



# Advent

*Awaiting Redemption*

**A Daily Reflection**

# What is Advent?

If you are new to the season of Advent, here is a brief introduction to the history and heart behind our corporate participation and observation of this season. The church year, also known as the liturgical calendar, contains six sacred seasons to be observed throughout the calendar year. Practiced by several Christian denominations, these seasons provide the Church with a time to reflect on both the grand narrative of the Gospel story and the stories of God's work through our lives today. Advent is the first of these gospel-seasons and is defined as a period of waiting. It is here that we take time to remember the coming of Christ's birth as we wait in longing for Christ's second coming here on earth. **With this space between, let us pause, seek the Lord, and pay close attention to the reality of our weary hearts and the present and future hope of Christ's redemption.**

## Introduction

The Christmas season is here and with it feelings of excitement, anticipation, and expectation. Our excitement for the holidays is in many ways bound by the list of expectations and expenses that overwhelm this time of year. Perhaps we even add pressure to the way we should be experiencing our spirituality in this season. We want to experience more hope, more joy, more peace. Yet, for many of us, the reality of this longing simply makes us mask our pain and pretend that things are fine or burn ourselves out trying to meet our own unrealistic expectations. In all our Christmas planning and preparation, how often do we pause long enough to acknowledge the reality of our heart's deepest needs? What if this Christmas, we instead took a step back from all the expectations in order to invite Jesus into our lives in a whole new way? What would it look like to sit with the reality of what we wished this year would have brought us and lean into the present and future promises found in Jesus?

Jesus did not come to earth to demand peace, hope, joy, and love from us. He came to bring them as a gift for us, and that gift is Himself. In Christ, we can experience each of these attributes when we walk with Him. When we bring Jesus our hopelessness, His hope shines even brighter on the canvas of our unfiltered lives. When we bring Jesus our anxieties and chaos, His peace shines brightly, displaying His glory. When we offer Jesus our brokenness, He renews us with a song of joy and when we come to Him freely, He welcomes us into His love. Come, let's experience the closeness of our King in this season by recognizing our reality and reflecting on our Redeemer Jesus!

Each week, this Advent guide will invite us to be brutally honest about the good, the bad, and the ugly in our lives. We will focus on themes of hope, peace, joy, and love that Jesus fulfills through Himself. God desires for us to experience these things; however, we do not cultivate them apart from being with Him. He wants us to make space so that He can be these things to us in the ways He knows we need them most.

# Week One: **Hope**

## **Hope Bridges the Gap**

Make Room: Begin with 2–3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

"There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, looking forward to Israel's consolation, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he saw the Lord's Messiah. 27 Guided by the Spirit, he entered the temple. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform for him what was customary under the law, 28 Simeon took him up in his arms, praised God, and said, 29 Now, Master, you can dismiss your servant in peace, as you promised. For my eyes have seen your salvation. 31 You have prepared it in the presence of all peoples—32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel." Luke 2:25–32

*Prayer is the practice of the Hopeful*

Practice of Hope: Prayer

Monday

## The Reality of Hopelessness

Make Room: Begin with 2-3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“My soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say, ‘My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the Lord. Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall. My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me’.” Lamentations 3:17-20***

Have you ever felt this way? Drained of hope and dwelling in discouragement? These words from the prophet Jeremiah are ones that many of us can relate to deeply. The reality of hopelessness is rising, and in light of our country's current crises, the notion of hope seems weighted down by legitimate loss and a deep sense of isolation. So, what do we do with our present pain, and how are we to hold onto hope when heaviness is all around us? We see in these verses of Jeremiah's lament over the destruction of Jerusalem an example of utter honesty and transparency before the Lord. Jeremiah shares his pain openly and petitions the Lord in earnest prayer. So, today let us simply take time to do the same. Let us name whatever hopelessness may reside within our hearts and share it honestly before the Lord today.

### Reflections:

In what area(s) of my life/heart am I experiencing hopelessness (i.e. pain, captivity, defeat, doubt, etc.). Name them here:

### Prayer Practice:

Today in prayer, honestly share the reality of these challenges with the Lord as Jeremiah did. Be open to expressing the depth and weight of the things that have been heavy on your heart.

# Tuesday

## The Expectation of Faith

Make Room: Begin with 2-3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” Hebrews 11:1-3***

Our hope is built on the expectation of our faith. So often we place our security in specific people or in our pursuit of possessions. In our American culture, it is easy to place our dependency in earthly comforts and cares. Therefore, much like Jeremiah in Lamentations 3, we find ourselves broken by the loss of what we thought could hold our hope. The counterfeit securities of this world are what often lead us to discouragement and hopelessness. In recognizing the futility of such faith, we can realign our expectations by looking to what Jeremiah also found to be the true source of security: God's good and gracious character.

"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 for Him'," Lamentations 3:21-24.

All other hopes will pale in comparison to what God has promised us in His Son. Jeremiah finds a sudden resolve from the depths of his hopelessness by considering the Father's unchanging nature. May we be reminded of this same truth today: that God's love for us is endless, His mercy ceaseless, and His character is faithful in providing us with the eternal hope of a heavenly inheritance.

