



Christmas

With Ethos

AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

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A D V E N T

This Advent, we invite you to stay tuned in to the songs and stories of the season and allow them to nudge you toward festive celebration, family connections, and joy. Each daily reading is anchored by a line of an Advent hymn. You may wish to listen to or sing the hymn to prepare for your daily study. Let these songs guide you to an awareness of a God who wishes to draw you into a deeper connection with Himself. You are included in His story, so join in the beauty and wonder of the season. Let's take it one day at a time.

The History of Advent

When many people think of Advent, they think of plucking chocolates from behind the window of an Advent calendar that counts down the days to Christmas. We have the brilliant holiday marketing minds at Cadbury to thank for that; they created the first chocolate Advent calendar in 1958.

The word *advent* comes from the Latin *adventus*, which means “arrival.” Advent is the coming, the arrival, of the presence of God Himself— *God with us*. For hundreds of years, followers of Jesus from a variety of church traditions around the world have set aside the four weeks leading up to Christmas as a meaningful season of **celebration** and **anticipation**.

Celebration

In celebration, we remember the earnest expectations and fervent prayers of faithful saints of old who longed for the coming of their Messiah to rescue them from sin and all its cronies (aka consequences). Humanity called upon the name of the Lord, and God answered. He arrived living and breathing and walking among us. Advent is a way to experience joy as we put ancient, Spirit-inspired words of Advent hymns on our lips as a community at Ethos.

Anticipation

Advent is something that really *happened*, but Advent *will happen* again. Jesus is coming back. At His first coming, the future kingdom of God burst into the present with Jesus’ incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Our spiritual enemies were disarmed, yet our world is not what it will be as we await the reign of our good King. We live in the “already but not yet” of Jesus’ kingdom. At Advent, we give voice to “kingdom come” prayers of our own, looking expectantly for Jesus’ return. In that way, this is a season of both celebration and anticipation.

For Christians, Christmas is less sentimental than we think. Advent allows us to be honest about what’s wrong with our world and to freely celebrate Christmas as good news—King Jesus has come; King Jesus will come again!

Participation

Jesus said, “I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20). Encountering God is not only possible this Christmas season, Jesus said it’s a matter of opening the door. Will you let Him into your home? He’s waiting.

If the idea of celebrating Advent is new to you, you’re in good hands. This devotional is meant to protect you from the unintentional consequences of the modern pace of life. In his book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, John Mark Comer defines daily worship practices as “a schedule and set of practices to order your life around the way of Jesus in community. They are a way to keep from getting sucked into the hurry, busyness, noise, and distraction of regular life. A way to slow down. A way to live into what really matters... key relationships with family and community...a healthy soul. You know, the good stuff.”

Our prayer is that through our weekly gatherings (Sundays), your small group, and this advent devotional, we will see and know Jesus more this Advent season than we ever have before.

In this together!



W E E K O N E

O Holy Night!

O holy night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!
O night divine, O night when Christ was born;
O night divine, O night, O night Divine.

Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming,
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,
Here come the wise men from the Orient land.
The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger;
In all our trials born to be our friend.

He knows our need, to our weaknesses no stranger,
Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!
Behold your King, Before Him lowly bend!

Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother;
And in His name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
Let all within us praise His holy name.

Christ is the Lord! O praise His Name forever,
His power and glory evermore proclaim.
His power and glory evermore proclaim.

“O Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining, it is the night of the dear Savior’s birth.”

Luke 2:8 (ESV) // “And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.”

Read

“O Holy Night” was originally a French poem that was later adapted to become this well-loved Christmas hymn that many of us sing each year. So, what does it mean that the night of Jesus’ birth is described as and called holy? This designation implies that there is something different about this night, something sacred. Holiness indicates that whatever is being discussed is worth reverence; it is meant to be set apart. Sometimes in the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season, it can be easy to lose sight of the reverence that the night of our Savior’s birth deserves. This Advent season let’s lean back into the wonder together and relearn to set apart what is truly meant to be seen as holy.

Reflect

What does the word “holy” mean to you? In what ways can you be reminded to revere God as holy and set apart this Christmas season?

Parents

As we reflect on the holiness of Jesus’ birth, let’s help our children unpack the word holy. Holy is a word that can be thrown around a lot without us truly understanding what it means. Discuss what it means to be holy with your kids. Ask them what things in their lives they think are holy? Encourage them to find things they can add or take off of that list? Talk about why this word is used to describe the Christmas season.

