

A lit candle with a warm glow is positioned at the top center, surrounded by a dense arrangement of pine branches. The candle's light creates a soft, golden glow that illuminates the surrounding branches and the text below. The background is a solid, vibrant red.

PREPARE HIM ROOM

A MIDTOWN FELLOWSHIP
ADVENT GUIDE



PREPARE
HIM
ROOM

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ADVENT GUIDE

Prepare Him Room: A Midtown Fellowship Advent Guide

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Advent is for adoring Jesus. For Christians it's a time to prepare room—to intentionally make space—in our minds and hearts to anticipate and celebrate the birth of Christ.

On the night of Jesus's birth, an angel appeared to the shepherds, proclaiming: "Fear not for behold, I bring you *good news of great joy* that will be for all the people." (Luke 2:10) Simply put: we want to behold our savior and celebrate this good news of great joy! We want to make a focused effort, amidst all of the December rush, to prepare room for Him.

Each day's devotional contains three parts:

1. Daily Advent Devotions
2. Daily Family Connections
3. Weekly Family Guides

THE SEASON OF ADVENT

The English word Advent comes from the Latin *adventus* which means "coming." Advent primarily focuses on the first coming of Jesus two thousand years ago. But Jesus's second coming is also anticipated during the season.

Advent begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve.

There's no biblical mandate to observe Advent. It is a tradition that developed over the course of church history with the first clear reference to it documented in the 6th century. While very early on the emphasis was more on penitence and fasting, the season now predominantly centers on hope and expectation for believers.

We will use the season of Advent to journey through the truths of Scripture that point to the birth of Jesus and the love that our Heavenly Father demonstrated through the gift of His Son. We'll study and celebrate that through Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, we can be called children of God. We will look to the life-changing hope, peace, joy, and love that are available to us through Christ and we will ask how we should respond to these gifts.

THE LAYOUT

Our Advent Guide and Candle Lighting Devotions will follow these common themes:

Week 1: Hope

Week 2: Peace

Week 3: Joy

Week 4: Love

Christmas Eve: Christ Candle

DAILY ADVENT DEVOTIONS

The Daily Advent Devotions contain Scripture passages, questions, prayer prompts, and song suggestions all centered around the weekly theme.

You'll notice that the Scripture passages are printed in the guide so that you can write directly on them. Sometimes a prompt will guide you through what to note as you read. Other times, the instructions may simply say, "Mark the text and note your observations." When that's the case, here are some suggestions to help you better understand and interpret the text:¹

- Circle or underline repeated words, phrases, or ideas
- Note particular attributes of God that are illustrated or celebrated
- When the text makes several points in a row, number them
- Put a question mark by words you don't understand (and look them up later)
- Draw arrows between key transition words or phrases
- Circle confusing ideas and write your questions in the margins²

Similarly, you will notice that blank lines have been provided so that you can write out your responses to questions directly in this guide. We hope this space serves as a starting place as you engage with the Scripture and steer your mind in a direction of prayer and repentance.

At the end of each day, you'll see a few song recommendations that go with that day's theme. All songs can also be found on our Spotify playlists

¹ You can find more Bible study resources at followingjesustogether.com/abide

² Annotation ideas taken from Jen Wilkin's book *Women of the Word*

that we have created for the four weeks of Advent. For the user, search for [midtowncolumbia](#), and there you will see the playlists for each week: “[Songs of Hope](#),” “[Songs of Peace](#),” “[Songs of Joy](#),” and “[Songs of Love](#).”

THE ADVENT WREATH

Our Weekly Family Guides center around the lighting of candles on an Advent wreath. Utilizing an Advent wreath in your home can serve as a great visual reminder and marker during the season and we would encourage all individuals using this guide to consider incorporating one.

The Advent wreath represents the passage of time over the four weeks of Advent. It is typically a circular wreath holding five candles, four in the wreath itself and one in the center. One candle is lit each Sunday, until all of the candles, including the center candle, are lit on Christmas Eve. The candles symbolize the light of God entering the world through the birth of Jesus. The light from the candles reminds us that Jesus is the Light of the World and He stepped into our darkness.

If you'd like to create an Advent wreath, be sure to gather your supplies and assemble your wreath before Advent starts. *(For a tutorial with pictures, check out how one LifeGroup turned this into a group activity and made small Advent wreaths for under \$5 at our blog: [midtowncolumbia.com/the-blog/wreath](#))*

1. A round wreath (any size)

You can also get greenery and assemble into a circle yourself.

2. A plate (or base of some sort)

A base of some sort on which your candles sit, surrounded by the wreath.

3. 5 candles

Typically the Christ candle is larger and sits in the center of the wreath while the four other candles are placed in the wreath itself

4. A lighter



FOR FAMILIES

DAILY FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Each Daily Advent Devotion ends with a “Family Connection.” This is an opportunity for parents to discuss with their children a simplified version of the day’s content. This will typically include 1-2 verses written out in either the International Children’s Bible (ICB) translation or the NIRV (New International Reader’s Version) translation. Discussion questions and prayer prompts follow each day’s verses.

WEEKLY FAMILY GUIDES

In addition to the daily “Family Connection,” we’ve compiled a “Weekly Family Guide” for each week of Advent. This guide includes an interactive candle lighting devotion to be used each Sunday of Advent, book and video recommendations, and service ideas that connect with each week’s theme.

A NOTE TO PARENTS

The Advent season is a gift to Christian parents because it gives a focused opportunity to talk to our children about the most important things in life. All of the questions that this season addresses will be asked and answered by our children in some way:

- What is the season about?
- Why did Jesus have to come?
- What is it that I need?
- How will those needs be met?
- Who am I and what is my life about?
- How is it that I am supposed to live?³

Culture will answer these questions and provide one narrative this season. As parents, we must recognize the false story that we (and our children) are exposed to all around us. This false story tells lies about who we are and what we need. It points to feelings, personal pleasure, and consumerism as the ultimate treasures to be stored up this holiday season.

