EXPEDITION CHURCH

# *A Daily Devotional*

FOR THE ADVENT SEASON

# the season of Advent



WELCOME

# Preparing Room for the King

Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning "coming" or "arrival." For centuries, the church has set aside the weeks before Christmas to slow down, remember, and prepare. We look back to the night God kept His promise and His Son was born in Bethlehem, and we look ahead with hope to the day Jesus will come again.

This booklet is an invitation to make room for Him. Each day offers a passage of Scripture, a short reflection, a personal application, and a prayer, written by members of the Expedition Church family. Week by week, through Hope, Joy, Peace, and Love, we prepare our hearts with expectation for Christmas morning, when we celebrate the arrival of Jesus, the Son of God, Emmanuel, God with us.

Whether you read alone, with your family, or with friends, our prayer is that these pages help you lay down the distractions of the season and rekindle your wonder at the King who came to serve.

*"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

John 1:14 (NIV)

GETTING STARTED

# How to Use This Booklet

**Find a quiet moment.** Morning or evening, set aside ten minutes each day.

**Read the Scripture slowly.** Read it twice if you can, and notice the words that stand out to you.

**Reflect.** Read the day's reflection and consider what God may be saying to you.

**Respond.** Carry the Personal Application with you into your day.

**Pray.** Use the written prayer, or let it lead you into your own.

THE WEEKS OF ADVENT

Week One · Hope
Week Two · Joy
Week Three · Peace
Week Four · Love
Christmas Eve · Christ

Begin Week One, Day 1 on the first Sunday of Advent, the fourth Sunday before Christmas. Because the length of Advent changes from year to year, Week Four may be shorter or longer than the days provided. Save the Christmas Eve devotional for December 24.

WEEK ONE

# a season of Hope



HOPE · WEEK ONE · DAY 1

*Garth Linkey*

## SCRIPTURE

*"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, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you…"*

1 Peter 1:3–4 (ESV)

## REFLECTION

As a child, Christmas brought hope like no other time of the year. That hope was usually centered around one material thing, or things that I really wanted for Christmas. As much as I can remember those wonderful gifts, I can also remember how quickly they were forgotten and replaced with something else.

Certainly, some of the things we hope for are much more noble than material things that will soon be forgotten. Perhaps there are things in life you have given up on hoping for. Maybe you have a child who has wandered from the Lord, and you've almost stopped praying for their return. Maybe you've experienced financial ruin and wonder if you'll ever see restoration. Whatever the hope or desire, today's Scripture is a wonderful reminder for us: Jesus is our LIVING HOPE.

This hope conquers and succeeds no matter what other hopes in our life have failed or seem unrealized. This hope, the writer says, is kept in heaven for us: imperishable, undefiled and unfading. I don't know about you, but that brings me hope!

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

Name one hope you have given up on, whether a wandering child, a strained relationship, or a financial setback. Write it down, and bring it to Jesus in prayer each day this week, trusting Him as your living hope.

## PRAYER

*Dear Lord, we confess that there are times when we have lost hope. We bring those things to You, our living hope, and ask that You would bring restoration in this Advent season. Help us to once again lay those hopes at Your feet, trusting and knowing that You are good, and that we can trust in You. Amen.*

*Missy Goss*

## SCRIPTURE

*"In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."*

John 1:4–5 (NIV)

## REFLECTION

Have you ever been in a situation where you need to stumble around your house at night with all the lights off? It's an incredibly awkward experience. Arms reaching out wildly to ensure you don't run into walls or door jambs. Feet shuffling slowly as they accidentally run into couch corners and step on discarded items on the floor. This is what our spiritual condition is like without the light of Christ. We stumble in the darkness while our soul searches for meaning and direction. The darkness can feel so heavy and so hopeless. And then, suddenly, someone turns on a light and our path is illuminated. Jesus is our light. His light shines into the oppressive darkness of the world around us, and the darkness cannot and will not *ever* overcome it. In him is the source of eternal light, and that brilliant, shining light gives hope to our souls.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

Reflect on the many ways the light of Christ has brought hope into your own life. Ask the Holy Spirit to challenge and convict you this week and to look for opportunities to shine the light of Christ into the lives of others in practical ways, whether that's through a meal, a phone call, or practical help for someone who is struggling with illness, loneliness, or unmet physical needs. Remember that just a little light in the darkness can bring a lot of hope!

## PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, thank you for being our light in the darkness. We rest in the truth that, though it may seem powerful, the darkness can never overcome you. We praise you knowing that the hope you offer is an eternal anchor for our souls. May our hearts experience your light and your hope in a new way this Christmas season. Amen.*

## HOPE · WEEK ONE · DAY 3

*Randy Kohls*

### SCRIPTURE

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

Romans 15:13 (NKJV)

### REFLECTION

Webster defines the word hope as 1) to have confidence, trust; 2) to desire and consider possible. This worldly definition seems pale in comparison to the hope we have in Christ. Our hope is based on an unfailing God who told us about Christ's coming thousands of years before His birth. These fulfilled prophecies and God's love we experience today through the Holy Spirit allow us to have a hope which is beyond wishful thinking. Even though our human minds cannot fully comprehend our Lord, we trust in God because we know His ways "surpass our own understanding."

The hope we have does not only encourage us to look forward to heaven but also provides benefits we can experience on earth. As Sarah Young wrote in her devotional *Jesus Calling*, our hope keeps us spiritually alive during dark times of adversity; it brightens our path and heightens our awareness of Christ.

It gives me great joy knowing that one day I will be reunited with my earthly father, Norman. He was my best friend and was taken away too early 35 years ago. This hope, which goes way beyond Webster's definition, is of great comfort to me. Hope in Christ cannot disappoint.

### PERSONAL APPLICATION

Write down one promise from Scripture that anchors your hope in Christ, such as Romans 15:13, and place it where you will see it each day this week.

### PRAYER

*Lord, thank you for the hope you have given us. This hope allows us to live beyond the disappointment and fleeting materialism of this world. We pray that the world would know of this hope which is promised to all who belong to Christ. This Christmas we pray that the Holy Spirit would work through us to share the hope we have in you. Amen.*

HOPE · WEEK ONE · DAY 4

*Carol Grush*

## SCRIPTURE

*"We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain."*

Hebrews 6:19 (ESV)

## REFLECTION

Hope in biblical Hebrew is *tikvah*, which means an expectation or a taut cord. The passage in Hebrews is specifically pointing to Jesus as our anchor and our high priest. A strong cord has many threads; thus our cord to Jesus has many threads. We have threads that are all the promises of God: the promise of salvation, of redemption, of rescue, of steadfast trust, of restoration, and of eternal life. These threads are all woven together, held taut and anchored to Jesus, our hope.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

How can we focus on this cord of hope? In those dark times of pain, grief, suffering, confusion and indecision, wrap the cord of hope that is anchored in Jesus around your hand and feel the gentle pull of His goodness and steadfast love, drawing you to Him.

## PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, we come to you today with a renewed hope for our lives. Thank you for the threads of hope that pull us to you and renew us with the promises of rescue and restoration. Anchor us in your word and your promises. Amen.*

*Kevin Wood*

## SCRIPTURE

*"This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary. Jesus has already gone in there for us."*

Hebrews 6:19–20a (NLT)

## REFLECTION

What things do we hope for? We hope for a better job, a better home, safe travel, a loving partner, good health, our children's safety. We hope. But Hebrews speaks of a radically different hope. Jesus has already gone *in there* for us—into God's Holiest of places—where He advocates for us before the Heavenly Father.

The Advent season helps us to look forward to the advent of a new and better life, the advent of different priorities, and the advent of a completely different source of hope. We can all be made temporarily happy with the things that we hope for, but God offers us more.

C.S. Lewis said, "Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures... like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

While we hope for some change in our circumstances, God asks us to look deeper. Look higher. There is only one strong and trustworthy anchor: Jesus in the Heavenly Father's very presence, speaking on our behalf.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

Don't stop hoping. It's not wrong to hope, but in addition, ask God for a new perspective for hope. Humbly admit to God where your hopes feel more self-centered, and ask Him to reshape your hope. Imagine Jesus advocating for you, and begin to align your hopes with His hopes.

## PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus to bring the advent of a whole new hope. Help me to pray like Micah 7:7: "But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me." Amen.*

HOPE · WEEK ONE · DAY 6

*Stephanie Lowe*

## SCRIPTURE

*"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."*

Isaiah 7:14 (NKJV)

## REFLECTION

The season of Advent, meaning "coming" or "arrival," is a time to reflect on the promise of the Messiah coming to earth to save us through His great love. The Hope of Mankind and longing for the Messiah had been prophesied for centuries. His first Advent or "coming" had been long awaited, and fulfilled. "People walking in darkness have seen a great light: on those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned" (Isaiah 9:2). Jesus is the light of the world by which all men may be saved and have Peace with God. Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

I love the old Christmas carol "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." Emmanuel means God with us. Perhaps when you hear this carol during the Christmas season, it will bring fresh insight. He has ransomed captive Israel that mourned in lonely exile, until the Son of God appeared. REJOICE, REJOICE!

## PRAYER

*Thank you, Father, for rescuing mankind by sending Your best. Jesus, our Emmanuel, dwelt among us. Thank you that I can have fellowship with You and know Jesus is still with me and never forsakes me. He is my very present help in time of trouble. Amen.*

HOPE · WEEK ONE · DAY 7

*Hunter Parker*

## SCRIPTURE

*"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)

## REFLECTION

The Christmas season is full of memories. Some bring joy, and some bring grief as we miss what once was. Lamentations 3 speaks to both; it is okay to have a mix of feelings. What the writer is helping us understand is that we can't lose sight of the hope we have in Jesus. The writer is in deep pain, and then he says, "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope." He remembers that the love of the Lord never ends, that His mercies are new every morning. Let us do the same. The Lord is enough for us, and because of this, we have hope in him.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

Think of one specific way you have seen God's love in your life, and meditate on it. Then write it down. When a memory of grief comes up, pause, look at what you wrote, and remember the hope you have in Jesus.

## PRAYER

*Lord, as memories and grief come up, may I remember how faithful you have been to me and how you have loved me throughout my life. I thank you that your mercies are new every morning. Lord, you are my portion; my hope is in you. Amen.*

WEEK TWO

# a season of Joy



JOY · WEEK TWO · DAY 1

*Jim Graham*

## SCRIPTURE

*"The angel reassured them. 'Don't be afraid!' he said. 'I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.'"*

Luke 2:10 (NLT)

## REFLECTION

One of the promises of Advent is joy. And we fill this season with joyful elements. Our music is filled with declarations of joy. Our decorations are joyful, and lights bring a magical, joyful elegance.

But joy is not the only emotion present this time of year. This holiday is often filled with a sadness that the music cannot drown out.

The current world will often prompt fear and anxiety. Unhappy memories of Christmas past will often dominate our thoughts. Loved ones no longer with us will greatly limit our joy. Our joy is shared with disappointments, discouragement, uncertainty, and depression.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

The solution is a simple one. Joy will not be found in the world around us or in the circumstances we encounter. It is experienced as we get closer to the one who has promised joy. "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11).

During this season of Advent, remember that even though we may not see Christ in our world, when we believe in Him and love Him, we will have a joy that is beyond explanation and filled with glory (1 Peter 1:8).

## PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, help us during this season when we focus on the birth of Christ to remember that we have been promised joy. Help us remember, in this world where everything can be upside down, that giving joy is a part of your promise. Fill us with joy and use us to bring joy to those around us. Amen.*

## JOY · WEEK TWO · DAY 2

*Payton Turner*

### SCRIPTURE

*"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."*

John 15:9–11 (NIV)

### REFLECTION

Joy is much more than the fleeting feeling of happiness that comes and goes throughout our lives. It is not dependent on our circumstances at all, actually! True joy is the deep understanding and confidence that we are fully known and fully loved by God, whether we're celebrating wonderful moments and successes or suffering through trials and hardship. Yes, that's right! Even in the toughest seasons, we can still experience joy unlike any other as we reflect on the relationship we have with Christ and recall the sacrificial love He showed us through the cross.

