His Son would suffer and die. To keep His promise of forgiveness, freedom, and eternal life He “did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all” (Romans 8:32). If God has kept His major promise by giving His Son for you and to you, you can be sure He will keep every promise He has made. That is why His love is the foundation not only for faith but also for hope. And that hope lasts; it will never fail. It is a hope that we can hold on to even when we are suffering, even when life seems to be unraveling at the seams, even when our worst nightmares are coming true. We can still have hope, because God kept His biggest promise, his oldest and costliest promise, when Love came down at Christmas.⁴⁶

Hallelujah! Christ has come for us. And in Him, we receive hope, joy, peace, and love.

Merry Christmas.

⁴⁶ Sinclair Ferguson. *Love Came Down at Christmas*.



WEEK 4: LOVE

WEEK 4

REFLECTION

WORSHIPPING IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

As we finish Advent this year, what has stood out to you overall?

Which of the practices were particularly challenging? Why is that?



What has the Lord taught you through his Advent season?

How might you and your LifeGroup spur one another on (Hebrews 10:24) to continue these practices as we head into the new year?

Go to **page 169** to craft a Rule of Life for the upcoming year.







APPENDIX 1

EVALUATING YOUR CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS⁴⁸

[KRISTIN TABB]

What does God want from us this Christmas? Our hearts.

How we approach our yearly Christmas traditions can help us gauge whether or not our hearts are near or far from God this Christmas.

When our traditions help our hearts to draw near to the living God, they are a tool functioning rightly. But when our traditions distract our hearts from the true purpose of Christmas—adoring Christ the Lord—then it is time to reevaluate and perhaps to repent.

So, if our primary goal at Christmas time is to worship Christ from a pure heart, which traditions deserve to be kept or started? And which deserve to be trashed?

Each family will need to determine what works best. Some complicated or time-consuming traditions may be worth keeping, if they increase our joy in Christ and help us spread that joy to others. Perhaps other traditions that we take for granted serve more as distractions. Here are the kinds of questions regarding our traditions that can help us to evaluate our hearts this Christmas:

- *Does this tradition help us to value Jesus as the Greatest Gift ever given, or does it turn our hearts toward seeking lesser gifts at the expense of celebrating the Giver?*

48 Kristen Tabb. [“Keeping the Heart in Our Christmas Traditions.”](#) *Desiring God*.



- *Does this tradition cause us to spend an inordinate amount of time, energy, or money on ourselves, and in doing so deplete our joy in Christ?*
- *Does this tradition increase stress and decrease holiness in our family, or does it increase our joy in God and the relationship we have with those around us?*
- *Does this tradition turn our hearts in thanksgiving to the God who made us and gave us all things through Christ?*
- *Does this tradition help us to spread the love and joy of Christ and the gospel to fellow believers and to neighbors who don't yet know Christ? If not, could it?*
- *Do my family's cumulative traditions allow me time for serving and bringing joy to those in the church or neighborhood who are hurting, suffering loss, or lonely during this season?*

So where is your heart this Christmas? How full is the measure of your joy in the midst of this season that celebrates His birth? It may be time to abandon an old tradition, or add a new one that will help spread your love for and joy in the Greatest Gift.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/keeping-the-heart-in-our-christmas-traditions>



APPENDIX 2

NAMES OF GOD⁴⁹

GOD

the Creator	El Shaddai	the Most High
the Deity	Father	the One
the Designer	Holy God	Providence
Divine Providence	Jehovah	the Sovereign Lord
the Divinity	the Lord Almighty	Yahweh
El	the Lord of Hosts	

JESUS

the Bread of Life	King of Kings	the Prince of Peace
the Bridegroom	the Lamb of God	the Promised One
the Door	the Light of the World	the Redeemer
the Galilean	Logos	the Rock
God's Son	Lord of Lords	the Son
the Good Shepherd	the Lord's Anointed	the Son of God
the High Priest	the Man of Sorrows	the Son of Man
Immanuel	the Messiah	Suffering Servant
Incarnate Word of God	the Only Begotten	the Way
the Intercessor	the Passover Lamb	the Word

THE HOLY SPIRIT

the Advocate	the Holy Ghost	the Spirit of Life
the Comforter	the Intercessor	the Spirit of Truth
the Counselor	the Mediator	the Teacher
the Eternal Spirit	the Paraclete	
God's Spirit	the Spirit	

⁴⁹ Robert Hudson. *The Christian Writer's Manual of Style: 4th Edition*. Zondervan, 2016.