³ Paul Tripp. “Are There Lies In Your Christmas Tree?” [Desiring God](#).

We get to tell (and show!) our children a greater and truer story, and we tell them over and over again: We share the *good news of great joy* we've received. We rejoice in our Savior. We treasure Him above all else and we pray that our children will grow in their understanding of and love for Jesus Christ.

Teaching our kids God's truth and centering our lives around His great story does not mean that we don't engage in traditional American Christmas festivities. But it does most likely mean that we have additional conversations about what parts do and do not reflect the gospel.

We also want to remember that we can't expect our children to fully rejoice in the faith when they are still learning to understand Christ. It's quite possible that, despite all our efforts this Advent season, our children are going to be more excited about presents than they are about Jesus. Don't shame them; teach them. Teach them that gifts are fun (and they can even serve as reminders of God's *giving* love!), but the joy that they provide is temporary. Point your children to the everlasting joy available to them in Christ. Strive to model that message through your own life this Advent season. Our children will hear our words, but they will also look to how we live our lives for their answers to what this season is about, what they need, and what matters most.⁴

WHAT ABOUT SANTA?

The question comes up often around families at Midtown. Should they do Santa? Not do it? Do it with qualifications? There are faithful members in our church who fall into all three of these categories. (For a point of reference, six pastors' families incorporate Santa to some degree into their family's traditions and three do not.) The choice to include Santa is not a closed-handed issue for followers of Jesus, so we want to guard against treating it as such or becoming self-righteous toward parents who've taken a different approach than we have.

Instead, as parents who are a part of one body of Christ, we focus on the larger goal of putting Jesus and His beauty and worth on display to the children in our church family.

⁴ Adapted from Lindsay Carlsons's article: ["3 Christmas Pitfalls for Parents." The Gospel Coalition.](#)

With that goal in mind, we do think it's wise to be intentional about your gift giving and what your practices could be communicating to your children. In her excellent article, "3 Christmas Pitfalls for Parents," Lindsay Carlson gives a helpful perspective for parents:

No child deserves presents. While Santa makes a "naughty" or "nice" list, Jesus doesn't. He gave His life for those in sin. He didn't dangle His redemption over our heads as a "behavior modification" tactic. God gave us the gift of Christ—his birth, death, and resurrection—by grace. All gifts we place under the tree or in the stockings should be given in the same manner that we receive Christ: freely.

Whether you choose to make Santa a part of your Christmas traditions or not, at the right time, we would encourage you to share with your children where the tradition of Santa Claus comes from: a real man, St. Nicholas, who followed Jesus and whose life was marked by the way he loved others.

AN ADVENT INTRODUCTION FOR CHILDREN

(Assemble your Advent wreath as a family and discuss prior to Advent season)

This is an Advent wreath. This is a long-time tradition that Christians use to remember and celebrate the gift of Christmas: that God gave us His Son, Jesus, to step into our darkness and become our light.

What shape is the wreath?

Answer: A circle

Does it have a beginning or an end?

Answer: No. (It goes round and round forever. This reminds us that God's love goes on and on forever. It never ends.)

What color is the wreath?

Answer: Green

The evergreens in the wreath never change; they are green all year. This reminds us that God never changes. We can trust who He is and His promises of what He says He will do.

Each week, we will light a candle in our Advent wreath and talk about the gift of Jesus that God gave us because of His love for us.

We will light an additional candle each week and we will remember that Jesus's light shines bright in our lives and in the world. We will celebrate that Jesus came into the world to save us and be our light.

SUNDAY: Jesus Is Our Hope

“Advent reminds us to listen for the message God is speaking, even in the waiting.” –Timothy Paul Jones

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 11:10, Romans 15:12-13

READ AND RESPOND

Read Romans 15:12-13. How is *hope* used in each verse?

Romans 15:12-13

And again Isaiah says,

*“The root of Jesse will come,
even he who arises to rule the Gentiles;
in him will the Gentiles hope.”*

¹³ *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*

Light the 1st Candle.

Click here for the Week 1 Family Candle Lighting Devotion on page 48.

(Isaiah 9:2, 6-7; John 1:9)

Today we light what is often referred to as the “Prophecy Candle.” This candle represents *hope* or *expectation* in the coming Messiah.

In Advent, we join with the prophets of the Old Testament awaiting the promised Savior and we remember that we too are waiting even on this side of Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection.

We are waiting for Christ’s return when He will once and for all wipe away all sickness and sadness and sin and death. We wait with *hopeful expectation* for Christ’s second arrival when He will bring His Kingdom to Earth and make all things new. Like the Old Testament prophets, we set our hope and faith on the promises of our trustworthy God.

In this season of Advent, we lean into the waiting as we call out to the One who came into our darkness and became our *living hope*. We wait. And we remember that there is meaning in our waiting.

In his article “Why Celebrate Advent,” pastor and professor Timothy Paul Jones captures the necessity of this waiting:

Left to myself, I turn too quickly from the God of the gospel to the gods of efficiency and convenience—false gods who proclaim waiting a waste, a “killing of time.” But Advent reminds me that time is far too precious to be killed, even when that time is spent looking ahead. Advent is a proclamation of the sufficiency of Christ through the discipline of waiting.⁵

Today when we use the word hope we usually mean *optimism* or *wishful thinking*.

I *hope* you have a great vacation.

I *hope* my team makes it to the Championship.

I *hope* the kids picked up their rooms while we were away.

There is a level of uncertainty associated with our modern use of the word.

5 [Timothy Paul Jones. “Why Celebrate Advent.” The Gospel Coalition.](#)

But this is not the *hope* in the Bible. In the Old Testament, there are two main Hebrew words translated as the word *hope*:

Yakhal = to wait

Qavah = the feeling of tension and expectation while you wait for something to happen

In the Old Testament, these ideas of hope are about waiting for a person. The writers of the Old Testament were hoping in and for God Himself. Biblical hope differs from wishful thinking and optimism because it's grounded in God's character. God is faithful. He is truthful. He always keeps His promises. It is by remembering God's faithfulness in the past that we can have hope for the future.⁶

We look forward by looking back.