### PERSONAL APPLICATION

I'm challenging myself to a perspective shift this Christmas season, and I'm inviting you to do the same! While of course we will appreciate the exciting holiday spirit and happenings, let's be sure to refocus our minds on the deep abiding love of Christ at the same time. Let's remember He sees YOU and ME exactly as we are and still desires to give US ultimate and complete joy, during the happy moments and the hard ones too!

### PRAYER

*Oh God, the joy you allow us to experience in this lifetime is unlike anything else! We can truly experience life the way you designed it for us when we allow you to fill us with your complete joy! Thank you, Lord, for showing us your heart through this beautiful gift! Amen.*

JOY · WEEK TWO · DAY 3

*Gary Volpe*

SCRIPTURE

"*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*"

Philippians 4:4 (NIV)

REFLECTION

If I look back on my life, there were so many dark times, and many times God was there knocking on the door of my life, being the patient one he was, showing me things and working on my soul. I was lost. That is when I started to see God, stop forcing my will, and turn my life over to Jesus. The JOY God has shown me has opened my heart to be faithful, joyful, and transformed for the glory of God.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Look back on your own life and name one dark season when God was patiently at work. Thank Him for it today. Then, when you are tempted to force your own will this week, stop, turn it over to God, and choose to rejoice in the Lord.

PRAYER

*Father God, we give you thanks for many JOYFUL blessings that you pour upon our hearts. Keep us always turning to you with love, peace, and JOY. Continue to strengthen our faith and anchor our JOY. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## JOY · WEEK TWO · DAY 4

*Sue Munoz*

### SCRIPTURE

*"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."*

Romans 12:12–13 (NIV)

### REFLECTION

Our joy is not found in a perfect Christmas. Our joy is found in a perfect Savior.

I love the renewed anticipation of celebrating the birth of Jesus. Joy to me is the presence and promises of God.

As I approach my fifth Christmas without my husband, I am reminded of Christ's faithfulness. I choose joy, choose to see others' needs, especially during this season. Choose to be patient in this crazy world and pray for all. I'm reminded of Christ's sacrifice for me and rejoice that he will come again. My joy is for sharing. You never know what other people are going through.

A simple smile can make a stranger's day. Choosing to give of my time and gifts brings me great joy.

### PERSONAL APPLICATION

I challenge my brothers and sisters in Christ to choose joy. Read Psalm 16:11, Nehemiah 8:10, and John 15:11 this week, and ask God to fill you with His joy. Then look for one person who may be in a hard season, and share that joy with a smile, a kind word, or a gift of your time.

### PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, thank you for all the joy you bring to me. Help me to love genuinely, serve enthusiastically and practice humility. Remind me that this life on earth has ups and downs; nothing is perfect except for your promise to give grace and to come again. Amen.*

JOY · WEEK TWO · DAY 5

*Todd Bookout*

## SCRIPTURE

*"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory."*

1 Peter 1:8 (ESV)

## REFLECTION

During Advent, we are often reminded that Jesus has not yet returned in physical form. That can bring either frustration or a longing desire for His return. I often think it would all be so much easier if Jesus would appear and tell me everything is okay.

"Though you have not seen him, you love him." We eagerly await His second coming this Advent season, but we are not alone. To those who love Him without physically seeing Him, Jesus says, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

Jesus' death and resurrection destroyed the power of sin and death, and He said it was better for His physical body to leave so that we could, here and now, receive the ultimate comforter and counselor, the Holy Spirit (John 16:7).

Even though we may not "see" Him, we believe in Him and are given the fruit of the Holy Spirit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, JOY, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22–23).

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

Is there an area in your life where it is hard to "see" Jesus? Bring that situation to Him, sincerely seeking comfort and counsel. He promises to give it, like a Father who knows how to give good gifts (Matthew 7:11). You can find joy in any situation when that joy comes from God.

## PRAYER

*God, thank you for joy that does not bend or bow to this world, joy found only in You and Your presence. Amen.*

JOY · WEEK TWO · DAY 6

*Guadalupe Moore*

## SCRIPTURE

*"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.'"*

Luke 2:10 (NIV)

## REFLECTION

Christ came to us to strengthen us and give us the joy we have in knowing that we, as believers, have a place in heaven set aside. The angel's announcement to the shepherds was good news of great joy for all people, and that includes us.