### Reflections:

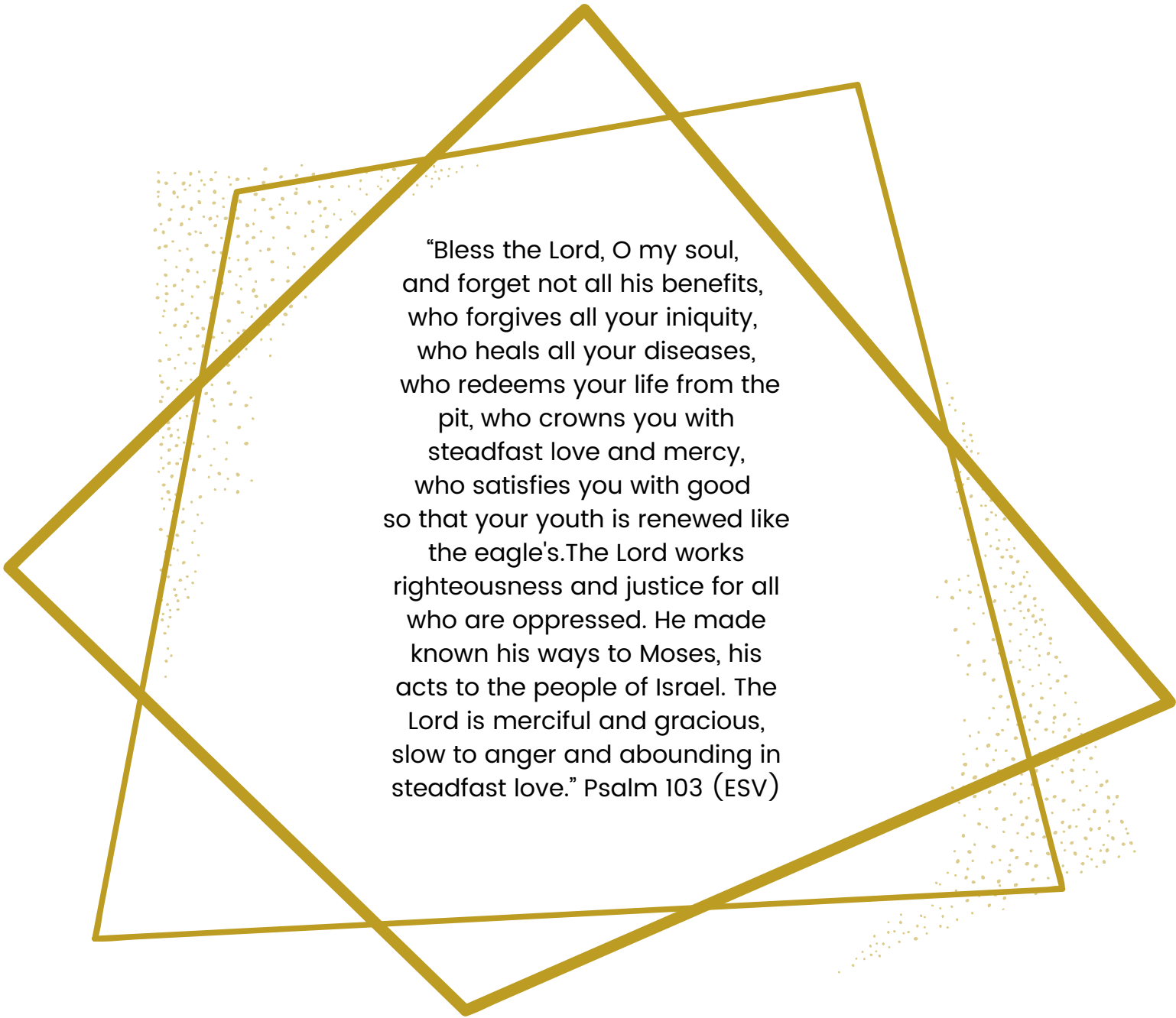
Take time to evaluate your earthly expectations by asking yourself:

What/who makes me feel secure? What/who makes me feel successful? What/who makes me feel like I am enough?

What aspect of God's character do I need to "call to mind" today to realign the expectations of our faith?

## *Prayer Practice:*

Today in prayer, let us ask the Lord to renew our hope in the certainty of eternity as we "call to mind" the character of our King using Psalm 103 to guide us:



"Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits,  
who forgives all your iniquity,  
who heals all your diseases,  
who redeems your life from the  
pit, who crowns you with  
steadfast love and mercy,  
who satisfies you with good  
so that your youth is renewed like  
the eagle's. The Lord works  
righteousness and justice for all  
who are oppressed. He made  
known his ways to Moses, his  
acts to the people of Israel. The  
Lord is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in  
steadfast love." Psalm 103 (ESV)

# Wednesday

## Renewing Our Vision

Make Room: Begin with 2-3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;...” “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old; Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” Isaiah 43:3; 18-19***

These words of the Prophet Isaiah to God’s people hold two distinct promises of hope found in the person and presence of God. In verse 3, we are met with the reality of life’s hopeless situations, yet in the midst of the overwhelming waters and flaming fires of tribulation, we are reminded that, “When you pass through the waters, I [the LORD] will be with you” (v. 2). It is the Lord, who walks with us in the face of adversity (Psalm 23). In this assurance, our hope can be renewed in the present moment. Even still, the uncertainty of what is to come weighs heavy on our souls. To this God also answers, “Behold, I am doing a new thing”... “I will make a way in the wilderness.” For as we renew our trust in the presence of God to be with us and make a way for us, our hope is rebuilt and a brighter vision is restored. May we renew our minds with the promise of God’s presence today. “I have set the Lord always before me... because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.” Psalm 16:8

### Reflections:

Reflect on the evidence of God’s presence in your past and ask yourself: In what ways has God walked with me in hopeless moments?