“Long lay the world in sin and error pining. ‘Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth.”

Titus 3:4-7 (ESV) // “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

Read

Our souls are made with an innate desire, a yearning to feel their worth. How often is it that we search for this worth in places and people that can never provide it? How often do we buy into the lie that our worthiness is tied to our performance, our popularity, or our possessions? Because of who Jesus is and what He has done, we have the opportunity to truly understand our value. It is only in the presence of Jesus that we can understand the magnitude of our worth. Jesus says we are worth loving, we are worth mercy, we are worth renewal, we are worth saving. Not because of anything we offer, but because we have been made in the image of God and have been adopted into the family of God.

Reflect

Where and how can you be tempted to try to find your worth apart from Jesus? How is God reminding you of your worth?

Parents

There is little more important we can instill in our children than a deep understanding of their worth as well as the worth of everyone they encounter and where it truly comes from. Have a conversation with your kids asking them to identify the things that make them feel the most important. Help them ideate and identify things that show them how treasured they are by God.

“A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.”

Matthew 11: 28-30 (ESV) // “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Read

In the last couple of years, many of us have come to understand the word ‘weary’ in a new way. Whether it has been through loss, uncertainty, parenting/homeschooling/working from home, or otherwise, we all experienced new levels of stress. It is during this weariness that Jesus gives the invitation we read in Matthew 11. The invitation is simple, “Come to me.” When we are at our wit’s end, let us go to Jesus. When we are overwhelmed by what is going on in the world and in our lives, let us go to Jesus. There are no prerequisites; there are no standards we have to meet. Just simply come to Him. The beauty in Jesus’ invitation is that He also invites us to experience His rest. When we come to Jesus and give Him our burdens, we can gracefully accept the promise of His rest. His burden is light; in that, there is so much hope.

Reflect

Take an honest inventory of your life right now. What burdens are you carrying on your own that you are not meant to be carrying? What can you give over to Jesus in order to experience His rest?

Parents

As much as the last few years have left us weary, it is important to remember that our children are feeling it too. Ask your kids the things that may be making them feel overwhelmed whether it be at home or at school. But discuss deeper than that and tell them the things that Mom & Dad may be feeling overwhelmed by as well. Pray together giving those burdens over to Jesus and asking for His rest.

“Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices! O night divine, O night when Christ was born; O night divine, O night, O night divine!”

Philippians 2:10-11 (ESV) // “So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Read

Bending down to your knees is a symbol of honor, worship, and adoration. In Philippians, Paul tells us that every knee will bow at the name of Jesus...in honor of Jesus. The very first people we see honoring Jesus are the shepherds who came to visit Jesus when He was born. Humility entered that stable and bowed in awe, adoration, and honor of who was before them. Furthermore, we need not look further than Mary and Joseph to find examples of people honoring Jesus. Mary and Joseph didn’t have all of the answers to what was to come for them. They did not have an instruction manual or a step-by-step guide for how the rest of their lives would play out, but they chose to honor. They honored God with their obedience and trust, and they honored Jesus by bringing Him to this world for all of humankind to come. Simply put, Jesus is worthy of our bended knee in honor and praise.

Reflect

What does it look like for you to honor Jesus in your day today?

Parents

Jesus is Lord, which means he is in charge of our lives. Begin a conversation with your kids about what honor means. Ask them to think of times over the last few days that they honored Jesus with their words and their actions. What can they do to show honor to Jesus in the future?

“Truly He taught us to love one another, His law is love and His gospel is peace.”

John 13:34-35 (ESV) // “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Read

We have the ultimate example of what love looks like in Jesus. Can we, for a moment, lean into the intentionality of the author of “O Holy Night” in the way he uses and describes love? Jesus’ “law” is love. In John 13, Jesus refers to love as a commandment, not a suggestion. It is not something we should do when it is convenient or feels good. It is a directive. Love ought to be a hallmark trait of Christ-followers. It should be so evident that it is how others can know we are Jesus’ followers. There are a lot of ways we can be identified: our job, our families, our hobbies. But above all else, let us be identified by the way we love.

Reflect

In what ways do you have the opportunity to love others today? Has there been a time recently that you missed the mark in showing love towards someone? What can you do to rectify that moment and show love?