We hope.

We wait.

INTERPRET THE SCRIPTURE

Reread [Romans 15:12-13](#). Consider reading it in an additional translation.

- How do the two Hebrew words for “hope” (*yakhal* and *qavah*) impact your reading of the text?
- What do you think it means to “abound in hope?”

⁶ [Yakhal/Hope.” The Bible Project.](#)

Family Connection

H

Light the first Advent Candle.

Click here for the Family Candle Lighting Devotion on page 48.

MONDAY: The Meaning of Biblical Hope

“We’re waiting for the return of Jesus. We are all in a sense waiting for something, but everything God said He will do, He will do. So, in the meantime, as we wait, we keep trusting, we keep believing, we keep reading Scripture to remind ourselves what God has said.”
—Jackie Hill Perry

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 39:7, Isaiah 8:17, 1 Peter 1:3, Psalm 130:5-7

Yesterday we mentioned the two main Hebrew words translated as the word *hope*. *Yakhal* (to wait for) and *qavah* (the feeling of tension and expectation while you wait for something). Today we want to build on what we learned yesterday by unpacking how the word *hope* is used in both the Old and New Testament.

Note: the majority of today’s content comes from *The Bible Project’s* word study on *hope*. You can check out the 4-minute video: [“Yakhal: Hope.”](#)

In biblical Hebrew, *hope* is about waiting or expectation. In the Old Testament, the hope is for God Himself. The words *yakhal* and *qavah* appear over 40 times in the Psalms and, in almost every case, what people are waiting for is God.

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Isaiah 8:17](#) and [Psalm 39:7](#). What stands out about how *qavah* and *yakah* are used? How does this language differ from how you most often hear *hope* used today?

Isaiah 8:17

*At this moment the Lord is hiding his face from Israel,
so I will **qavah** for him.*

Isaiah 8:17: I will **wait** for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will **hope** in him.

Psalm 39:7

*And now, oh Lord, what else can I **qavah** for? You are
my **yakhal**.*

(Psalm 39:7 And now, O Lord, for what do I **wait**? My **hope** is in you.)

In the New Testament, followers of Jesus lived out a similar practice of hope. Christ's death and resurrection created a new kind of hope—a *living* hope—and they used the Greek word *elpis* to describe this anticipation. More than once, Peter says that the good news about Jesus announces the “*elpis* of glory.” Just like in the Old Testament, this hope is based off of a person:

1 Peter 1:3

*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 **elpis** through the resurrection of Jesus
Christ from the dead,*

1 Peter 1:3: 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 **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Through Jesus we gain a living hope of being made into new people, but that's not where it ends. We now have the hope for all of creation to one day be restored. The resurrection of Jesus was a picture of what God planned for the entire universe when He would one day rid the world of all brokenness and sin and bring complete healing and restoration. Christian hope isn't optimism or wishful thinking; it is a choice to wait for God to do all that He's promised to do. And we know that He's trustworthy because He gave us His son. We look to Jesus, our Living Elpis, as we boldly wait with great expectation.

APPLY THE SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 130:5-7, paying particular attention to the use of the words *wait* and *hope*. What does this passage reveal about God? How does the psalmist's view of self change based on who God is?

Psalm 130:5-7

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,

and in his word I hope;

6 my soul waits for the Lord

more than watchmen for the morning,

more than watchmen for the morning.

7 O Israel, hope in the Lord!

For with the Lord there is steadfast love,

and with him is plentiful redemption.

Family Connection

Watch the Bible Project's 4-minute video on [hope](#) and afterwards, check out the family quiz questions located in **this week's Family Guide on page 51.**

READ

Psalm 39:7

*"So, Lord, what hope do I have? You are my hope."
(ICB)*

DISCUSS

- What is the difference between optimism and hope in the Bible?
Answer: Biblical hope is about waiting for a person; optimism is about believing circumstances will get better
- Why can we trust God and put our hope in Him?
- Are there areas of your life where you find it difficult to trust God? What are they?

PRAY

Thank God that you can put your hope in Him. Thank Him for the love and faithfulness He's shown through Jesus. Thank Him for His promise to make all things new. Pray for specific family members and the areas where they find it difficult to trust God and believe His promises. Ask God for help in putting your hope in Him and not in your circumstances.

TUESDAY: The Hope of the Gospel

“If Christmas is just a nice legend, in a sense you are on your own. But if Christmas is true, then you can be saved by grace.” –Timothy Keller

SCRIPTURE

1 Peter 1:3-7, Titus 3:4-7, John 3:3-8, John 1:13, Titus 1:1-2

READ AND RESPOND

Read [1 Peter 1:3-7](#). What does this passage tell us about our living hope? How is it obtained? What should be our response?

1 Peter 1:3-7

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, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ 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.

This is the gospel—the *good news* of Christmas—that by grace through faith, we can be born again into a living hope! Jesus Christ is our *elpis*; He is our living hope!

READ AND RESPOND

Read Titus 3:4-7. Paraphrase the passage, paying close attention to the order of events.

Titus 3:4-7

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ 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, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

For some additional reading, check out these verses that refer to our regeneration—our being born again—and note insight gained:

Titus 3:5

John 3:3-8

John 1:13

In his book *Hidden Christmas*, Timothy Keller states that:

There has never been a gift offered that makes you swallow your pride to the depths that the gift of Jesus Christ requires us to do. Christmas means that we are so lost, so unable to save ourselves that nothing less than the death of the Son of God himself could save us. That means you are not somebody who can pull yourself together and live a moral and good life. To accept the true Christmas gift, you have to admit you're a sinner. You need to be saved by grace.⁷

And it is this saving grace—the very grace that makes us right with God and brings us into new life—that creates in our hearts a living hope. When we are born again, we are made into children of new hope and we have the gospel to hope in.

