



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 2 - PEACE

REMIND

"We too are called to withdraw at certain intervals into deeper silence and aloneness with God, together as a community as well as personally; to be alone with God – not with books, thoughts, and memories but completely stripped of everything – to dwell lovingly in God's presence, silent, empty, expectant, and motionless. We cannot find God in noise or agitation."

- Mother Teresa

READ

Psalm 4

REMEMBER

The consumerism, romanticism, and hallmark-ness of our Christmas season can often leave us feeling less than fulfilled. We, in light of the "season", often force ourselves to live outside of the present realities in favor of performing a merry or joyful Christmas. This does violence to our souls. It prevents us from moving through pain in favor of moving around it. As we disconnect from ourselves, whether by platitudes or coping mechanisms, we reinforce the need to perform a "spirit of Christmas." The advent is an invitation to be real and human. It is an invitation to feel the full range of complex and conflicting feelings that may come and, in moving through them, discover a peace that goes deeper than anything we can manufacture. The advent is an invitation to be real and human. As Jesus comes, he doesn't erase the stories of our past, nor does he immediately reveal where everything is going. Instead, he invites us to hold onto an everlasting peace found only in him. An invitation to live as though a better and good world is yet to come, even when all hope seems silent. Jesus wants to give you peace, but it only comes when you journey with him through the emotions and struggles that are robbing you of peace.

REFLECT

- How are you feeling, like really feeling, as you move toward Christmas? Pay attention to the full range of what is in you (joy, pain, stress, numbness, and all) and bring those feelings to God in honest prayer.
- How does it feel to be honest with God, how does God respond to you?
- Set a timer for 5-10 minutes and be silent before God. The goal isn't to hear or accomplish anything, but to simply practice being in God's presence. As we are, not as we pretend to be. May being in God's presence bring you peace.
- Spend a few minutes praying over your family, friends, or spouse.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I want to make space to allow your Holy Spirit to help me see myself as you see me. Help me to not run from my pain or uncomfortable emotions but remind me of your presence in the middle of it. As I pursue peace, may I not seek it in the avoidance of the uncomfortable or the pleasure of temporary possessions, but may I find it in you. Amen.