



ADVENT

WHAT IS ADVENT:

Christmas has long since gone commercial, hasn't it? 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 actually comes from the Latin **adventus**, which simply 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 wide 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**. That's what we're up to here.

So, allow this season to be a journey of anticipation. One of waiting and expecting God's goodness. One where we discover the ways that our story intersects with the story that God has always told and continues to tell. The story of Jesus' great love for all the world.

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL:

This Christmas season we want you to consider connecting with a few friends or family members once a week (**Sunday evenings** if you can) to enjoy community and encounter God together.

There's a pattern you may have noticed most people tend to fall into during the Christmas season. We spend more, consume more, eat more, and do more in December than any other month of the year. For this reason, Christmas can be one of the least emotionally healthy seasons of the year. We believe it doesn't have to be. In fact, we're inviting you to resist that pattern. As the famous Christmas carol proclaims, "Let every heart prepare Him room." Make room for these Advent Gatherings. You won't regret it.

Friends don't let friends do Advent alone.

- If you're able to meet in person, we recommend it.
- If not, gathering via video call works too.
- Plan to share a meal together.
- Make it as simple or as extravagant as you like; the point is to be together in celebration and anticipation.
- Have Fun.
- Then conclude by taking some time to **go through this guided devotional together**.

(Parents, consider leading your children through this devotional and then spending some dedicated family time together immediately after by playing a game, doing a puzzle, or watching a movie.)

WEEK 4 - LOVE

REMIND

“When we learn to read the story of Jesus and see it as the story of the love of God, doing for us what we could not do for ourselves—that insight produces, again and again, a sense of astonished gratitude which is very near the heart of authentic Christian experience.” - NT Wright

READ

John 3:16-21

REMEMBER

The work of advent is to believe that God loves the world enough to rescue it from oppression, evil, violence, and death. Many of us have been taught this in concept, and then heard Bible stories used to reinforce that the way God works is always - if there is enough faith or will - dramatic and immediate. We are taught to have faith and wait. But if you really have enough faith, we are told that you will see God move. This, while not ill intentioned, has convinced many of us that the everyday things of our lives are not spiritual enough to count as God “moving”. We may begin to believe that God is not with or for us in the less extraordinary moments of life. This idea has convinced us that our prayers are not spiritual or fervent enough, and that our spiritual activity isn’t up to par. It has told us that we are not enough because if we were, God would come. The “God-with-us” narrative of advent turns this on its head. The coming of Jesus is much more about a movement than a single spectacular moment. It is about everyday things converging with the divine to make it all sacred and holy. This is a way that God loves us. Allowing ourselves to be immersed in a story where God is making everything, every moment, every bit of growth and change, sacred.

REFLECT

- What are the sacred moments that you may have missed in your life today or this week?
- What do you think God may have been showing or reminding you of in that moment?
- Who inspires you to “see God in the little moments” by being more attentive to God’s daily interaction with them? What can you learn from them?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we are asking for grace and patience to see your love in the little moments of our lives. It’s easy to rush from one moment to the next and it’s even easier to assume that you are only present in the biggest moments of our lives, but we know that’s not true. This Christmas, teach us more of your love so that we may love us more like Jesus loves us. Amen.