In what areas am I needing to invite God’s presence to “be with me” and “make a way” in my life?

### Prayer Practice:

Today in prayer, let us ask the Lord for His presence to be revealed in painful areas of our lives and let us praise Him for the ways His presence has comforted our hearts and renewed our souls.

Thursday

## Remembrance of Our Redeemer

Make Room: Begin with 2–3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and she will call Him Immanuel.” Isaiah 7:14***

***“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given: and the government shall be on his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6***

What are we to do when hope seems lost? It is so easy to become consumed with cultural chaos or to become fearful in the face of loss. In these moments, our vision is clouded and our souls struggle to experience the security found in salvation. Much like King Ahaz in Isaiah 7, we can become discouraged by our distress and dismiss God’s invitation to “ask for a sign” of His faithfulness. For this reason, we must take time to remember the most significant sign God has given to us: our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. For through Christ, God revealed his promise and unchanging character as an encouragement for us to hold fast to the hope set before us (Hebrews 6). The prophetic words of Isaiah foreshadowed the coming of Christ’s birth. “Immanuel,” meaning God with us, would come to be the physical evidence of God’s presence on earth. It is Jesus who came to embody the power, compassion, immortality, and peace of God’s own character and is a steadfast anchor for our souls. In Matthew 1, the fulfillment of God’s promised hope spoken by Isaiah was revealed to the world in Christ’s birth. Oh, that our souls would savor the significance of who Jesus is for us today! His life was and is evidence of God’s faithful presence. So, let us remember our Redeemer and rejoice in the hope He holds for us.

### Reflections:

What makes it difficult to hold onto this hope?

Read Hebrew 6:19–20: How does reflecting on the fulfillment of Jesus’ coming anchor my soul?

### Prayer Practice:

Today in prayer, let us take time to remember our Immanuel and rejoice in the eternal hope we have because of His life.



# Friday

## Restoring Our Security

Make Room: Begin with 2–3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“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, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” I Peter 1:3-5***

What does it mean to be “born again to a living hope?” And how does this help us live with hope despite the reality of hurt and heaviness in our lives? For the hope of the Gospel was made alive by Christ's resurrection and made accessible to us through God's good mercy. It is in this gift of salvation that our security is restored in the unfading and imperishable inheritance of heaven. It is this living hope of salvation that bridges the gap between our reality and what is awaiting us in eternity. The Apostle Paul reminds us in Philippians 3:20 that, “our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” Is this where we each have placed our hope? If so, then we may rejoice, even in the face of hardships and hopelessness, knowing that through all we experience on earth, our faith is refined and God's glory is revealed.

*“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” I Peter 1:6-7*

### Reflections:

Reflect on how the Gospel provides hope in the present moment and ask yourself:  
How does Christ's eternal hope change my perspective of the presence of pain?  
In what ways can I apply this hope to my current challenges?

### Prayer Practice:

Today in prayer, let us thank God for his mercy and kindness in giving us His son so that we could be called the children of God. Let us count the fruit of salvation and rejoice in the hope that awaits us in heaven.

# Saturday

## Rest in His Return

Make Room: Begin with 2–3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.” 1 Thessalonians 4:13-20***

***“...So we will always be with the Lord”—how these words comfort the weary soul! For in this final hour at Christ’s second coming all of our worries will fade away at the return of our King. This is what we wait in hope for and with the power of the Holy Spirit in us, we can rest in His return knowing that one day victory will be won and pain will be no more! Let us celebrate this coming glory of the Lord and hold hope for all that is to come. “And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new’.” Revelation 21:5***

### Reflections:

How have you experienced peace this week?

### Prayer Practice:

Today in prayer, let us rest in our waiting for Christ’s return and pray for endurance and strength for the day when we will be with the Lord.