Parents

We love because He first loved us. This is a great opportunity to discuss with your child how they feel loved and how they like to express love. It is important for your kids to know that loving others can sometimes be difficult. Explore different ways they can love others, even when it is hard.

“Chains he shall break, for the slave is our brother. And in his name all oppression shall cease.”

John 8:36 (ESV) // “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

Read

The visual that this portion of the song brings to us is so powerful! Chains have a strong association with a sense of imprisonment and bondage. They’re something that keeps people stuck, unable to move forward, and takes away their freedom. But justice is close to the heart of God. Repeatedly in scripture, we see examples of Jesus loving and serving the poor, the widow, the orphan, the marginalized, and the oppressed by empowering them to be free of the chains that were holding them back. The ultimate sacrifice of Jesus dying on the cross offers freedom to all people. Lord, let it be on Earth as it is in Heaven.

Reflect

Where do you see marginalized, hurt, or oppressed people in your life? By your own actions have you made someone feel oppressed? What can you do to proclaim freedom with and for those people?

Parents

It is no secret that kids tend to have a very keen eye and a discerning spirit for those in need. Take some time as a family to think about someone they know or saw that may be hurting or in need this season. Spend time discussing what they or your family can do to meet that need. Take it further, and help your kids make a plan of action to help meet the needs they see.



W E E K T W O

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe the way that leads on high
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel

Oh, come, our Wisdom from on high,
Who ordered all things far and nigh;
To us the path of knowledge show,
and teach us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Oh, come, Desire of nations, bind
All peoples in one heart and mind;
Bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease,
Fill all the world with heaven's peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

“O come, O come, Emmanuel”

Matthew 1:23 (NLT) // “Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means “God is with us.”

Read

Jesus is Emmanuel, “God with us”. God made a very intentional decision when he gave us His son, Jesus. That was God’s deliberate way to always draw near to us. At that moment, He put Himself on physical human display for us to know Him, through Jesus, better than we have ever known anyone. Because God is with us, we can never not know His love. Because God is with us, we can accomplish all He has for us. Because God is with us, we can daily live out His truth for us. The beauty in all of this is when we place ourselves with and remain in God, we bear firsthand the fruit of that intentional placement. We will, without even realizing it, love others deeper, give more generously, and live with greater confidence. If God is already with us, then why would we not draw even closer to Him? Let the understanding that God is with you lead you to truly experience all He has for you.

Reflect

In what areas of your life, big or small, do you struggle to believe that God is with you? What can you do at this moment to begin to think differently?

Parents

In remembering that God is with us challenge your children to find a time in their day where they felt that God was with them. Maybe it was a tough moment at school, with their siblings, or with friends. Ask them how they felt in that moment knowing that in their decisions they were representing God.

“Our spirits by Thine advent here; disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death’s dark shadows put to flight.”

Isaiah 9:2 (NLT) // “The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.”

Read

Have you ever stopped to think about how amazing light truly is? We have it so readily available to us. However, since it is so easily accessible, we oftentimes miss how valuable it really is (until we don’t have it). Then we find ourselves in the darkness frantically searching for a source of light. For many, this time of year tends to carry with it a darkness. Thoughts become clouded by what we don’t have, what we didn’t accomplish this year, and what we feel we missed out on. Yet, amid that darkness, we are promised a great light. The light of a Savior. Our hope is not in the people or things around us. Rather, it is in our God who came to Earth through His Son, Jesus, to give us the light that we all so desperately need to guide us through life. No longer must we fumble around through life in darkness when we are promised the greatest and brightest of all lights.

Reflect

Have you ever been in, or are currently in, a dark place in life that felt impossible to get out of? How did/does that feel? What helped you find the light that is Jesus to guide you in those times?

Parents

With your kids, open a conversation about how they feel when they are in a dark room or at nighttime. What are things they wish they could do but can’t because it’s dark? Encourage them about areas in their life where they can rely on Jesus to show them what to do.

“And open wide our heavenly home. Make safe the way that leads on high and close the path to misery.”