And it starts with Jesus coming down to us. That's the good news—the gospel—of Christmas: We could not save ourselves; Jesus came to save us.

He is our living hope.

Today we want to set aside time to thank God for this grace gift. We want to examine our hearts for anywhere that we are not fully believing or hoping in it. We want to set our hope on the One who never lies and always keeps His promises (Titus 1:1-2). Praise God, our Heavenly Father, full of grace and truth!

⁷ Timothy Keller. *Hidden Christmas*. Viking, 2016.

Family Connection

READ

Titus 3:3-7 (ICB)

In the past we were foolish people, too. We did not obey, we were wrong, and we were slaves to many things our bodies wanted and enjoyed. We lived doing evil and being jealous. People hated us and we hated each other. ⁴ But then the kindness and love of God our Savior was shown. ⁵ He saved us because of his mercy, not because of good deeds we did to be right with God. He saved us through the washing that made us new people. He saved us by making us new through the Holy Spirit. ⁶ God poured out to us that Holy Spirit fully through Jesus Christ our Savior. ⁷ We were made right with God by His grace. And God gave us the Spirit so that we could receive the life that never ends. That is what we hope for.

DISCUSS

A note to parents: *Knowing that many of our children have not yet put their faith in the saving work of Jesus, today's Scripture provides a great opportunity to walk your children through the process of regeneration. For children in the preschool and elementary stage, we'd recommend the picture books The Garden, The Curtain, And The Cross and The Christmas Promise as helpful continuations of today's discussion.*

Work as a family to list the sequence of events that lead to our hope.

Answer:

- 1. We were slaves to sin.*
- 2. The love of God was shown.*
- 3. We were/can be saved by grace and made into new people through Jesus.*

4. *When we are made right with God through grace, He gives us the Holy Spirit and we receive new life.*

5. *This is what we hope for.*

How do these verses describe what a person's life is like before Jesus saves him or her?

Answer: Titus 3:3

What causes change in a person's life?

Answer: Titus 3:4

Why does Jesus save people?

Answer: Titus 3:5

How does Jesus save someone?

Answer: Titus 3:5-7

PRAY

Thank Jesus for making a way for you to be right with God and have new life in Him. Thank God for His gift of grace. Pray that your children would grow in wisdom and knowledge of what Christ has done for them. Pray that through faith, they'd come to believe and receive Christ's saving gift of grace and walk in the sweetness of new life found in Him.

WEDNESDAY: Set Your Hope Fully on Christ

“If we are to set our hope fully on Christ, we must be fully attuned to the things of Christ with great seriousness.” –Jen Wilkin

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 78:5-7, Psalm 130:7, 1 Timothy 6:17, John 5:45, 1 Peter 1:13

Yesterday we celebrated the truth of the gospel—the good news that Christ came to us, died, and rose again in order that we might have new life. Christ became our living hope—hope that is synonymous with grace. The call for us is to repent, turn away from our sin, and set our hope fully on Christ.

READ AND RESPOND

Look up the following verses, noting their connection with hope.

Psalm 78:5-7

Psalm 130:7

1 Timothy 6:17

John 5:45

This idea of *setting our hope* is seen throughout Scripture. With this instruction comes an underlying assumption that our hope has the ability to drift—that while we are still sinners on this side of eternity, our hope won't always be placed in Jesus and His grace like it should.

We must tell our hope where to go.

So how do we do this?

READ AND INTERPRET

Read 1 Peter 1:13, noting the instruction given for how to set your hope fully on grace.

1 Peter 1:13

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Peter makes the correlation between our minds and our hope. Using Biblegateway.com, look up [1 Peter 1:13](#) in 3 additional translations. What phrasing is used for “sober-minded”? What additional insight does this provide in how we are to engage our minds?

1 Peter 1:13 (Christian Standard Bible)

1 Peter 1:13 (New International Version)

1 Peter 1:13 (New Living Translation)

Peter instructs his readers to live out their salvation with seriousness and self-control. We must engage our minds, not just our hearts. The pursuit of setting our hope fully on Christ starts as an endeavor of the mind.

But why does Peter choose to include the word *fully*? Why doesn't he just say, “Set your hope on the grace...”? Peter knows that it's possible for us to set our hope *partially* on the grace of Christ and *partially* elsewhere. Bible teacher and author Jen Wilkin describes our partial allegiance this way:

We're prone to placing our hope on our own good deeds, or on a spouse or our children, or a pastor or president. We may place it on a bank account or a career, or even on the size of our social media accounts. We tell ourselves that we hope in Christ, but what we mean is that we hope in Christ and _____.
We're people of divided allegiance, divided hopes. We're those Jesus warned about, storing up treasures both on earth and in heaven.⁸

⁸ Jen Wilkin. “Two Ways to Fix Your Hope on Future Grace.” [The Gospel Coalition](#).

Family Connection

READ

1 Peter 1:13 (ICB)

So prepare your minds for service and have self-control. All your hope should be for the gift of grace that will be yours when Jesus Christ comes again.

DISCUSS

Practice confession as a family (Parents, lead out!) Where does your hope drift when you are not setting it on the grace of God?

- As a family, are there things that you all are particularly prone to place your hope in?

(Vacations? Outcomes of sporting events? Good grades?)

- How can you encourage each other this week to set your hope fully on Christ?

PRAY

Confess to God where you are tempted to place your hope and ask for His help in setting your hope fully on Christ. Pray that as a family you'd take seriously the job of setting your hope fully on Christ and that you would encourage each other in your pursuit.

THURSDAY:

Full Assurance of Hope

“My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name.” -Edward Mote

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 11:1, Hebrews 6:11-12, Hebrews 10:22-23, Colossians 1:21-23

READ AND OBSERVE

Read Hebrews 11:1, Hebrews 6:11-12, and Hebrews 10:22-23. Note the relationship between *hope* and *faith* in each. Then paraphrase each verse in the space provided. Consider reading additional translations in order to help you with your paraphrases.

