



# Advent

AT HOME

A 4-SUNDAY ADVENT DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL



MAKING DISCIPLES. DEVELOPING LEADERS.

*Advent at Home: A 4-Sunday Advent Devotional Journal*

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# Intro

*What does Advent mean?*

The word advent means “the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event.”<sup>1</sup> Advent is a special time of year when we celebrate Christ. After all, the most “notable person” who ever lived was Jesus and one of the most notable events in history was his birth. Advent is also a time for believers to look forward to Jesus’ second coming—the promise that Jesus will one day return to make all things right and establish God’s Kingdom on earth forever.

Basically, Advent means that for an entire month we get to celebrate Christ’s arrival on the very first Christmas and anticipate the promise of Christ’s return!

This Advent devotional journal is designed to help prepare your heart to celebrate and receive Jesus this Christmas. Each Sunday, we’ll focus on a different reason to celebrate: *Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love*.

## How It Works

This book has four Sundays worth of devotions and activities to help you focus on Christ as you journey through the Advent season.

You’ll have an opportunity to see the nativity story with new eyes, study the Bible with engaging tools, dig deeper into the heart behind a favorite Christmas carol, and take on challenges that help you anticipate and celebrate Christ’s arrival. Each Sunday comes with an ADVENT ACTIVITY. This is an opportunity to share what you’re learning and celebrate Advent with friends and family. We’ve also included a special Family Devotion for you to go through together on Christmas Day.

Remember, you’ll get out of this book what you put into it. The challenges you’ll encounter won’t always be easy—they’re designed to stretch you! Take a risk and use this journal to run hard toward God. When we make ourselves available to him, he’ll transform us and use us in ways that will blow our minds!

# Advent

AT H▲ME

# Hope

1st Sunday

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:  
The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;  
they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.  
'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'

LAMENTATIONS 3:21-24 (ESV)

The Book of Lamentations was written during a time when God's people had lost everything. They were far from home, enduring hardships brought on by others, and suffering the consequences of their own rebellion against God. They'd hit rock bottom as a nation and were in desperate need of some hope.

Over 2,500 years have passed since these verses were written, but we can still feel the same ways today, although we'd definitely use different words to say it! We often feel like we've lost our way. We're enduring hardships of all sorts—some that aren't our fault! And we're suffering through the consequences of our individual and collective rebellion against God. It's easy to get weighed down by all that's going wrong in the world. We're all in desperate need of some hope.

Enter Jesus.

Jesus was born to bring us the kind of hope that lasts. No matter what we've done or what's been done to us, when we put our trust in Jesus we receive God's steadfast love and endless mercy—no questions asked! Like the writer of Lamentations, when we wait expectantly for God's love and mercy, we find hope.

## **JOURNAL YOUR ANSWERS TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:**

What is your heart hoping for as you begin this Advent journal?

What do you think it means that God's steadfast love and endless mercy are new every morning?

How have you experienced God's love and mercy in the last few months? Take a moment to remember and thank Jesus for walking with you through these experiences.

What's one thing that is bothering you or not going right about the world right now?

Who could use more of God's love and mercy in the situation you described above?

# Advent Activity

## Letters to Jesus

Every year children all over the United States write letters to Santa. These letters almost always list ways the writer has been “good,” begging Santa to overlook anything “bad,” and no letter is complete without a wish list. As a child, you might have spent hours thinking about what you’d put on your “wish list” for Santa, hoping and dreaming that you’d wake up Christmas morning to find your #1 requested item under the Christmas tree.

Sadly, at some point, we all found out Santa’s not real. (If you didn’t already know...spoiler alert, sorry!) Thankfully, Jesus wants to hear what we’re hoping for and dreaming about. The good news is he’s very real and even more powerful than Santa!

### WRITE A LETTER TO JESUS

- Thank Jesus for some of the good things you’ve experienced this year.
- Admit a few areas where you need help to follow Jesus.
- Tell Jesus some of the things your heart is hoping for and dreaming about the most. (They can be big or small, something fun you hope to experience as a family, something about the world you wish you could fix, anything.)



[illegible]

## HOW TO GET YOUR FAMILY INVOLVED

- Invite your family to write and share their own Letters to Jesus.
- Celebrate what you're most thankful for and why.
- Ask how you can help each other follow Jesus in the year ahead.
- Share something from your wish list.
- End with prayer that God would provide his love and mercy where you're each hoping for it the most.

