



All I want
for Christmas!
HOPE, PEACE, JOY, LOVE

DEVOTIONAL

2023



Week 1

HOPE

Monday, November 27th

Celebrating Advent Together

For this day of Advent, gather your family together over dinner, invite over some friends, or feel free to Zoom or Facetime them. You can also celebrate individually. For today's devotion (and every Sunday through Advent) we will be celebrating Advent with an Advent wreath. You can purchase one online if you aren't super crafty (there are some nice ones on Etsy), or make one yourself with items from around your house and yard or from the local Michaels. If either aren't good options, feel free to gather 5 candles and use them as part of the celebration.

An Advent wreath usually include five candles (3 purple, 1 pink, and 1 white in the center), surrounded by some sort of greenery. The greenery (be it real pine or holly or plastic garland) represents life that is ever-green and growing.



You can purchase an inexpensive one on amazon!



The modern Advent wreath originated among German Lutherans in the 16th century. Beginning in 1839 in a shelter for orphans, each night of Advent, a German pastor named Johann Hinrich Wichern gathered the kids around him to light a candle, tell them a story, and pray. Eventually this custom spread as churches and families adopted it.

Turn down the lights, gather around the Advent wreath, and read aloud **Isaiah 9:2-7**.

Light the first purple candle and spend a minute or two in silence. Then pray this prayer together:

Thank you, God for the flame of hope. As we prepare for Christ's coming, help us to share our hope with others.

Tuesday, November 28th

Hope Is Trusting God

Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.

Lamentations 3:22-24

It's easy to think we have more control and authority over our lives than we actually do. It isn't until something significantly impacts us that we are left wondering about how much we actually do control. Whether it's a loss, ailment, diagnosis or other form of tragedy, these unforeseen circumstances can suddenly disrupt even the best-laid plans. We discover that we exist in a liminal space between what's possible and what's not possible, a tiny area where we can no longer assume we have the kind of influence in our lives as we wish we did. It is in this space where we learn to trust in God, who meets us in this space!

Advent reminds us that hope and the fulfillment of God's promises can be found in the least likely of places, and in unexpected ways. Through a tiny infant God came to experience real life with us, and to teach us how to hope in those liminal spaces. God reminds us that through the chaos and uncertainty of this life we can ground and anchor ourselves in God's self who is the source of true life, and life of abundance (enough). God isn't far off in some distant place or as some distant idea, rather God is closer to us than our very breath!

Whenever we celebrate Advent we celebrate God with us, God as Immanuel. God is with us on the beautiful days and the impossibly dark ones. God is with us as we rejoice and celebrate and as we mourn and can't pull ourselves out of bed. God is with us as we wrestle as we make choices. God is with us when we have no other choice but to keep going. Advent celebrates this: ***There is no place we can go that God has not already been. God is with us—all of us!***

PRAY

God, you know my heart and you know that under all the busy-ness of my life, my heart desires the warmth of your love and the light of your presence. Help me embrace hope, to rest in hope, and to become hope for others. Whether days are hard and impossible, or everything is well, let your presence be my rock and light. Remind me you hold me close. Amen!

finding Hope In Darkness

PUTTING HOPE INTO ACTION

When we are wrestling in the darkness or barely surviving day-to-day, it can feel difficult, almost mocking, to talk about hope. However, it is precisely in those moments where we need hope the most. Where we need to come back to our center--God's presence.

If you are struggling with hope this season, consider gifting yourself the following tips to bring light of God's hope in your life.

Give yourself permission

Do you feel like you deserve hope? Have you given yourself permission to grieve? To open up to others? It's easy to come up with a bunch of reasons why we don't deserve something, or why we shouldn't be vulnerable with others. But this often keeps us stuck. Remember that God chose you first because God loves you. God is present with you no matter how you think of yourself or the loss you are carrying. So in this season of waiting, give yourself permission and the space to find hope.

Ground yourself in Gratitude

Hope springs forward from a place of gratitude. By gratitude, this isn't talking about toxic positivity. Rather it's acknowledging the places of hope in the midst of life's challenges. The more we practice gratitude, the more our perception of our lives and the world around us shifts.

- Be present and mindful of the good things in life while honoring the truth of your current season in life.
- Set the intention of gratitude. You can make the choice to respond to life from a place of gratitude rather than reacting to it from a place of cynicism and frustration.

Connect with your support team

Hope isn't easy to carry on our own. Community that encourages mutual support is absolutely essential to navigate through the darkness and hold onto hope when things seem bleak. Surround yourself with a network of caring individuals that understands shared burdens are lighter and shared joys are magnified.

Thursday, November 30th

Hope Can Be Hard

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

Life is indeed beautiful, but it is also hard! For some it's harder than others. For all of us though sometimes in life's most hardest moments we can lose sight that the sun rises and sets and a new day comes no matter how dark a night may be. We can forget that God holds the world together, not us. We can muddy our connection to God's presence within us that is constantly reminding us we are loved and that God does hear every prayer we utter or silently hold on our hearts.

Advent hope is found in the reminder that while our world can feel like its being ripped apart at the seams, the truth is that the sun keeps rising and setting every day. While we can feel alone and trapped, God is at work in and through us in unexpected ways. This doesn't mean we won't have hard days, we will. This doesn't mean that loss will kick us, it will.

Hope can be hard because life can be hard. And let's be honest, life can be exhausting. However, hope is possible through Jesus. Hope can and it does exist in the midst of darkness. That is where it's most needed after all! People never expected Jesus to be a baby, born in the middle of nowhere to a family of nobodies. People never expected Jesus to suffer or be willing to follow us no matter where that path led him. That night, a little light was born. That little light pierced into the darkness of night and began to tear down mighty walls. We have been deemed worthy enough of love and belonging that God would lose it all so that we would gain it all. We have been so loved that God is willing to sit with us in all of our pain, in our doubts, or in our struggles.

GO AND DO

Choose to spend some intentional time with: a Co-worker, a Stranger, a Neighbor, or a Family member you haven't seen in a while. Do not go with any agenda other than to be present with them. Take some time to chat with them. Ask how they are really doing. Find out something new about them. Sit with them in their story. Then offer up a short prayer for them. You can be a source of hope for someone!

Friday, December 1st

Hope Is A Protest

But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah 40:31

Advent is a season of waiting and hope is believing that tomorrow can be better than today! Long ago people waited for the coming messiah. They waited for justice to be delivered and wrongs to be righted. They waited for freedom to come into their communities.

We too wait for our communities to be safe spaces, and for those who are vulnerable to thrive. We wait for our earth to heal and justice to come. Some of us wait for others to understand who we are becoming and to be fully accepted for who we are--to be free to be ourselves. Others of us wait for relationships to be restored and mistakes to be mended. Many of us are waiting for grief to pass and for that better tomorrow to come. What are you waiting for?

When we wait through the season of Advent we wait with expectancy. We wait with the anticipation for God to make all things new. We wait knowing that God is moving and will bring shalom to all people. We wait in the Spirit of hope.

The hope we celebrate exists and persists through struggle, through darkness. It's not a fleeting feeling of warm and fuzzies that comes and goes depending upon our circumstances.

It's gritty and messy. It takes root in unexpected places and it embraces vulnerability. And it reminds us that our lives are full of possibilities, that what we choose to do can and does make an impact. It looks forward towards God's reality and not ours... a reality that is usually constructed with

REFLECT

What does hope feel like for you? Has there been a time when hope has felt toxic?

What is the difference between hope and optimism? Is there room to expand or redefine your understanding of hope?