John 14:6 (NLT) // “Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”

Read

We would be lying to ourselves if we said that at one point in time that we did not feel at a loss of how to truly feel connected to and with God. When we stop and honestly think about the vastness and greatness of God, there is immediately room to doubt and to question, “How do I stay close to Him?” But God already had the answer planned out. He knew what He was doing when He gave us Jesus. It is during this time at Christmas that we celebrate Jesus coming to Earth to save us, to give us life, and to be with us. In coming to Earth, Jesus immediately became our means to bridging the gap that we feel when trying to be with God. In coming to Earth, Jesus became our only way to be with God. He became the only truth personified that we need to live daily with God. He became the only means to eternal life with God. By fully investing ourselves into who Jesus is as the way, the truth, and the life, it becomes that much easier to live out our lives with God.

Reflect

What habits can you establish (or what habits do you need to break) to help position yourself to continually be close to God?

Parents

Ask your kids to share how they feel when they are close to Mom and Dad. It’s one of the greatest feelings. Share with them about what it means that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life and that Jesus allows them to be close to God.

“To us the path of knowledge show and teach us in her ways to go.”

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT) // “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.”

Read

Have you ever wondered how the world would be different today had Mary and Joseph leaned on their own understanding of their situation instead of trusting in the Lord with all their hearts? We would have never been given our Savior, Jesus. They could have easily dropped everything and left because what they understood on their own did not make any sense. However, they remained true to the path that was set for them despite not knowing the full picture of what was to come. That is trust in a faithful God. In facing situations in your life, it may seem so much easier to just tap into what you know. But faith in God tells us that we do not have to navigate life alone based on our own understandings. Trusting God in every situation and season means we get to be with God. He will lead us to a life that is better than we could imagine because His plan is uniquely tailored to who He created you to be.

Reflect

Do you find it hard to trust God? What are things holding you back from fully giving your trust to God and what can you do to change that?

Parents

With your kids, talk about who the people are that they trust the most. People like Mom, Dad, teachers, police officers, siblings, etc. Why do they trust them? What did those people do to make themselves trustworthy? Help them understand why putting their trust in God is even more important.

“All peoples in one heart and mind, bid envy, strife and quarrels cease. Fill all the world with heaven’s peace.”

Luke 2:13-14 (NLT) // “Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others – the armies of heaven – praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.’”

Read

Life is full of sudden moments that can change perspective forever. Whether they be fun and joyous moments or moments of pain and heartache, it is inevitable that in our lives we will experience both. So how do you respond in those moments? Sure, responding in peace to those joyous moments is easy because that moment was so satisfying and beautiful. But what about those moments that were unexpected and painful? When you’ve lost a loved one, you’ve been let go from your job, or a friend betrayed your trust? Do we have that same peace then? God knew in creating this life that we would need an everlasting source of peace. Giving us Jesus was that solution. When we place our trust in Jesus, we experience the peace that our hearts were intricately designed for because He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Reflect

How do you pursue peace in your life? Think about the things you can do in your everyday life to continually posture your life in a position of peace. What are they?

Parents

Ask your kids to share when they feel the most comfortable, the most at peace. Ask them when they feel the most disturbed, the most anxious. Help them identify how talking to God and leaning on your wisdom can help bring them peace. Ask them to pray that God would remind them of His peace when they feel anxious.

“Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel, shall come to thee, O Israel.”

Luke 2:10-11 (NLT) // “But the angel reassured them, “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The savior – yes, the Messiah, the Lord – has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!”

Read

In the world we live in today it is so easy, a commonplace almost, to become fearful of our surroundings and of the unknown of what is to come. Especially when living through a time in life that is unprecedented and has never been experienced before. To be fearful and timid seems almost normal. In fact, meeting someone who exhibits a non-anxious presence almost catches you off guard. But we have the truth of the birth of our savior, Jesus, and that joy comes because of Him. There is a difference between happiness and joy. Happiness is circumstantial, but joy is transcendent. Think about that for a moment: the joy we experience in life, in jobs, with our families, with friends, etc. is Jesus. The good news that the angels brought the shepherds that night years ago was news that was intended for all of us today. We can look beyond our circumstances, straight to Jesus, knowing that He never changes.

Reflect

Is it hard for you to experience joy? What do you feel is hindering you in life from experiencing true joy in Jesus? How does knowing that Jesus never changes bring you greater joy?

Parents

Ask your children to retell a memory of when they experienced something fun. Why was it so much fun? Ask them to share a recent memory of something they dreaded. Why? Help them identify that even in situations that are not enjoyable, we know that Jesus is still with us, for us, and will guide us through the situation.