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Hebrews 6:11-12

And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end,¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Hebrews 10:22-23

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

Hebrews 11:1 provides the closest thing we have to a definition for *faith* in the Bible. Faith is fully assured hope—confident hope. *Confident hope* comes when we trust in the truth and grace of Jesus Christ, our living hope. There is a moral certainty to it. Hope is an essential part of faith.

When we think of hope through this critical lens, its pursuit becomes all the more urgent. If we become women and men of faith by pursuing hope, then perhaps there is no greater fight than our fight for hope.

How do we fight sluggishness? We hope.

How do we not waver in our hope? We recall the faithfulness of God.

How do we have full assurance of hope? We fight for satisfaction in Christ. We are serious about seeing and savoring Him as our treasure. We are skeptical of anything else in our lives that would promise to do what only Christ can.

We renew our minds (and our hope) by reciting the promises of God.

APPLY THE SCRIPTURE

Read Colossians 1:21-23 (in several translations). What do these verses remind us about who God is and what He has done? How do they change how we view ourselves? In light of that, what are we called to do?

Colossians 1:21-23

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

REFLECT AND PRAY

Spend some time reflecting on the faithfulness of God in your life. Praise Him for it. Remind your heart and mind of it. Set your hope in Him and His faithfulness.

Practice the discipline of renewing your mind by choosing a promise of God that you will focus on throughout your day. Write it out. Recite it. Pray it.

Make Colossians 1:21-23 personal. Where have you drifted in your hope? What truth do you need to believe and stand firmly in today? Write it out. Pray it. Ask for God's help. Fight for hope.

Family Connection

READ

Hebrews 11:1 (ICB)

Faith means being sure of the things we hope for. And faith means knowing that something is real even if we do not see it.

DISCUSS

Use the verse above to lead a conversation with your children about the meaning of faith and its connection to hope. Here are some questions that may prove helpful in that discussion:

- What does it mean to be confident in something? What are you confident in?
- Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is being confident (sure of) the things that we hope for. This week we've talked about placing our hope in God. Why can we be confident in Him?

Answer: God always keeps His promises. He is trustworthy. He sent us Jesus to save us when we could not save ourselves. He loves us and has our good in mind.

- Is it ever difficult for you to believe that God is real even though you can't see Him? Did you know that we can ask God for the faith to believe and trust him more and more?

PRAY

Thank God that you can put your faith and hope in Him because He is trustworthy. He always keeps His promises. He gave His Son, Jesus! Ask Him to help your family look to the gift of Jesus during this Advent season—that more and more, He would be your hope and that more and more, the members of your family would trust Jesus with their lives.

FRIDAY: Hope in God

“The best sermon you preach to yourself this week may be only three words long: Hope in God!” –John Piper

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 42:5, Romans 15:4, Psalm 130:5-7, Psalm 33:18-22

This week we’ve celebrated the gift that is Christ, our living hope. We’ve been reminded that the good news of Christmas is that we could not save ourselves so Christ came to save us—that through grace and faith, we can be reconciled to God and have new life in Christ. We looked at the call to set our hope fully on Christ and the mind-battle that is required to do so as we single-mindedly pursue Christ. We examined our own lives for where we may be tempted to shift in our hope, and we’ve begun the work of reminding ourselves that we fight for hope by setting our minds on the faithfulness of God and His promises.

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Psalm 42:5](#). What do you notice about how the speaker interacts with himself?

Psalm 42:5

*Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my salvation*

In Psalm 42:5, we see the speaker in conflict with his own soul. The soul is arguing with itself *and* preaching to itself: *Hope in the Lord*. Throughout the Psalms, we observe speakers fighting to keep their hope in God. Part of our job as Christians is to recognize that this inner battle will always exist in our own lives on this side of eternity. In acknowledging that we are prone to wander, we can then go to work fighting, like the Psalmist, to *Hope in God*.

As John Piper reminds us: “Hoping in God does not come naturally for sinners like us. We must preach it to ourselves, and preach diligently and forcefully, or we will give way to a downcast and disquieted spirit.”⁹

Read Romans 15:4. What purposes for Scripture does Paul give?

Romans 15:4

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

All Scripture is for our instruction *and* intended to sustain our hope.

Because of this, we will take the next three Fridays to meditate on Scripture. We will ask the Holy Spirit to help us understand what we read and walk in obedience. We will focus on what the Scriptures reveal about God’s character and His promises and we will anchor our hope in them.

On the next page you will find a handful of verses in the Psalms. Consider this a starting place as you hope in God’s Word. You may also want to revisit other verses from this week. Approach them in whatever way best helps you in your fight for hope. Read them out loud. Write them in a journal, Paraphrase them. Pray them. Choose one to memorize. Sit with the Scripture in whatever way grows your love and affection for God and what He has done for you in Jesus Christ.

⁹ John Piper. “How Can I Keep on Hoping? The Scriptures!” *Desiring God*.

Psalm 119: 74, 81, 114, 147

Psalm 130:5-7

Psalm 33:18-22

LISTEN

- “All My Hope” (Hillsong Worship)
- “Hope” (The Brilliance)
- “Living Hope” (Bethel Worship- Brian Johnson)

Family Connection

How as a family can you set aside time to *Hope in God* together? Here are a few suggestions:

- Make a list of God's promises and His character. Discuss the list. Put it on the fridge where you can all see it and remind each other of it.
- Choose a verse to memorize and discuss how memorizing God's Word can help you fight for hope. (Consider choosing one from this week's **Family Guide on page 48**)
- Listen to our ["Songs of Hope" Spotify playlist](#) and discuss lines that stand out to you in the songs. What does the song say about who God is and what He has done? How does this give you hope?
- Read one of the books on our recommended book list found in this week's **Family Guide on p. 52**. Remind each other of the hope of the gospel: You could not save yourself; Jesus came to save you!