Joy is seen daily in the little things around us. We just need to slow down and notice them.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

Slow down today and look for the little things that bring you joy: a beautiful color, a smile, a blessing you might normally overlook. Write down three of them, and thank God for each one.

## PRAYER

*Thank you, Jesus, for the joy I feel when I look around me and see all those beautiful colors, smiles, and so many blessings. Amen.*

## JOY · WEEK TWO · DAY 7

*Chadwick Kellenbarger*

### SCRIPTURE

*"Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

Hebrews 12:1–2 (NIV)

### REFLECTION

Jesus did not endure the cross because it was easy. He endured it because He could see what was on the other side. The joy set before Him—our redemption, His victory, His place at the Father's right hand—carried Him through the suffering. He waited, and He waded through the pain, knowing joy was on the other side.

For some of us, joy comes easily at Christmas. We look at the Christ child and remember why He came. But for others, this season stirs up hard memories: an empty chair at the table, a diagnosis, a broken relationship, a loss that still aches. Joy can feel just out of reach.

This is the beauty and tension of Advent. Advent is not the celebration of Christmas—yet. It is a season of waiting and expecting, of looking forward to joy even while walking through difficulty. In this way, Advent invites us to walk the same road Jesus walked. We keep our eyes fixed on Him, trusting that joy is on the other side. Christmas morning is coming. The promise will be kept.

### PERSONAL APPLICATION

What hardship are you carrying into this Christmas season? Name it honestly before God. Then each day this week, take a moment to fix your eyes on Jesus: read one of the Christmas promises, look at a nativity scene, or simply pray in His name. Let Jesus be your joy while you wait.

### PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, thank You for enduring the cross for the joy set before You, and for counting me as part of that joy. When this season feels heavy, help me fix my eyes on You. Teach me to wait with hope, knowing that joy is coming. Amen.*

WEEK THREE

# a season of Peace



PEACE · WEEK THREE · DAY 1

*Laura Linkey*

## SCRIPTURE

*"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."*

Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)

## REFLECTION

God knew that the people of the world would desperately need peace. His Son was called the Prince of Peace. Through his birth, life, death and resurrection, Jesus accomplished the prophetic promises of peace, reconciling humanity to God and uniting people. We have true peace through Christ Jesus.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

God's steadfast love and promise of peace remain completely secure, even if the most immovable parts of creation were to disappear. Let the following Scripture soak in and remind you of God's promises of steadfast love and peace, no matter the circumstance:

"For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed" (Isaiah 54:10).

## PRAYER

*Precious Father, thank you for the gift of peace. Thank you for sending your Son to show us how to live in your peace. Even when the storms of life rage around us, your steadfast love and peace shall not be removed. Father, we trust you with our lives and thank you for the peace, your peace, that surpasses all understanding. Thank you for reconciling humanity to you through Jesus, your Son. Amen.*

# The Light of the World

*Scott Sheffer*

## SCRIPTURE

"*I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*"

John 8:12 (KJV)

## REFLECTION

Christmas is a season filled with lights. Yet for many people, the season also makes the darkness more noticeable. Christmas can bring painful memories of loved ones who are no longer here. Others face financial strain, broken relationships, or an uncertain future.

The lights on our trees cannot reach that kind of darkness, but Jesus can. He did not claim merely to point toward the light. He declared that He Himself is the Light. Hope, forgiveness, and peace are found in Him.

The light of Christ does not always change our circumstances overnight, but it changes how we face them. David wrote, "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" (Psalm 27:1). Peace is not the absence of hard things. It is the presence of the One who walks through them with us. Because Jesus came, we do not walk through the darkness alone, and darkness will never have the final word.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

Name one burden you are carrying into this Christmas. Bring it to Jesus by name today, and ask Him for His peace in the middle of it. Then think of someone who may be walking through a dark season, and let His light shine through a phone call, a note, or a kind word.

## PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, thank You for coming into our darkness as the Light of the World. Calm our troubled hearts, guide our steps, and help us reflect Your peace to others this Christmas. Amen.*

PEACE · WEEK THREE · DAY 3

*LaDonna Welsh*

## SCRIPTURE

*"You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal."*

Isaiah 26:3–4 (NIV)

## REFLECTION

In the chaos and uncertainty of the world around us, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, peace comes from trust. Trust that our God is sovereign. Trust that God sent Jesus with a plan to reconcile us to Himself. Trust that Jesus will come again and take us to Himself. This trust brings peace to our souls. God's got us. He is the rock we can cling to when things seem out of control.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

Name the things that make you uneasy. Speak Jesus into those thoughts. We can't think two thoughts simultaneously. Speak Scripture to replace anxious thoughts. Live in the present. Peace is found in the present. Trust for today. Remember past examples of God's faithfulness and let those memories give you the confidence to trust now, too. Tension releases in light of confident trust. Peace is the result of that trust.

## PRAYER

*Father, thank you for being Lord of my life. I know that I can trust you in all situations every day. Help me to hold on to your promises and keep my mind steadfastly focused on you. Thank you for the peace that comes from trusting you completely. Amen.*

PEACE · WEEK THREE · DAY 4

*Kevin Wood*

## SCRIPTURE

*"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."*

Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)

## REFLECTION

Peace. We all want it. Whether it's world peace, familial peace, political peace, or peace of mind, we all want that! Especially during Christmas chaos! Will we have peace when we're financially secure? When we're relationally secure? When there are no more conflicts?

In Hebrew, peace is "*shalom*," meaning "fullness" or "wholeness," an internal sense of well-being. Isaiah 9:6 speaks of the arrival of Jesus as the "Prince of Peace."

The last time they ate together, Jesus said to His closest friends: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (John 14:27). Peace! A huge gift to His friends and to us! How can He do that? With all the trouble and chaos in our world, can He do that?

The Prince of Peace, Jesus, brought us a new understanding of this beautiful peace we long for. For Jesus, peace did not mean the absence of struggle, but the presence of love. His love. His unconditional acceptance of us. His undying friendship with us. His utter forgiveness of us. When we let that permeate our hearts, we can find His peace, no matter the circumstances.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

Try shifting your focus from your circumstances to resting in His presence. Unlike worldly peace, which depends on everything going right or problems disappearing, Jesus offers a "surpassing" peace that stays steady even in the middle of storms. So when anxious thoughts trap your brain, stop and hand them over to God and remind yourself of Jesus' offer of *shalom*.

## PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, I want what Jesus promised: peace! Help me not to look at my circumstances and situations but to find* shalom *in Your love, acceptance, presence and forgiveness. Amen.*

PEACE · WEEK THREE · DAY 5

*Melody Dawson*

SCRIPTURE

*"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."*

Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)

REFLECTION

When I want peace, I often think of things I can do to obtain it. For example, maybe if I take a long enough hike, do yoga, or make sure to thank God for everything I can think of before telling Him how I really feel, I will finally experience peace. Yet, this list of names is a reminder that Jesus Himself is our peace. The Prince of Peace. His birth marked the beginning of restoration between God and man, the deep inner healing that comes from the Holy Spirit, and the promise that someday we will experience everlasting peace in His presence. Advent is a time to remember that peace was always outside our grasp before Jesus. His identity as the Prince of Peace means that we don't need a million attempts at peace; we simply need to get to know Him.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Spend a few moments meditating. Take deep breaths. Pray, "Prince of Peace, show me the ways I am attempting to find peace without You." Listen. Surrender whatever comes up to God. Spend a few more moments in His presence.

PRAYER

*Jesus, thank You for securing eternal peace that I don't have to chase. Help me to rest in the peace that You have already secured on my behalf. Help me to slow down and let go of my determination to create peace for myself. Soften me with Your peace, so that it may begin to soften the hearts of others. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

*Jim Graham*

## SCRIPTURE

*"And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!'"*

Luke 2:12–14 (ESV)

## REFLECTION

How many times have we read this over the years? An angel declaring the birth of Christ with the promise of peace. This was first heard by shepherds living in circumstances not ideal for peace, yet the birth of Christ came with that promise.