# Week Two: **Peace**

## **Peace Meets Us in the Gap**

Make Room: Begin with 2-3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

"Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and provided redemption for his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, just as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets in ancient times; salvation from our enemies and from the hand of those who hate us. He has dealt mercifully with our ancestors and remembered his holy covenant — the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant that we, having been rescued from the hand of our enemies, would serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness in his presence all our days. And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. Because of our God's merciful compassion, the dawn from on high will visit us to shine on those who live in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." Luke 1:67-79

*Repentance is the practice of the Peaceful*

Practice of peace: Repentance

# Monday

## The Reality of Chaos

Make Room: Begin with 2–3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” 1 Peter 5:6***

***“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”***

***Philippians 4:6-7***

When the angels announced the birth of Christ to the Shepherds, they proclaimed: “Peace on earth.” With the coming of Christ came the gift of peace, yet so much of our life is filled with chaos and turmoil. This season, let’s not try to manufacture our own calm. Praise God, peace is both a gift and a fruit of the Spirit; therefore, God does not sit far off judging to see how peaceful we can be. Rather, God invites us to present ourselves to Him as we are, chaos and all. Our unsettled hearts give the perfect backdrop for His peace to shine brightly so that we and others can know that He is God. He longs for an intimate relationship with each of us. He invites us to entrust to Him the depths of our hearts because He cares. Today, take the time to cast all of your anxieties on Him and make known to Him your requests. Don’t bury them. Don’t avoid them. Don’t sugar coat them. Take the time to sit and articulate them to the Lord. He cares! He cares about the details. The presence of God is a safe place to be open and honest.

### Reflections:

Am I experiencing God’s peace in my life? Where is peace lacking in my life?

### Prayer Practice:

Today in prayer, share with God the raw reality of the things that are consuming your mind. Be honest about how you may have been trying to create peace on your own lately.

# Tuesday

## The Reality of Peace

Make Room: Begin with 2–3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world.” John 16:33***

When the people of the Old Testament were waiting for the coming Messiah, they expected a warrior king who would come and establish His kingdom and bring peace in the land. The incarnation of Christ on earth, and especially His death and resurrection, ushered in God’s peace, but not in the way many were expecting. Jesus told His disciples to expect both peace and suffering/tribulation. When we pray for peace, how are we expecting God to answer? If we are honest, oftentimes our prayers ask God to change our circumstances—to remove the conflict, chaos, lack of security, etc. Perhaps our expectation is that He will fix things so that our inner turmoil naturally falls away.

Peace, however, should not rely on our circumstances. In the Bible Project’s video, “Shalom—Peace,” Tim Mackie teaches us that peace is not just the absence of conflict, but the presence of something much better. Rather than focusing on how God may or may not work in our circumstances, let us remember what He does promise. He will never leave us nor forsake us. He will work all things together for our good and His glory. Yesterday we looked at Philippians 4:6–7 and made our requests known to God. These verses also say to do so with thanksgiving. When we pray with thanksgiving, He promises to respond with peace that is beyond our understanding. Although it may be hard to thank God for certain circumstances, we can thank Him for His character and presence in the midst of them. When we do, we can fully expect that He will respond by supplying a peace that will guard our hearts and minds.

### Reflections:

Are there any circumstances that you are relying on for peace? Are there any problems or people that you blame for lack of peace in your life?

What promises can you thank God for in the midst of these circumstances?

What aspects of God's character do you need to focus on today?

## *Prayer Practice:*

Today in prayer, as you make known your requests to God, pray with an attitude of thanksgiving.

### Resource

Search: "Shalom—Peace" on YouTube (<https://bit.ly/3kG66Ts>)  
or scan this QR code with your camera phone:



Wednesday

## Through Christ—Peace with God

Make Room: Begin with 2–3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Romans 5:1-2***

***“Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.” Psalm 32:1-5***

As we prepare our hearts for Christmas, let us remember that faith in Christ grants us peace with God. This peace does not just refer to the eternal glory which we will experience one day in the distant future. Because of the cross, we are able to experience peace with God right now. Do we realize that this peace relies on the finished work of Christ and not on how deserving we are of it each day? Yes, sin can disrupt our peace with God, but in those moments, God always invites us to Himself for repentance and reconciliation. When we sin, Satan, our accuser, visits us with shame, which then brings about a desire to hide or cover up. Satan deceives us into thinking we have ruined peace with God in order to have us avoid God. But God says to come boldly before the throne of grace to receive mercy in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

The parable of the prodigal son depicts a Father who rejoices at the return of His wayward son. This Christmas, God offers you the gift of peace in every area of your heart! Conviction, although miserable, is a precious gift from God inviting us into His presence to repent. His response to true repentance will always be forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9). Conviction only needs to last as long as it takes to get our hearts to the throne of grace. Repentance ushers in the peace that is already ours because of Christ. Psalm 32 shows the contrast between David’s misery before confession and then the experience of blessing in forgiveness after.

## *Reflections:*

If you have an area of hidden sin, how does it weigh on your heart?

## *Prayer Practice:*

Today in prayer, ask God to give you the boldness to confess and repent of any secret sin in your life. Once you confess your sin to God, praise Him for the peace of His forgiveness.



Thursday

## Continued Peace through Trust

Make Room: Begin with 2-3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.”***  
**Isaiah 26:3**

Peace comes through trusting in God, yet it is so tempting to worry rather than trust. If we take an honest look at worry, it appears to be a way to mentally control something or someone by keeping it/them in the forefront of our mind. But this is a false sense of control. Thinking or worrying about something does not change a situation. Matthew 6 teaches this when it says worrying cannot add a single hour to your life. Trust is the ability to release these things completely, acknowledging that God is the One who is in control, and He is trustworthy. When we fix our mind on His character rather than our circumstances, it is amazing how we experience His peace. The Christmas season is a time to remember all that God has done for us. Jesus willingly emptied Himself and humbled Himself to the point of becoming a baby who came to serve (Philippians 2:6-8). His obedience took Him first to a manger, then to the cross. While on the cross, Jesus continually entrusted Himself to God the Father (1 Peter 2:22-24). Let the story of Jesus remind us how trustworthy God truly is. It was God's love for us that asked such a sacrifice from His Son. Anytime we question whether we can trust God, let us always view this question through the lens of Jesus.