SATURDAY: Share the Hope

“Every hope outside of God is insufficient. The little hopes of this world are Band-Aids on a bleeding heart. Instead, bind up the wounds of insufficiencies, unfulfilled desires, and challenging seasons with the lasting hope of Jesus Christ. He lived and died and rose to become the cornerstone of your daily hope.”
—Maggie Combs

SCRIPTURE

1 Peter 3:14-15, 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

READ AND RESPOND

Read 1 Peter 3:14-15. What do these verses imply?

1 Peter 3:14-15 (HCSB)

But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear or be disturbed,¹⁵ but honor the Messiah as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

If we need to be prepared for people to ask us why we are so hopeful, the assumption is that we are in fact *hopeful*. When a non-Christian spends time with us, after a while, part of what she should notice is our hope.

And note that Peter does not say, “Be ready to explain this *feeling* of hope you have.” No. He says, “Be ready to give a defense.” Peter suggests that there are reasons for our confident hope and we should be ready to explain them.

APPLY THE WEEK’S SCRIPTURE

So let’s take a moment right now and think about the reasons we have for our hope. We’ve studied it all week, but how would you put it in your own words? What is the reason for the hope that is in you?

READ AND RESPOND

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17. What stands out to you about this description of hope? What is Jesus establishing our hearts for?

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

We have a good hope that has been given to us through grace. And this good hope should be evident in our lives. Christ has established our hearts in every good work and word. He will be with us as we share the reason for our hope.

We want to use the next three Saturdays (or choose a different day of the week) to be intentional about sharing our hope. We want to be people who don't serve this holiday season because it makes us "feel good" or "that's just what you do this time of year." We want to serve because we realize it reflects the very heart of God. God has invited us to join Him on His rescue mission to save the world! He reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ and now we can join in His mission and share our hope with others as we love and serve them.

Be intentional in your conversations this week. Has God placed someone in your life that needs to hear about the living hope that is available? Is there a family member or co-worker who may be more receptive to the gospel of grace this time of year?

Is there a fellow Christian that you might encourage? Someone that you know is struggling in the battle for hope? Who can you join in the fight with this week? Maybe it's a phone call, intentionally shared Scripture, truth spoken over coffee or a shared meal.

PRAY

Thank God for allowing you to join Him in reconciling all things to Himself. Thank Him for the hope that is in you. Ask for opportunities to share that hope with others. Confess where you are tempted to fill your time with lesser things. Repent and take a step of obedience by intentionally serving and sharing your hope this week as you strive to make Jesus, your living hope, known throughout our city.

LISTEN

- "We've Got This Hope" (Ellie Holcomb)
- "Glory" (Gungor)

Family Connection

READ

1 Peter 3:15b (ICB)

Always be ready to answer everyone who asks you to explain about the hope you have.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 (ICB)

We pray that the Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father will comfort you and strengthen you in every good thing you do and say. God loved us. Through his grace he gave us a good hope and comfort that continues forever.

DISCUSS/PLAN

As a family, think through how you can display God's love and the hope you have in Jesus this Advent season.

- Are there projects or initiatives that your children's school(s) are already doing to serve the weak or vulnerable in your community? How can you partner with them and intentionally pray for and discuss these service opportunities as a family?
- Are there specific neighbors that God may be calling you to share the hope of Christ with this season? How could you tangibly put God's love and grace on display?

Through making cookies and writing notes? By meeting a tangible need like helping with yard work or repairs? By making a meal or, better yet, inviting them into your home for a meal? By inviting them to join your family for a festive holiday activity around our city?

PRAY

Ask God to give you eyes to see the people in your life who need to know about the hope found in Christ. Pray for opportunities to share that hope. Pray that as you serve this Advent season, you would do so with joyful hearts, remembering that you get to join God in His mission to save the world.

H

Additional Resources

Timothy Paul Jones. “Why Celebrate Advent.” *The Gospel Coalition*. thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-celebrate-advent

Timothy Keller. *Hidden Christmas*. Viking, 2016.

“Yakhal/Hope.” *The Bible Project*. thebibleproject.com/videos/yakhal-hope/

John Piper. “What is Hope?” *Desiring God*. desiringgod.org/messages/what-is-hope

Jackie Hill Perry. “The Miracle of Waiting Faithfully.” *Desiring God*. desiringgod.org/interviews/the-miracle-of-waiting-faithfully

Jen Wilkin. “Two Ways to Fix Your Hope on Future Grace.” *The Gospel Coalition*. thegospelcoalition.org/article/fix-hope-future-grace/

Maggie Combs. “The Hope That Moms Don’t Need.” *The Gospel Coalition*. thegospelcoalition.org/article/hope-moms-dont-need/

John Piper. “How Can I Keep on Hoping? The Scriptures!” *Desiring God*. desiringgod.org/messages/how-can-i-keep-on-hoping-the-scriptures

Family Guide Week 1

A NOTE TO PARENTS

The “Light the Candle” devotions are written with the intent of being read out loud by a family member. We have placed any instructions (that don’t need to be read out loud) in italics. Certainly feel the freedom to simplify or expand the content based on your children’s age. Each weekly candle lighting will have a greater visual impact if it takes place in a darkened room.

CANDLE OF HOPE SUNDAY FAMILY DEVOTION

As a family, sit in darkness. Ask a few age-appropriate questions about the darkness.

How does the darkness make you feel? What is difficult to do in the dark? Are there times that you’ve been afraid to be in the dark?

No matter what you want to do in a room, you have to first turn on the light or you can’t see anything else.

Often, when the Bible uses the word darkness, it is referring to evil or ignorance (*not knowing something*). The prophet Isaiah lived about 700 years before Jesus was born. In Isaiah chapter 9, he writes about the darkness that the people were living in:

Have someone read [Isaiah 9:2](#) out loud.