# Peace

## 2nd Sunday

At Christmastime, we often wish each other peace on earth. In fact, that's one of the reasons Christ came—to bring us the kind of peace that lasts. But our daily schedules are filled with tasks, chores, school, work, friendships, family, etc. Social media and the internet mean there's always something else to pay attention to. And being human means we occasionally might (definitely will) experience conflict. Our world is far from peaceful. So what does it mean to have a peace that lasts and how does peace work in everyday life?

From a spiritual perspective, peace doesn't necessarily mean doing nothing, being quiet, or avoiding worries and conflict. Instead it's a state of mind, a heart attitude that says, "God is in charge, and I trust him in this moment." Peace comes from deciding every day to rely on Christ to guide you through the Holy Spirit.

Read **Isaiah 9:6–7** and **John 14:15–27** and see how Christ came to bring us peace using the **OPA method** for Bible study: Observation, Principles, and Application. *Helpful tip: the more effort you put into making observations, the easier the principles and application will be to see.*

### **OBSERVATION**

Compile all the facts found in these passages. Try to make 15–20 observations about what you read.

## **PRINCIPLES**

Draw a few principles from the observations you made. What is God trying to teach you in this passage?

## **APPLICATION**

How will you apply these principles to your life? Be specific—a good application will tell who, what, and when.

## **Questions for Group Study:**

- What are some reasons you see in these verses to have peace?
- What situations are you facing that make it hard to feel peace?
- What can you do to rely on the Helper (Holy Spirit) for more peace this week?

# Advent Activity

## Instruments of Peace

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He came, not only to give us peace, but also to make us his peacemakers (Matt. 5:9, ESV). As we rely on Christ to guide us with his Holy Spirit, we have the opportunity to share his peace with the world.

This week, we'll use the *Peace Prayer* written in 1912 by a French priest to grow as peacemakers. It's also known as the *Prayer of Saint Francis*, though it wasn't actually written by the 13th-century Saint Francis of Assisi. As you read it, look for the advice it offers on how to be an instrument of God's peace.

### MAKE ME AN INSTRUMENT OF YOUR PEACE

- Read the prayer on the next page. Pay attention to the lines that begin with "Where there is..." Choose one that jumps out at you or reminds you of a situation you're currently facing.
- Ask God how you can be an instrument of peace in that situation. Use the prayer as a guide. (e.g., *Lord, help me to be an instrument of peace at school. Where there is offence, let me bring pardon. Help me to offer forgiveness to the classmate who offended me.*)
- Come back to this prayer throughout the week and keep praying about how to be an instrument of peace in your situation.

## PEACE PRAYER

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me bring love.  
Where there is offence, let me bring pardon.  
Where there is discord, let me bring union.  
Where there is error, let me bring truth.  
Where there is doubt, let me bring faith.  
Where there is despair, let me bring hope.  
Where there is darkness, let me bring your light.  
Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.  
O Master, let me not seek as much  
to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love,  
for it is in giving that one receives,  
it is in self-forgetting that one finds,  
it is in pardoning that one is pardoned,  
it is in dying that one is raised to eternal life.<sup>2</sup>

## HOW TO GET YOUR FAMILY INVOLVED

- Share the *Peace Prayer* with your family.
- Pray through it together each night at the dinner table (or another time when you can all be together). You may need to explain some of the language to younger family members.
- Ask how you can support each other in becoming more effective instruments of God's peace this Christmas.

# Joy

## 3rd Sunday

What's your favorite Christmas carol?

*Joy to the World* is the most published<sup>3</sup> and second-most recorded<sup>4</sup> Christmas carol in U.S. history, which means it would probably win the most-popular vote. It was originally written in 1719 by Isaac Watts and it's been sung all over the world, in many languages for hundreds of years!

Do a quick Google search for Isaac Watts. You'll probably find an old guy in a wig. Pretty stuffy looking, right? But what these pictures can't tell you about is the inspiring story behind the author of this favorite carol.

You see, young Isaac Watts was considered a bit of a revolutionary when he wrote *Joy to the World*. Watts grew up in a time when most hymns were taken straight from Scripture and sung solemnly with repetitive patterns. As a young man, he complained to his father about how boring and joyless these hymns were. He longed to be more expressive in his worship!

When Isaac's dad challenged him to do something about it, a lifelong calling was launched. His goal was to create Christ-centered hymns that could be easily understood (using the language of the time) and passionately sung. Watts wrote over 750 hymns and paved the way for modern, more expressive worship in the Church. For our favorite carol, *Joy to the World*, Watts rephrased Psalm 98, making it more relatable and infused with the joy of Christ's salvation. It was one the first hymns he published.