W E E K T H R E E

Joy To The World

Joy to the world; The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the earth, The Saviour reigns;
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills & plains
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.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness,
And wonders of his love.

“Let earth receive her King”

Psalm 98:4-6 (NLT) // “Shout to the Lord, all the earth; break out in praise and sing for joy! Sing your praise to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and melodious song. With trumpets and the sound of the ram’s horn. Make a joyful symphony before Lord, the King!”

Read

Sometimes our hallelujah and our shout come out so easy. Especially when we remember what he has done in our past, what He is doing for us right now, and when we can so easily anticipate all the good to come. However, when storms come and the unthinkable happens in our lives, our natural inclination is to fall silent, to shut in our shout. But we must realize that our shout for joy is not based on our circumstances because those can change in a moment. Rather, may we remember that fullness of joy is found in the presence of God as we fix our attention on Jesus. If we allow Jesus to abide in us and our every day, no matter the situation, His joy will be present in us and come out of us when we need it most.

Reflect

Do you find it hard to not let your circumstances dictate your attitude? What shifts do you need to make in your life to allow space for Jesus to abide in your life?

Parents

Ask your kids what it means to “look to Jesus”. “How can we look to Jesus in all our circumstances, both good and bad?” Share a story from your life when things didn’t go the way you had hoped but you continued to trust that God would walk you through it. Don’t be intimidated to be healthily vulnerable with your kids.

“Let every heart prepare him room,”

Ephesians 3:17 (NLT) // Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong.”

Read

At one time or another, we have all heard the phrase, “Just make yourself at home!” When we hear that, it is instant joy and gratification because whoever said that to you loves you, cares for you, cherishes you, and is comfortable with you. They trust you inside of their space. When we trust God to make Himself at home in our hearts, we are telling Him, “God, I love you, I cherish you, I am comfortable with you, and I find joy in you being here.” The longer He dwells in our hearts and we trust Him in our space, the deeper His love will take hold in our hearts. Sometimes the best thing we can do when we are growing in trust with God is to take a step of faith and tell Him, “God, I trust you even if I don’t feel like it.”

Reflect

What habits do you need to adjust in your life in order to create a comfortable home for Jesus to inhabit?

Parents

Trusting God can sometimes seem difficult because we can’t see Him. As children grow older, that reality begins to set in more and more. Ask your kids to share a time when trusting you as a parent was difficult. Pray with your kids that their trust wouldn’t be in the outcome of an event but in God being present in every situation they ever encounter.

“Let men their songs employ;”

Psalm 96:2 (NLT) // “Sing to the Lord; praise his name. Each day proclaim the good news that he saves.”

Read

Praising and worshipping daily can be hard. The daily distractions that come at us at any moment of any day can cause us to throw our priority to praise into the back seat. But we are given this instruction to praise no matter where we are, no matter what we are doing, no matter the circumstance; we sing and we bless His name. Think about the moment that men encountered Jesus for the very first time when He was born; they praised His name. Before even knowing all that He was going to do on this Earth, they praised His name. So, it should be all the easier for us to joyfully praise His name as we have had a front-row seat to all of the great things He has done!

Reflect

When are the moments that you find it hardest to praise? What adjustments do you need to make in your life, so situations no longer dictate your praise?

Parents

Ask your kids, “What is something you want to thank God for today?”. Follow that up with, “What is something you think I need to thank God for today?”. Take turns praying and thanking God for the big and seemingly little things that He has done for you.

“No more let sins and sorrows grow.”

Romans 5:20 (NLT) // “God’s law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God’s wonderful grace became more abundant.”

Read

The Bible is clear that grace is a gift that was given to us the moment God gave us Jesus on this Earth. We, unfortunately, oftentimes assume that God’s grace is like human grace - imperfect, reactive, and that we must earn it. So, we tend to think the worse, “The more sinful I am, the less grace I can obtain.” But the Bible is clear that grace is a gift. It is not a reward for our efforts in life but rather based on who God is and who we are with Him, through Jesus. God gives us grace simply because He wants to. He finds joy and delights in giving us grace when he sees us put our faith in his Son. This season, what if we stopped exhausting ourselves trying to earn a place in the good graces of both people and God? Rather, let us find the joy in discovering the grace that is already ours, and in turn it will become even easier to extend that same grace to one another.

Reflect

It is easy to believe that we are undeserving of God’s grace because of the life we have lived or are living. What does it mean in your life to stop trying to earn God’s grace and realize that it is already yours?