Isaiah 9:2 (NIRV)

The people who are now living in darkness will see a great light.

They are now living in a very dark land. But a light will shine on them.

Isaiah says that the people lived in darkness; they were surrounded by evil. There was evil in their hearts, and there was nothing they could do to stop the darkness. They needed someone to save them! But according to Isaiah, a light was going to shine on the people:

Have someone read [Isaiah 9:6-7](#) and [John 1:9](#).

Isaiah 9:6-7 (NIRV)

A child will be born to us.

A son will be given to us.

He will rule over us.

And he will be called

Wonderful Adviser and Mighty God.

He will also be called Father Who Lives Forever

and Prince Who Brings Peace.

There will be no limit to how great his authority is.

The peace he brings will never end.

He will rule on David's throne

and over his kingdom.

He will make the kingdom strong and secure.

His rule will be based on what is fair and right.

It will last forever.

The Lord's great love will make sure that happens.

He rules over all.

John 1:9 (NIRV)

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

Because of God's love, He would send the people a savior—a rescuer to light up the whole world. And this savior would be born to them. The greatest gift would come to Earth as a baby. God's rescue mission to save the world from sin and darkness starts with a baby.

And just like those living 700 years before Jesus, we too are walking in darkness. Because of sin, not only do we do the wrong thing, but we often don't even know the right thing to do. Sin has separated us from God. We need to be rescued. We need Jesus to save us and be our light.

Light the first candle.

This first candle represents the *hope* that God's people had as they waited for God to send a rescuer to save them and to step into their darkness. As we light this candle of **hope**, we praise God for being trustworthy and always keeping His promises. During this Advent season, we celebrate that all of the promises of God find their "yes" in Jesus. We praise God for giving us His Son: the very best gift.

DISCUSS

During this season of Advent, let's be on the lookout for reminders of the truth that God sent Jesus to be our light:

- Where do we see extra lights during the Christmas season?

Answer: Christmas lights on houses, lights on Christmas tree, star on Christmas tree, candles in windows, etc)

- How can these lights remind us of Jesus?

Answer: When we see these beautiful Christmas lights around, can use them as tiny reminders that Christmas is for celebrating Jesus: the Light of the World. Every time we see Christmas lights, we can celebrate Jesus!)

PRAY

As a family, let's spend some time thanking God for sending Jesus to rescue us and become our light. Let's thank Him that His love never ends and that we can trust Him and His Promises. Let's ask Him to use this season of Advent to grow our hope in Him.

THE BIBLE PROJECT FAMILY QUIZ (MONDAY)

“Yakhal/Hope.” *The Bible Project*.

thebibleproject.com/videos/yakhal-hope/

Name one of the Old Testament Hebrew words translated to the word “hope”

Answer: Yakhal, Qavah

In biblical Hebrew, hope is about waiting for *what*?

Answer: A person/God Himself

How is biblical hope different from optimism?

Answer: Biblical hope is about waiting for a person; optimism is about believing circumstances will get better.

In the New Testament, what new kind of hope did Jesus bring?

Answer: A living hope

What Greek word was used to describe this new kind of hope after Jesus’ death and resurrection?

Answer: Elpis

What is Christian hope?

Answer: Christian hope is a bold choice to wait on God based on His faithfulness in the past and His promises for the future

FAMILY CONNECTIONS (TUESDAY-SATURDAY)

Be sure to check out our daily mini family devotions located at the end of each day in the adult guide. Each mini family devotion coordinates with the adult theme for the day and includes a Scripture passage, discussion questions, and a family prayer prompt.

DAILY FAMILY CONNECTION SCRIPTURE RECAP

Sunday: Isaiah 9:6-7; John 1:9

Monday: Psalm 139:7

Tuesday: Titus 3:3-7

Wednesday: 1 Peter 1:13

Thursday: Hebrews 11:1

Friday: Choose a verse to memorize as a family

Saturday: 1 Peter 3:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

SONG RECOMMENDATIONS

Check out our "[Songs of Hope](#)" playlist on Spotify for the complete list of songs for the week.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

The Christmas Promise by Catalina Echeverri

The Garden, The Curtain, and The Cross by Carl Laferton

The Jesus Storybook Bible by Sally Lloyd Jones.

If you're looking for an additional nightly reading option with your family during Advent, you can start at the beginning of *The Jesus Storybook Bible* on the first Monday of Advent, read one story each night, and you will reach the story of Christ's birth on the 23rd and "The Light of the Whole World" reading on the 24th.

SHARE THE HOPE IDEAS

As a family, think through how you can display God's love and the hope you have in Jesus this Advent season.

- Are there projects or initiatives that your children's school(s) are already doing to serve the weak or vulnerable in your community? How can you partner with them and intentionally pray for and discuss these service opportunities as a family?
- Are there specific neighbors that God may be calling you to share the hope of Christ with this season? How could you tangibly put God's love and grace on display? (*Through making cookies and writing notes? By meeting a tangible need like helping with yard work or repairs? By making a meal or better yet, inviting them into your home for a meal? By inviting them to join your family for a festive holiday activity around our city?*)

WEEK 2: PEACE

SUNDAY: Jesus Is Our Peace

“God cannot give us a happiness and a peace apart from himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.” –C.S. Lewis

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 9:6-7, Luke 2:13-14, Romans 16:20, Philippians 4:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 13:20, John 14:27, Ephesians 2:14

P

READ AND OBSERVE

Read [Isaiah 9:6-7](#). What stands out to you as you read Isaiah’s prophecy?

Isaiah 9:6-7

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*

Light the 2nd Candle.

Click here for our Week 2 Family Candle Lighting Devotion on page 92.
(Luke 2:8-15; John 14:27)

This week, we light the second candle that represents the peace of Christ. This candle is often referred to as the “Angel Candle” and it is used as a time to remember the message that the angels proclaimed to the shepherds on the night of Christ’s birth:

Luke 2:13-14

*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of
the heavenly host praising God and saying,
14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace
among those with whom he is pleased!”*

The angels proclaimed what Isaiah prophesied. Their news had two parts: *glory to God in the highest* and *peace on earth*. This week, we will celebrate this beautiful gift of peace that we are offered through Christ.