APPENDIX 3

CRAFTING A RULE OF LIFE IN THE NEW YEAR

*Ask me not where I live
or what I like to eat...
Ask me what I am living for
and what I think is keeping me
from living fully for that.*
-Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*

WHAT IT IS

A *Rule of Life* is the name in Christian tradition for the structure that enables us to say “yes” to the process of spiritual transformation day in and day out. In his book, *The Common Rule*, Justin Earley defines it as a set of habits you commit to in order to grow in your love of God and neighbor.

To borrow a definition from Portland’s *Bridgetown Church*, Pastor John Mark Comer defines a Rule of Life as:

a schedule and set of practices and relational rhythms that help us create space in our busy world for us to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what He did—to live “to the full” (John 10:10) in His kingdom, and in alignment with our deepest passions and priorities.⁵⁰

St. Benedict was the first to develop a Rule of Life for monks who were

50 “Rule of Life Workbook.” *Bridgetown Church* from practicingtheway.org



living in community to order their days very simply around three key elements of their life in God: *prayer*, *study*, and *work*. He and St. Augustine are some of the earliest people on record creating rules of life and in both cases, the goal of these communal rules was love. St. Augustine’s rule began with: “Before all things, my dear brothers, we must love God and after Him our neighbor; for these are the principal commands which have been given to us.”⁵¹

You may be asking, “Why call it a *rule*?” The word *rule* is used because it comes from the Latin word *regalia* which is a word associated with a trellis—the woodwork on which a plant grows. In the same way that a vine needs a trellis to properly grow and produce fruit, we need a Rule of Life—or set of habits—to structure our life around.

A Rule of Life seeks to answer two questions:

1. *Who do I want to be?*
2. *How do I want to live?*

Or, as Ruth Haley Barton describes it, a Rule of Life seeks to address the interplay between these two questions:

How do I want to live so that I can be who I want to be?

2 Corinthians 3:18

And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Each rule or “rhythm” (to use more *Midtown* language) is the way we partner with God for the transformation only He can bring.

An effective rule of life (or *rhythm*) will be very personal. No two people will have exactly the same rule of life because no two people are the same. We’re all wired differently. We struggle with different sin patterns and different idols. We are in different seasons of life and have different schedules. The beauty of creating a personal rule of life is that we are not waiting for some perfect combination of circumstances, but rather we take seriously our resolve to choose Jesus as the good portion right now. Ruth Haley Barton offers this encouragement:

51 Justin Earley. *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction*. IVP Books, 2019.



One of the great temptations of the spiritual life is to believe that if I were in another season of life, I would be more spiritual. The truth is that spiritual transformation takes place as we embrace the challenges and opportunities associated with each season of our life. This involves honesty regarding the challenges and willingness to embrace the opportunities. Our expectations about ordering our life during the different seasons need to take into account what's real and can't be changed; otherwise we set ourselves up for frustration and failure.⁵²

WHERE TO BEGIN

Take time to reflect on your experiences with different disciplines (from the past 4 weeks and beyond!). Spend time in prayer and invite God to show you which have been most life giving and have resulted in true life change. When has true transformation resulted? What disciplines come the easiest? Which have been the most stretching?

Refer back to your notes from earlier this week. Are there daily liturgies you've inadvertently developed that need to be substituted? Do you need to set parameters around your technology usage? What were some of the ways you want to see God increase and yourself decrease in the next year? Are there tangible rhythms that could be set up with that goal in mind?

DEVELOPING A PLAN

The next step is to begin developing a plan based on these reflections. Invite God into your planning. Spend time in prayer, listening to Him and how He leads you:

- What practices will you seek to engage in on a daily basis?
 - ◊ *Weekly?*
 - ◊ *Monthly?*
- Where will you engage in these disciplines?
 - ◊ *What time?*

52 Ruth Haley Barton. *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*. IVP Books, 2006.



-
- What have you learned about the significance of community for spiritual transformation? Where might there be an opportunity or an invitation to enter more deeply into community with your LifeGroup?

CREATING YOUR OWN

We've created a template to use to get you started! (See pages 173-174)
A digital editable copy of this template is available on our [spiritual formations site](#).

Once you've crafted a plan, consider committing to it for a certain amount of time (a month is a good start) and then, after that time, reevaluate to see how effective your Rule of Life has been at helping you meet the goal of abiding with Jesus and loving His people. Adjust where you need to adjust.

*The choice to orient our life to God's transforming presence
is always ours; sacred rhythms help us to say yes to this desire,
day by day by day.
-Ruth Haley Barton*



PRACTICES	ABIDING	REST	HEALTH
DAILY			
WEEKLY			
MONTHLY			
QUARTERLY			
BI-ANNUALLY			
ANNUALLY			



PRACTICES	RELATIONSHIPS	GENEROSITY	MISSION
DAILY			
WEEKLY			
MONTHLY			
QUARTERLY			
BI-ANNUALLY			
ANNUALLY			



MIDTOWNCOLUMBIA.COM