Parents

Ask your kids, “Who do you see every day that needs to have a friend like Jesus? Gracious and kind. How can you be that?”

“And heaven and nature sing.”

Psalm 19:1 (NLT) // “The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship.”

Read

Every single one of us was created by the same Creator with the same purpose – to glorify God. From the very beginning, we see God create plants, animals, birds, oceans, mountains, and us...humans. He created each in His image, to love nothing more than His glory. All of God’s creations point to the fact that there is someone greater than us. As a result of being His creation, we are called to simply proclaim His glory. If it’s all about God and it’s not all about you—or about making money, being popular, or any of the other things the world thinks are important—then the implication is that loving God is your priority. Jesus said it like this: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. This is the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:37-38 TLB).

Reflect

What is the goal of your life? How does our culture try to convince you that life is all about you? In what ways can you practice loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind?

Parents

Following Jesus first begins with understanding how much Jesus loves you. Ask your kids how much easier it is to obey you when they remember how much you love them. Share how that relates to the way we obey God because of His love for them. Then ask, “How would people know you follow Jesus today without you having to tell them?”

“And wonders of his love.”

Psalm 17:7 (NLT) // “Show me your unfailing love in wonderful ways. By your mighty power you rescue those who seek refuge from their enemies.”

Read

God’s love is amazing. It never fails. His love for us is unconditional and not based upon whether we love or serve Him in return. He loves us simply because He is God and we exist, and that is all the reason He needs. His love is there for us regardless of what we say or do, and the truth is no one can love us like He loves us. Oftentimes, the love we receive from the people around us is only given based on what we have done for them first. But we can find pure joy in God’s unfailing and unconditional love for us. A love that was love at first sight.

Reflect

Have you ever had moments where you felt unworthy of God’s love for you? What is it that makes you feel that way? What lie has the enemy been trying to tell you to convince you that you are not worthy of God’s love? Pray and ask God to remind you just how big His love is for you.

Parents

Ask your children the last time they questioned whether or not you loved them. Ask them what led to that conclusion and help them identify the root of the lie. Share how the enemy will try to lie to them as well when it comes to God’s love for them. Pray together asking God to help them call out the lies of the enemy.



W E E K F O U R

The First Noel

The first Noel the angel did say
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
in fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
on a cold winter's night that was so deep.

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
born is the King of Israel.

They looked up and saw a star
shining in the east, beyond them far;
and to the earth it gave great light,
and so it continued both day and night.

And by the light of that same star
three Wise Men came from country far;
to seek for a king was their intent,
and to follow the star wherever it went.

This star drew nigh to the northwest,
o'er Bethlehem it took its rest;
and there it did both stop and stay,
right over the place where Jesus lay.

Then entered in those Wise Men three,
full reverently upon the knee,
and offered there, in his presence,
their gold and myrrh and frankincense.

“The First Noel, the Angels did say”

Luke 1:28 (ESV) // “The angel went to [Mary] and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.’”

Read

Noël is a French word for Christmas that has its roots in the Latin word, *anatalis*, meaning birthday. In the Christmas story, God’s voice is apparent. Sometimes it can feel like God is no longer speaking into your life when prayers seem to go unanswered, when we feel lonely, and when we feel lost. While it might not be through an angel or an audible voice, God is still speaking today. We can hear from God in His word and in prayer. We can hear from God through being impressed by the Holy Spirit. We can hear God us through people and his creations. We must take time to listen to His still, small voice.

Reflect

Where have you seen evidence of God’s hand and voice in your life? If you feel like you have not or don’t, what things do you feel need to change to get to that place?

Parents

Like any relationship, communication in our relationship with God is so important. Talk with your family about how they like to communicate with God and ways they have “heard” from God. Encourage your kids to think of examples of how they know God loves them. This is one example of a way they have heard from God!

“Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;”

Luke 2:8-12 (ESV) // “And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 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. 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. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.’”

Read

When we have good news to share, it can be hard to keep from telling everyone we know, but sometimes we must be intentional about who we share our news with. God could have chosen to share the news of Jesus’ birth with anyone, but He chose to have the Angels appear to the shepherds. Shepherds, traditionally, worked in the field with animals. They’re not the people you might expect to be the first to receive this long-awaited news. Yet, these humble shepherds, just doing their jobs, are drawn into the Christmas story by God and play a key role in others finding out about Jesus’ birth. Regular people like you and I are important to God and can be used by God. There is meaning to our purpose here on Earth. We are part of something bigger than ourselves, and all we must maintain to do is stay available. Thank you, God, that you use us in ways that are dramatically disproportionate to who we are.