## READ THROUGH THE VERSES OF THIS CHRISTMAS CAROL:

Circle/underline any words you don't understand or phrases that stand out.  
Look them up or ask someone for help, then write down what they mean.

### *Joy to the World*

Joy to the world! The Lord is come:  
let earth receive her King;  
let ev'ry heart prepare him room,  
and heav'n and nature sing, (x2)  
and heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns:  
let men their songs employ;  
while fields and floods,  
rocks, hills, and plains  
repeat the sounding joy, (x2)  
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,  
nor thorns infest the ground;  
he comes to make his blessings flow  
far as the curse is found, (x2)  
far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,  
and makes the nations prove  
the glories of his righteousness  
and wonders of his love, (x2)  
and wonders, wonders of his love.<sup>5</sup>

**TAKE TIME TO FOCUS ON AND RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING LYRICS:**

*Let ev'ry heart prepare him room...*

What do you need to do this week to prepare room in your heart for Christ?

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*Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns...*

Christ is King and he rules over the world. Why does that bring you joy?

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*No more let sin and sorrows grow...*

What does it mean to you that Christ has come to remove sin?

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*He rules the world with truth and grace...*

Why is it important the Christ rules with both truth and grace?

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# Advent Activity

## Joy to the World

**SEARCH THE INTERNET FOR YOUR FAVORITE VERSION OF THIS SONG.**

As you listen to the song, is there one verse that jumps out at you? Why?

Think of a situation where you're struggling to feel joyful. Challenge yourself to be like Isaac and do something different. How can you change your perspective and celebrate Christ's rule and reign over this situation?

## HOW TO GET YOUR FAMILY INVOLVED

- Share the story of why Isaac Watts wrote *Joy to the World* with your family. Make sure you highlight Isaac's choice to do something different and God-honoring in a frustrating situation, and how that led to more joy.
- You might want to do some exploring together to find out more about Isaac Watts and the other hymns he wrote (many are well-known favorites).
- Listen to and sing along with your favorite recordings of *Joy to the World*.
- Ask every member of the family which verse is their favorite and why.

# Love

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## 4th Sunday

*“God is love.”*

It’s a popular saying that most people actually seem to agree with, at least in a general way and as long as you don’t mention any names. But bring up the name of Jesus, and suddenly “God is love” stops being true for everyone. Which is pretty ironic since Jesus—his birth, life, and death on the Cross—is kind of the centerpiece of God’s love.

Today’s passages focus on how Jesus is the epitome of the saying “God is love.” God showed the world the depth of his love by sending his son Jesus to save us. Jesus’ life is the perfect example of how to love like God loves. Jesus died to offer us a love so powerful it destroys sin and death. And Jesus asks us to respond to this gift by sharing God’s love with others.

Read **John 3:16**, **Romans 5:7–10**, and **1 John 4:13–21**. Use the **5P method** for Bible study to find reasons to celebrate the gift of God’s love. *This title, 5P Method, is simply a way to help you remember this Bible study technique.*

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### PURPOSE

Why do you think the author wrote this? Why is it important enough to be in the Bible?

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## PRIMARY VERSE

Which verse seems to contain the most important thought in the passage? Which one stands out most to you? Write it out.

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## PROMISES

Make a list of any promises you find in this passage.

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## PROBLEMS

If you find anything you don't understand—even if it's just a word—write it down as a question. Then ask someone for the answer or look it up yourself.

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## PRACTICAL APPLICATION

What do you need to change or work on so that what you have read is real in your life? Be specific—your application should tell who, what, and when.

## Questions for Group Study:

- What difference does it make in your life to know that God loves you?
- How do you express your love for God?
- What would it look like for you to show love to the people in your life this week?

# Advent Activity

## Sharing God's Love

When we've received the amazing gift of God's love through his son Jesus, it doesn't make any sense to keep it to ourselves! This is a gift so great it has to be shared. In fact, the passages we studied tell us that Jesus meant for us to share his Father's love with the world. Christmas is a time when people are extra receptive to receiving gifts, so make a point of sharing God's love with others in a tangible way this week.