### Reflections:

Name one thing holding you back from trusting in God?

How does the incarnation of Christ serve as evidence that we can trust God with our lives?

### Prayer Practice:

Be honest with God about your trust in Him. Thank Him for the ways that you do trust Him; confess where you are having hard time trusting Him and say why. Ask the Holy Spirit to sift your heart and to help you trust God more.

Friday

## Looking to the Future Peace

Make Room: Begin with 2–3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.” Isaiah 11:1-6***

In a time of war and judgment, Isaiah prophesied of a time of future peace. Although things looked hopeless, God promised that His kingdom would be rebuilt through the coming of the Messiah. Jesus has since come and returned back to heaven, yet we still await the future peace. We are living in the already and not yet. Verse 6 is where we get the phrase, “The lion will lay down with the lamb.” Can you imagine a time when there will be no conflict at all? We will be in a perfect relationship with God and with one another. All of the church will truly be in one accord and harmony.

Today, take time to look forward to the inheritance that we have in Christ. Imagine peace with God without having to wrestle with trusting Him more. Imagine being in perfect harmony with all fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Imagine the day when the cares that are consuming your mind will never again fight for your attention. This is a day that is promised!

### Reflections:

How does focusing on the promised peace of eternity impact your perspective of today’s difficulties?

Is there anyone in your life whom you need to share the Gospel with so that they can experience this peace as well?

### Prayer Practice:

Dialogue with God about what it will be like to be fully in His presence. Ask for wisdom and courage to share the Gospel with friends and loved ones who do not yet know Christ.



*Saturday*

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## Reflections on Peace

Make Room: Begin with 2-3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

Today, take time to pause and reflect on the truths that you learned about peace. How have you experienced peace this week?

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters. He  
restores my soul. He leads me in paths of  
righteousness for his name's sake. Even  
though I walk through the valley of the  
shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you  
are with me; your rod and your staff, they  
comfort me. You prepare a table before  
me in the presence of my enemies; you  
anoint my head with oil; my cup  
overflows. Surely goodness and mercy  
shall follow me all the days of my life, and  
I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
forever.” Psalm 23

### *Reflections:*

Read through this passage again and visualize the imagery depicted here. Describe the peace that the Shepherd provides when we remain close to Him.



### *Prayer Practice:*

Today, turn Psalm 23 into a personal prayer to the Lord.

# Week Three: **Joy**

## **Joy Lifts Us in the Gap**

Make Room: Begin with 2-3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

"And Mary said: My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, because he has looked with favor on the humble condition of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed, because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and his name is holy. His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear him. He has done a mighty deed with his arm; he has scattered the proud because of the thoughts of their hearts; he has toppled the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly. He has satisfied the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering his mercy to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he spoke to our ancestors." Luke 1:46-55

*Praise is the practice of the Joyful*

Practice of Joy: Praise

# Monday

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## Good News

Make Room: Begin with 2–3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“And Mary said, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation, He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever’.” Luke 1:46-55***

Soon after Mary discovered she would be the mother of the Savior, she responded with a song of praise. That song begins, “My soul magnifies the Lord. And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” What does it mean that her soul magnifies the Lord? When we magnify something we aren't so much making the object bigger, but simply changing our scope so that we see more clearly the details that are already there. Mary takes the time to sit and wonder about the greatness of her Lord. Her response is joy over her Savior. That Savior is a tiny seed within her and a growing promise. She now has a timeframe for when her Savior will appear. The rest of her prayer reflects on the greatness of God—His might, His mercy, His strength. She reflects on how He has personally affected her as well as others throughout history. Today, let's take some time for our souls to magnify the Lord.

### Reflections:

Ponder over the attributes you know to be true about God through Scripture. Which attributes are you most grateful for?

How have you seen these attributes of God evidenced in your own life?

### Prayer Practice:

Praise God for these attributes. Ask Him to open your eyes so that you can see more and more of His fingerprints in your life.

# Tuesday

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## Rejoicing in Pain

Make Room: Begin with 2–3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 1:6-7***

During Advent, we take the time to rejoice in the birth of Christ. The coming of the Messiah was anticipated for centuries. Mary walked this anticipation quite literally. Child bearing is a process of both excessive joy and pain. Yet, morning sickness and contractions are painful realities that are surpassed in the joy of the arrival of the baby. Years later, Jesus Himself walked through a similar process of holding both insurmountable pain and joy together. “Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2–3

“For the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the cross.” That joy was both the approaching return to His Father as well as the redemptive work being accomplished. God’s Word gives us a glimpse into Christ’s wrestling with the Father in prayer before heading to the cross.