Later, Jesus would remind his followers of that promise: "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid" (John 14:27).

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

There are a great number of reasons to take away our peace. Life is full of them, and when we focus on them, they will take away our peace. To experience our peace, we must get close to the one who has promised us peace. C.S. Lewis described this as a great fountain: "If you get close to it, the spray will wet you."

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths" (Proverbs 3:5–6).

## PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us peace. As we live in this confusing world and during this busy Advent season, remind us of the peace you have given us in Christ. Help us to rest in this holy promise. Amen.*

PEACE · WEEK THREE · DAY 7

*Guadalupe Moore*

## SCRIPTURE

*"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*

Isaiah 9:6 (NIV)

## REFLECTION

Through daily trials we come to have peace, as we lean on the knowledge that Christ came to save us from daily torment, worries, and mean and hateful people. The child born in Bethlehem is the Prince of Peace.

My peace comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

Name one trial or worry you are carrying into this Christmas season. Each morning this week, bring it to the Prince of Peace in prayer, and remember that the peace He gives does not depend on your circumstances.

## PRAYER

*Thank you, Father, for my daily peace in all my trials. As I remember what Christmas is all about, I feel the peace given freely to us who believe. Thank you that You have a place for me in heaven. Amen.*

WEEK FOUR

# a season of Love



*Chadwick Kellenbarger*

## SCRIPTURE

*"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. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."*

1 John 4:9–11 (NIV)

## REFLECTION

John tells us that God is love, and he shows us how we know it: God sent His Son into the world. At Christmas we celebrate that sending. The child in the manger came to do for us what we could never do for ourselves.

Sin brings a curse and a deep estrangement between God and humanity. We could not climb our way back to Him. So God came to us. Through the cross, Jesus removed the curse and undid the separation. Through His resurrection, He began the renewal of humanity and all creation. In Jesus, the love of God is not an idea or a feeling. It is a rescue.

John does not stop there. "Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." The love we receive becomes the example and the challenge for how we love others. God's love in Jesus is restorative and completely sacrificial. It moves toward broken people, pays the cost, and works to make things whole. As followers of Jesus, we are called to love the same way.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

Think of a relationship that needs restoration or a person who is hard to love. This week, take one sacrificial step toward that person: an apology, a phone call, a word of forgiveness, or an act of service that costs you something. Let the love you have received in Jesus shape the love you give.

## PRAYER

*Father, thank You for loving us first and for sending Your Son into the world to bring us back to You. Fill me with that same restoring, sacrificial love. Help me move toward others the way You moved toward me. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

*Sandy Kellenbarger*

## SCRIPTURE

"A *new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*"

John 13:34–35 (NIV)

## REFLECTION

There was a time when I struggled to love all people. I remember praying specifically for God to give me His Love for others. One evening while traveling the highway with my husband at night in another state, we saw the lights of a town in a valley. The thought came to me, "How many of those people are LOST?" Tears filled my eyes. I felt my heart fill with compassion and love, and I knew right then that God had answered my prayer. Since that time I began to see people in a different way. I am now able to look beyond their speech and action and see their distress, unhappiness, loneliness, etc.

Ephesians 6:12 (paraphrased) spoke to me in this way: "Our struggles are not against mankind but rather against the darkness that mankind allows to enter their hearts." When the darkness comes we are under the influence of the enemy. We do things and say things that we would not do had we stayed in God's Love. Matthew 12:34 (KJV): "...for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

Ask God to give you His love for others this week. Think of someone who is hard to love, look past their words to the hurt they may carry, and pray for them by name.

## PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, I'm so grateful that you answered my prayer all those years ago. I'm grateful that I can see your people in a new way. I'm so thankful that I can empathize with them and that I can pray your blessings on them to show them another way to live. May we all learn to love each other as you have loved us. Amen.*

## LOVE · WEEK FOUR · DAY 3

*Todd Bookout*

### SCRIPTURE

*"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."*

John 14:21 (ESV)

### REFLECTION

During Advent, we remember that it was God and His Love who first moved towards us. "For unto us a child is born," and with that little child in a manger came our comforter, our counselor, our ultimate embrace by an all-powerful, all-knowing, and always present God. Through this child, He was reconciling the world to Himself—entering our pain, our sadness, our most difficult trials—and ultimately this child would lay down His very life to save our own.