### **HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM, OR YOU CAN COME UP WITH YOUR OWN:**

- Find some everyday practical ways to share God's love through service. You could rake leaves and shovel sidewalks in your neighborhood, do your siblings' chores, or corral and return all the shopping carts at the grocery store. If you just keep an eye open for ways to serve others, you can find endless opportunities. When people ask why, you can simply tell them that serving others is a way to share that God loves them.
- Make Christmas cards to let people know God loves them (include message/verse). You can drop them off at any local organization that serves people who could use some encouragement (nursing home, hospital, women's shelter, etc.). Make sure you check with the organization beforehand and follow any guidelines. Keep it simple and use wisdom in how much personal information you share in your card.
- As a family, decide to spend less on yourselves this year so that you can buy Christmas gifts for someone in need. There are many local, national, and international organizations you can partner with (local children's services, Angel Tree, World Relief, etc.) to share God's love with others.

## HOW TO GET YOUR FAMILY INVOLVED

- Invite your family to join you in sharing God's love with others this Christmas. You can work together to find an activity that is age-appropriate for every family member and works for your time and budget.
- Talk with each other about how sharing God's love to others in this way impacted you. You can ask:
  - Did you learn anything new about yourself or about others?
  - Did serving in this way change the way you think/feel about the people you served or the issues they're facing?
  - Are there more ways you can share God's love in the year ahead?

## HAVE YOU RECEIVED GOD'S GIFT YET?

**“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,  
that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”**

John 3:16 (ESV)

Did you know this is one of the most well-known verses in the world? Here's why: it's the entire Gospel in one verse. Here's what it means: God loves the world he created and everyone in it. But we messed up and sin entered our lives. So, God sent his son Jesus to save us from our sin. Anyone who puts their faith in Jesus receives the gifts of God's salvation immediately, God's steadfast love and endless mercy to help us follow Jesus while on earth, and God's eternal life to enjoy in heaven. These gifts are freely available to everyone. All you have to do is ask him and you'll be saved. If you've never accepted Jesus as your Savior, now is the perfect time to receive the gifts God has for you. Talk to a Christian friend, one of the pastors at a local church, or any of us at LeaderTreks Youth Ministry if you want to find out more about following Jesus.



# Christmas Day

## Bonus Family Devotional

**IT'S FINALLY ARRIVED! THE THING WE'VE BEEN PREPARING AND WAITING FOR. IT'S CHRISTMAS!**

**IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE! IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL THE FESTIVITIES AND ACTIVITIES, THE FUN MOMENTS AND THE HECTIC ONES, DON'T FORGET TO CELEBRATE THE MOST NOTABLE PART OF ALL. REMEMBER TO MAKE ROOM IN YOUR HEART AND YOUR PLANS FOR JESUS TODAY.**

## HOW TO GET YOUR FAMILY INVOLVED

Ask your family to set aside 15–20 minutes at some point on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. You can set aside a special time or carve out some space for the following activity during your family meal or gift exchange.

### **Invite Christ into your gathering. Ask each other:**

What are you hoping for from God the most right now (big or small)?

Where do you need more of God's peace in your life?

What brings you joy this Christmas season?

Here's one way I experienced God's love through you this year...

### **Read Luke 2:1–20 out loud together.**

Christ's arrival was both long-awaited and unexpected. Take a few moments to soak in the details of the story, then pray together as a family.

Give each person a chance to pray by answering this prompt:

*"Lord Jesus, I'm grateful that you were born because..."*

## NEXT...AND THIS IS IMPORTANT...

Go share some Christmas treats together, laugh a lot, play some silly games, take at least one good (or goofy) family photo, and enjoy any gifts you've exchanged. But most of all, celebrate Jesus!

Congratulations! Over the past four Sundays, you've taken the deep dive into understanding what Advent means and celebrating Christ's arrival. Remember, Advent isn't just about an event that took place 2,000 years ago. It's a reminder that Jesus is coming back one day. While we wait, he's given us everything we need—hope, peace, joy, and love—to follow him and share him with the world.

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We Wish You A  
**Merry Christmas**

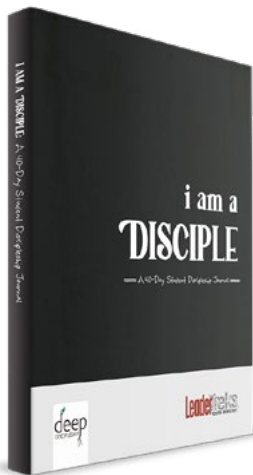


## Endnotes:

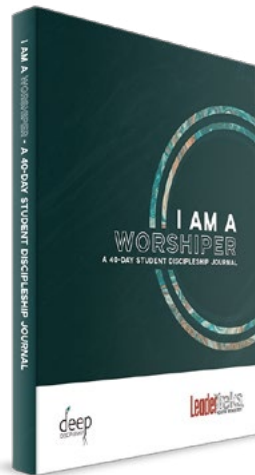
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