“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.” Hebrews 5:7

This verse refers to Christ’s prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus asked for this cup of suffering to be removed. He poured out His heart to His beloved Father, and although God did not remove the cup, He listened intently to the cries of His Son with compassion. Praise God that when He calls us into suffering, He also invites us to cry out to Him, knowing He listens and cares. Jesus’ time with the Father in the garden empowered Him to endure the cross. The joy set before Him made it bearable.

God calls us to set our joy in what is to come, a certain inheritance, and recognize that in the meantime there will be suffering. He also invites us to the garden to pour out our hearts before Him.

## *Reflections:*

Is there an area in your life where obedience to God is causing suffering? Have you followed in the footsteps of Christ and poured out your heart to God about this?

How are you being intentional in rejoicing in your inheritance in the midst of today's trials?

## *Prayer Practice:*

Spend time pouring out your heart to the Lord. Express your fears, anger, frustrations, pain, etc. Pray until you can say, "Not my will, but your will be done." (If this took Jesus hours, do not be frustrated if it takes days or longer. Don't give up. Keep coming back.)

# Wednesday

## Rejoicing in Pain

Make Room: Begin with 2–3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him... James 1:2-5***

We have already seen how keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus and on the certainty of our inheritance can produce joy in suffering. James 1 gives us a few more reasons to rejoice. Trials test our faith. This testing of our faith produces steadfastness. Steadfastness allows us to stand firm in the midst of temptation (vs. 12-15).

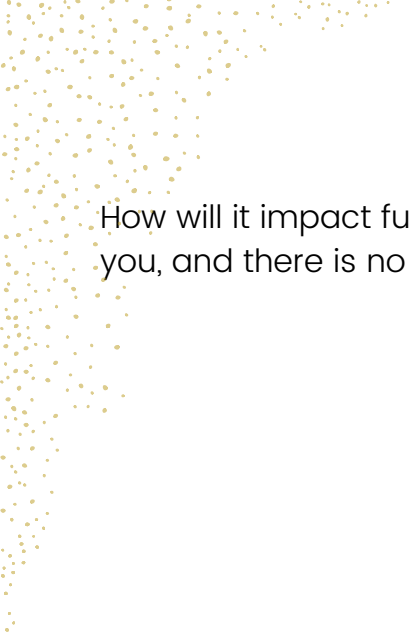
When we are tempted, Satan is so quick to accuse and make us feel shame even over the temptation. Romans 8:1 combats this. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Yet, if not focusing on the truth, condemnation is exactly what many expect when they face temptation. Verse 12 proves that shame over temptation is a deceptive move of Satan. This verse shows that temptation can become an opportunity to stand steadfast in the midst of it with Christ. Not only can we stand steadfast, but when we do, we receive a promised crown. Not only is God not ashamed of your temptation, but He promises to celebrate your steadfastness in the midst of it.

Christ is our great high priest (Hebrews 4:16). His strength is what we need to resist temptation, and Satan knows that if he can get us to avoid God out of shame, we will inevitably fall. Temptation can be hard, dark, and ugly, but it does not have to be lonely. What if in the midst of a temptation—when it feels like there is no choice but to fall in the darkness—what if we realize that Christ is standing in the gap ready to offer us His presence and strength? Consider it joy, my brother, when you face trials and/or temptation. This produces steadfastness and steadfastness adds a crown to your inheritance.

### Reflections:

When dealing with temptation, do you have a tendency to hide from God or go to Him for the strength to stand steadfast?





How will it impact future times of temptation to realize that Christ stands in the gap with you, and there is no need to hide? How does this bring joy?

### *Prayer Practice:*

Ask God to remind you to run to Him in the midst of trials and temptations. Thank God for never leaving us alone. Thank God for the ways that you have seen trials develop faith and steadfastness in your life.

# Thursday

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## Inexpressible Joy

Make Room: Begin with 2-3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“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, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” 1 Peter 1:8-9***

Peter had the privilege of walking this earth with Jesus. He knew Jesus's mannerisms, the tone of His voice, and his sense of humor. Years after Christ's ascension to heaven, Peter wrote, “Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.” Although Jesus was physically gone from Peter's life, Peter's faith in His resurrection brought about a joy that was inexpressible. Some of the original readers of Peter's letter had also personally walked with Jesus and resonated with this line. Others, however, including all of us, never had the opportunity to physically walk with the person of Jesus. Thankfully, Peter addresses us as well. “Though you have not seen him, you love him.” Which means we also can believe and rejoice. These verses bring both hope and conviction. Knowing and loving Jesus is a source of inexpressible joy that we get to experience. Are we experiencing that joy?

### *Reflections:*

Does my heart respond in exuberant joy as I reflect on Christ? If yes, spend some time praising God with that joy.

If not, what may be some things that are stealing your joy?



## *Prayer Practice:*

Take time to reflect on the life of Christ. Then, respond in praise.  
What it cost Christ to come to earth,  
emptying Himself of his Glory.  
The loving, perfect life that He lived,  
constantly ministering to and serving others.  
The love He poured out and the wrath  
that He drank while on the cross.  
The affection that He has for you as an  
individual and for His bride, the Church.