Reflect

How is God including you into His story? How can you position yourself to be included in God’s story? What opportunities at work, school, or home do you sense God is inviting you to be a part of His story?

Parents

Throughout scripture, there are examples of God using unexpected people to do great things. Discuss with your kids how God could have chosen to appear to anyone but chose to have the angels appear to shepherds. There is no age, status, or skill they must first achieve before they can be used by God. Share examples.

“And by the light of that same star three Wise Men came from country far”

Matthew 2:1-2 (ESV) // “Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.”

Read

Wise men, also called Magi, are another group of people God brought into the Christmas story. While we may not know exactly how many of these Magi went in search of Jesus, scripture tells us that they came to know of Jesus’ arrival through a star. Many describe these Magi as philosophers, or perhaps Persian scientists that spent some time studying the stars. They may not have known everything about Jesus, but what became apparent to them in that star was enough that they left their homes to go see Jesus and honor Him. God led them to Jesus with a star, the very thing they were studying. How like God is it to meet us right where we are? To use what we love to reveal Himself to us in new and amazing ways! Whether it be in a sanctuary or the grocery store, God will meet us right where we are and is leading us to Jesus.

Reflect

Where is God meeting you? How can you invite Him into your space?

Parents

Spend some time talking to your kids about what they want most, what they are pursuing, and what they are going after. Whether it be beating a level on a video game, earning good grades, or being a good friend, we are all pursuing something. Discuss how after seeing a star, the Wise Men went on the pursuit of Jesus. Even though we can’t physically see God like we can our friends and family, He meets us where we are each day. Ask them, “What did you do today that Jesus would be proud of?”

“Then entered in those wise men three full reverently upon their knee, and offered there in his presence their gold, and myrrh, and frankincense.”

John 12:3 (ESV) // “Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.”

Read

When the Magi arrived to where Jesus was, they showed him honor and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Later in Jesus’ story in John, we see Mary do the same in pouring perfume on Jesus’ feet. While in both of these examples people are providing Jesus with tangible items of great value, it is not the gift they give that matters, it is the heart behind it. Whatever we have, let’s live as open-handed stewards and give it to Jesus. Whether it be serving through community projects, truly listening to someone struggling, or giving to a cause that expands God’s kingdom, let’s give Jesus the best of what we have.

Reflect

Take a moment to reflect on your life. What gifts are you bringing to the feet of Jesus? What do you feel that you have in you that you can start bringing to the feet of Jesus?

Parents

This is an awesome opportunity to build up your child with the different gifts and strengths you see in them! Speak these things over them and encourage them to point out what they notice in themselves and each other. Discuss how they can use these gifts to honor Jesus.

“Then let us all with one accord
sing praises to our heavenly
Lord; that hath made heaven
and earth of naught, and with
his blood mankind hath bought”

2 Corinthians 13:11 (ESV) // “Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.”

Read

In this last verse of the First Noel, we find a call for unity. Jesus made us and saved us. He came for all people, not just the ones that think like we do, that look like we do, or behave like we do. In 2 Corinthians, Paul urges the church in Corinth, and us today, to strive for restoration so that we can be united. In our love and worship of Jesus, we are united. There are a lot of conflicts in the world. It's filled with wars, division, arguments, prejudice, racism, terrorism, and partisanism. As a result, we have broken relationships, broken economies, broken governments, broken marriages, broken lives, and broken hearts. I challenge you as a believer to commit to becoming an agent of reconciliation in a world filled with conflict. Become a bridge builder, not a wall builder. Look for ways to bring people together rather than tear them apart.

Reflect

What does it look like in your life to be united with those you encounter day in and day out? How does Jesus' life, death, and resurrection make this possible for you to live this daily?

Parents

Explore what it means to be united. Ask your kids to share a time when they and a friend were not on the same page. When those friendships get hard, what are some steps they can take to stay or become united?

“Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
born is the King of Israel.”

M E R R Y
C H R I S T M A S

You are infinitely and
unconditionally loved
today and forevermore!
Thank you, Jesus.

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