Three years ago, I was diagnosed with lupus. I faced fatigue, pain, depression, and doubt. However, through prayer and belief, God entered into my trial and spoke to my mind, my heart, my very soul. He called me to obedience, trusting Him to heal me mentally, physically, and emotionally. Today, lupus is no longer detectable in my body, a true miracle from a Loving and Powerful Father.

Was it my obedience that healed me? No, it was God and His Love that healed me. My obedience was my response to His Love: "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me." He challenged my way of thinking, my habits, my very belief in Him. He first loved us, and in response, we are able to trust and learn to love Him back.

### PERSONAL APPLICATION

Think about your toughest trial and how you respond to it. Is God asking you to trust Him, and you find yourself doubting? Read the words of Jesus and His message, then trust and obey him. Is He calling you to offer forgiveness, ask for help, or serve someone when it costs you something? Do it today.

### PRAYER

*God, I believe; help my unbelief. I pray that You would speak to me, reinforce what You've already shown me, and provide me with the Holy Spirit to obey in Love. Amen.*

*Chadwick Kellenbarger*

## SCRIPTURE

*"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."*

2 Corinthians 4:16–18 (NIV)

## REFLECTION

This is my favorite passage in all of Scripture. God's love and power are often unseen. But at Christmas, the unseen became visible. In Jesus, the love of God took on flesh and stepped into our world. That is why we do not lose heart.

We rebelled and turned away from our loving Creator. Yet God did not leave us that way, living as strangers and adversaries. He came to us. Jesus revealed the glory of God, a glory that can be ours when we surrender to His lordship. Even now, by the love of Christ, our inner selves are being renewed day by day.

Picture two sides of a scale. On one side sit the sin, hardship, and suffering this world presses upon us. On the other side sits the eternal glory of God. His glory tips the scale in our favor and far outweighs it all.

Because of Jesus, anxiety and suffering do not have the final word. Our Heavenly Father is always at work on our behalf, through the love of His Son.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

This week, remind yourself that the unseen realm is all around you. Read 2 Kings 6:15–17, where Elisha prays that his servant's eyes would be opened to see the armies of heaven. Then, when worry rises, pray the same prayer for yourself, remembering that the forces of God's love are fighting on your side.

## PRAYER

*Father, thank You for making Your unseen love visible in Jesus. When my troubles feel heavy, open my eyes to Your glory and remind me that it far outweighs them all. Renew me day by day, and free me from anxiety. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

CHRISTMAS EVE

# Christ
## is born



CHRIST · CHRISTMAS EVE

# Christ Is Christmas to Me

*John Cornelius*

## SCRIPTURE

"*Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.*"

Luke 2:10–11 (KJV)

## REFLECTION

It is that time of year when we celebrate the great tradition of Christmas. My wife and I get all the containers out of the shed and set up our tree. Karen hangs all the ornaments, and I do the electrical lights. Then comes the top of the tree. A star, an angel, or nothing? How about a bow? Why all the to-do?

Two thousand years ago, there were shepherds in a field watching their sheep at night. The heavens opened up, a host of angels appeared, and the glory of God put on a spectacular light show. Then a big party broke out in the sky, and they shouted, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." That's why we put the angel on top of the tree.

How about the star? Wise men from the east saw a great star in the sky lighting their way (Matthew 2:1–11). It settled above the house where Jesus was living, and when they saw the child, they fell down and worshiped him and gave him gold, frankincense, and myrrh. That is why we exchange gifts —to show love for one another.

Christ is Christmas to me. Santa can have the bottom of the tree, but Jesus gets the top… and my whole life, as well. Remember, the greatest gift of all was when the Father loved us so much that he gave us his only Son.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

Gather with others in Jesus' name and lift up your voice in praise for the wonderful thing God has done. Consider joining the angels by singing a hymn or song of praise today.

## PRAYER

*Thank you, Lord, for the greatest gift in the world given to us, our Savior and Redeemer Jesus Christ. Amen.*

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