Friday

## No More Tears

Make Room: Begin with 2-3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’ And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ And he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment’.” Revelation 21:3-6***

What a day that will be! Take a moment to read this passage again and relish in the truth of it. There will be a day when there is no more pain or tears. There will be no more fear of separation through death or division. This is the day when we will see our Savior face to face. Even if right now at this moment we do not experience inexpressible joy at the thought of our Savior, just know that on that day we will not be able to put into words the glorious praise we will want to lavish on Him. This may be where those crowns come into play. We will be so grateful that we have something in our possession that is worthy of the honor to lay at His feet. Then, we can lay ourselves at His feet, because He has made us worthy. In this we rejoice, although now....already, and not yet.

### Reflections:

Take some time visualizing the beauty of heaven and the presence of God. What do you think you will be most grateful for on that day?

How could choosing to rejoice in this daily affect the way you live each day?

### Prayer Practice:

Write out a prayer of praise for things now and things to come. Ask God to help you choose joy every day.

*Saturday*

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## Reflections on Joy

Make Room: Begin with 2–3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

Today, take time to pause and reflect on the truths that you learned about joy. How have you experienced joy this week?

*Reflections:*

**“Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, ‘You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.’ As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight. The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips. The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Psalm 16**

*Prayer Practice:*

Today, turn Psalm 16 into a personal prayer to the Lord.

# Week Four: **Love**

## **Love Defines Us in the Gap**

Make Room: Begin with 2-3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

"The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit. So her husband, Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly. But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated 'God is with us.' When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord's angel had commanded him. He married her but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he named him Jesus." Matthew 1:18-25

*Invitation is the practice of the Loved*

Practice of Love: Invitation

Monday

## The Absence of Love

Make Room: Begin with 2-3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-8***

Do you know this kind of love? The kind of affection that waits, hopes, and holds no record of wrongs? For many of us, the absence of this tenderness has been our reality as far back as we can remember. Our relationships have become defined by conflict and contempt while our souls ache to experience a depth of such intimacy. Instead of connection, our world struggles in dissension and despite a call to compassion we continue to experience feelings of hatred. So, what is it? What has created this gap between our deepest needs and our daily decisions? 1 John 4:8 says, “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” This is the missing piece! In neglecting to invite God into our hearts and homes, we are attempting to manufacture love without the source itself. For love absent of God is unable to be sustained. Therefore, to know love and experience its boundlessness and blessing, we must start by knowing God.

### Reflections:

In what area(s) of my life/heart am I experiencing an absence of love (i.e. hate, hostility, hurt, bitterness, resentment, etc.). Name them here:

### Prayer Practice:

Today in prayer, let us invite God into our hearts, our hurts, and our healing and begin to experience what love truly is:

“Lord, I invite you into my heart, my hurt, and my healing. Allow me to experience your deep and compassionate kind of love!” Amen.

Tuesday

## Evidence of His Affection

Make Room: Begin with 2-3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“I have loved you,” says the Lord. But you say, “How have you loved us?” Malachi 1:2***

It can be so easy to doubt God’s love for us. Unfortunately, many of us have learned through our lived experiences that love can be distorted to abuse or harm us. When trust is broken, our walls go up to protect us from further harm. In Malachi 1, a powerful dialogue between God and His people is recorded in which a familiar question is asked. One which is often similar to our own interaction with the Lord in seasons. For, in response to God’s declaration of love to them, they reply with a doubtful questioning, asking for evidence of God’s love. Oh, how often do we also question God’s love for us in the reality of hurt and hardship! Yet, just as God gave evidence of His love to Israel, He also declares His love for each of us through Christ His son.

1 John 4:9-10 says, **“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”** How has God shown his love for us? By giving us Jesus. This act of love was not a response to our strivings or good standing but initiated by the heart of our heavenly Father. The evidence of His affection for us is daily. May we never forget the way in which God has shown His love for us!

### Reflections:

What makes me doubt God’s love for me?

What evidence do I have of God’s love for me?

### Prayer Practice:

Today in prayer, let us invite God into our doubts by naming them before Him and thanking Him for sending us Jesus as evidence of His love for us!



# Wednesday

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## Love's Invitation

Make Room: Begin with 2–3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:6-8***

“Am I good enough?” This question of self-doubt is one many of us battle against on a daily basis. In failing to meet our own expectations for ourselves, we often struggle with feelings of shame and insufficiency. How easy it is to believe that love and forgiveness are contingent on our practice and performance. Yet, scripture tells us that we need not work to win God’s affection. In fact, the invitation of the Gospel comes to us in our weakness and shame. For it says, “while we were still weak, Christ died for us” and that, “God shows his love for us while we were sinners.” For God’s love displayed through Christ invites us to come to Him, weak and worn out, struggling and unsuccessful. It does not require right spiritual standing to partake of the gift of life that God offers us through Christ. For it is in accepting this invitation of love that we are both justified and reconciled to God.

Ephesians 1:7 says that it is in [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us. What an invitation! No longer must we measure ourselves by the standard of our own strength but rest in the grace of Christ’s redeeming power. So, let us come to him, and receive this gift of God’s invitation of grace!

### Reflections:

What keeps me from accepting God’s love for me?

In what ways can I intentionally accept God’s invitation of love for me today?

### Prayer Practice:

Today in prayer, may we seek to embrace the invitation of grace that has been given to us and respond to His love in a deeper way.

# Thursday

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## Beloved Children

Make Room: Begin with 2-3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” 1 John 3:1***

“That we should be called children of God.” What does it mean for us to be God’s children? For some, the knowledge of a father’s love is limited. Yet, regardless of our background or broken experiences, God’s love invites us into this special place of belonging. This is gospel-brand love. It’s the kind of affection that desires deep connection. As a father, God’s love welcomes us home, it invites us into His tenderness and offers us the eternal inheritance of heaven. Oh, how our hearts find healing in the arms of our Heavenly Father. Regardless of the wounds we each carry from our father’s failures or mother’s mistakes, know this: You are known by God; you are beloved by God, and you are called His very own child. May we be with our Father today and experience the love that He has so greatly given!

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” Galatians 4:4-7

### *Reflections:*

Am I a child of God? If so, what does this mean to me? If not, what is holding me back from accepting God’s love for me?

What truth of God's Fatherly affection do I need to reflect on today?

## *Prayer Practice:*

Today in prayer, let us receive God's words to us and reflect on His love and kindness. Let us speak them over our souls and keep them close to our hearts each and every new day:

"Dear Child,  
You are precious to Me. (Isaiah 43:1-4) Don't ever doubt how much I love you. You are so valued (Luke 12:15), and I never want you to forget that I have great plans for your life (Psalm 138:8, Philippians 1:6). Remember, I am with you always so be strong & courageous (Joshua 1:9). My sweet child, I love being your Father, and I delight in you (Psalm 149:4, Zephaniah 3:17). Despite how this world may treat you, remember that nothing can separate you from My love (Romans 8:38-39). In a little while, you will be fully at home in my presence, with no veil between, but until then, hold tightly to My words each day (Psalm 119:105) and share My light with this world (Matthew 5:14)."

-Your Heavenly Father

# Friday

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## With All of Me

Make Room: Begin with 2-3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Deuteronomy 6:5***


***“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” Philippians 3:12***

What does it mean to love God with all our hearts, minds, souls, and strength? To abandon all other loves and fully pursue our love for God is hard to comprehend. We say we “love” God yet our hearts are often divided; our minds easily distracted; our souls secretly struggling, and our strength so quickly spent in light of the reality of our world. Yet, as we come to know and believe the love that God has for us, we begin to trust God and His intentions towards us and, in turn, experience a love for God that is deeper and richer with time.

This is what the love of God does: It changes and rearranges our whole world. Our plans, our priorities, and our perspectives are all reordered when our souls surrender to the pursuit of God’s loving heart. To be loved and to love consumes our whole being. It defines us. This is the same motivation that the Apostle Paul speaks of in Philippians 3 when he says, “I **press on to make it my own, because Christ has made me His own.**” For as we experience and internalize the love that God has for us, we will grow in our love for God with our hearts, minds, souls, and strength.

### *Reflections:*

What does it mean for me to love God with all of me?



If loving God starts with knowing and believing His love for me, then what truth of God's love do I need to reflect on today?

## *Prayer Practice:*

Today in prayer, let us express to the Lord our love for Him. Let us be consumed by the way He loves us and respond with our whole hearts.



# Saturday

## By This You Will Know

Make Room: Begin with 2–3 minutes of silence inviting the Lord into this time of reflection.

***“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”  
John 13:35***

***“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Ephesians 5:1-2***

How do others describe you? Is it by your love? What is so powerful about God's love is that as we invite Him into our lives and experience the depth of His love for us, we are defined by this same authentic affection for those around us. During Jesus' ministry He charged his disciples to live out His love, so that all people would know to whom they belonged. Are we not also disciples of Christ? This is why the apostle Paul also encourages believers to imitate God's example through Christ's loving sacrifice. This is our charge, that as we invite the Lord into our hearts daily, we may be empowered to walk in such love, inviting others to taste and see the Lord's goodness! Let us celebrate this gift of love we have been given and in turn allow it to define the way we live and love others!

### Reflections:

How have you experienced God's love this week?

### Prayer Practice:

Today in prayer, let us invite the Lord to equip us in the way of invitation. Ask the Lord to provide you with opportunities to bring His love into the lives of those around you.

# Christmastime



Merry Christmas! We are excited to celebrate this season with you and pray that you have been able to experience the Lord in new ways this Christmas season.

## What is Christmastime?

The second of the six observed sacred seasons of the church calendar, Christmastime is a short but powerful season. It is essentially a 12-day period of feasting and celebration. This season starts on The 25th of December and ends on the 5th of January. Within this 12-day period, there is an emphasis on giving thanks and celebrating Christ's first coming which is gifted to us through salvation. It is during these 12 days that we set aside time for celebration and thankfulness to God for the many gifts given through Christ.

Join the Christmastime celebration by tuning in to our  
Christmastime Podcast and scripture readings.

**Look for the "Gospel Audio Podcast"**

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