Four times in the New Testament God is called the God of Peace. (Romans 16:20, Philippians 4:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 13:20) The angels declared that Christ’s birth would bring peace. In the final days of His life, Jesus shared with His disciples that He would leave His peace with them — a peace that is much different than what the world has to offer (John 14:27). With Christ’s peace comes righteousness. Through Christ, we are invited into the very peace that He has with His Father!

This week we will rejoice in the good news that Christ has become our peace (Ephesians 2:14), and we will examine what a life marked by this type of peace can look like if we’d only receive this glorious gift.

REFLECT AND PRAY

- Read Ephesians 2:14. Meditate on the truth that Christ is your peace.
- Thank Jesus for becoming your peace. Pray that you’d understand and know that peace on a deeper level this week.

- Ask the Lord to reveal where you might be turning to the peace the world offers instead of the fullness of peace that is available through Him.

P

LISTEN

All songs are available on our [“Songs of Peace”](#) Spotify Advent playlist. You can also search user “midtowncolumbia” for “Songs of Peace.”

- “Silent Night” (Page CXVI)
- “Who Would Have Dreamed” (Sovereign Grace)

Family Connection

Light the second Advent Candle.

[Click here for the Candle Lighting Devotion on page 92](#)

WEEK 2: PEACE

MONDAY: The Meaning of Biblical Peace

“True peace requires taking what’s broken and restoring it to wholeness, whether it’s in our lives, our relationships, or in our world.” –The Bible Project (“Shalom”)

P

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 9:6-7, Job 5:23-24, 1 Kings 9:25, Proverbs 16:7, John 14:27

The word *peace* is common in most languages. Typically, it refers to the absence of conflict. Government officials may meet to discuss peace talks between two warring countries in an effort to end conflict. A parent may bemoan that he just needs a moment of “peace and quiet” between two bickering siblings.

The Bible certainly uses this meaning of the word *peace*, but it also points to the presence of something better in its place.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*. *Shalom* means “complete” or “whole.” We see the word used to refer to objects in a state of perfection with no cracks or missing parts. But we also see it used as a verb. To *bring shalom* means to make complete or restore.

READ AND RESPOND

Look up the following verses and note how peace (*shalom*) is used in each:

Job 5:23-24

Israel's government was charged with bringing *shalom*; the goal was not simply to end fighting with rival kingdoms but to begin restoring relationships and working for each other's good. For the ancient Jews, *shalom* was much larger than simply ending conflict; *shalom* signified a future reality when all of creation would be restored and made whole.¹⁰

The hope of *shalom* was set on a coming savior.

INTERPRET THE SCRIPTURE

Re-read [Isaiah 9:6-7](#). How does your understanding of *shalom* enhance your reading of the prophecy?

Isaiah 9:6-7

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Shalom.
Of the increase of his government and of shalom
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*

¹⁰ [Shalom: "Peace." The Bible Project.](#)

The New Testament uses the Greek word, *eirene* for peace. In Luke 2, Jesus’s birth is announced as the arrival of *eirine*. Jesus comes and He offers his peace (John 14:27)—peace that has the power to heal all that is hurting and restore all that is broken.

Eirine. Peace.

Peace with God. Peace with ourselves. Peace with others. Peace with the world.

Glory to God!

P

REFLECT AND PRAY

- Where are you in need of *shalom*? What about the world around you?
- Lay your brokenness at the feet of your Heavenly Father. Ask Him to bring restoration and healing that only He can.
- Thank Christ for stepping in as your *shalom* and making a way for you to have the fullness of peace.

LISTEN

- “Peace is Here” (Jars of Clay)
- “One Still Night” (Sovereign Grace)

Family Connection

Watch the Bible Project's 4-minute video: "[Shalom: Peace](#)" and check out the family quiz questions in **this week's Family Guide on page 95.**

READ

Isaiah 26:3 (ICB)

You, Lord, give true peace.

You give peace to those who depend on you.

You give peace to those who trust you.

DISCUSS

- What is true peace?

Answer: Peace that has the power to restore all that is broken

- Who does Isaiah say will receive the true peace of God?

Answer: Those who depend on and trust Him

PRAY

Thank Jesus that He came to bring peace. Ask God to give you hearts and minds ready to learn about the peace that Jesus offers. Pray that as a family you would see Christ's peace as greater than any gift that may (or may not) appear under your tree Christmas morning.

WEEK 2: PEACE

TUESDAY: The Gospel of Peace

“What is the beauty? What is the magnificence that has come? That God, in the sending of Christ and in the coming of Jesus, makes peace with mankind.”

–Matt Chandler

P

SCRIPTURE

Romans 5:1-11, Luke 2:10-11, Romans 15:13

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Romans 5:1-5](#). As you read, mark repetition and transitional phrases that appear in the text.

Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² 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. ³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

According to the passage, how do we receive peace with God? What is the connection between peace, faith, and hope?

Read Romans 5:6-11. As you read, mark words that repeat as well as transitional phrases.

Romans 5:6-11

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Paraphrase the process described in the passage:

The most basic need we have is peace with God. And Romans 5 explains how we get this peace: we *believe*. We believe in Jesus as the Savior. We admit that we are, by nature, in conflict with God. We put our faith in the saving work of the Messiah. We trust that Jesus's death and resurrection were enough to make us right with God. When we rest in what Jesus has accomplished, we are united to Him and His righteousness is counted as ours. We are justified before God.

The result of placing our faith in the saving work of Jesus is peace with God.

Check out how Matt Chandler describes this peace:

God makes peace where the wages of sin is death...The coming of Christ is about the bringing of peace between the hostility of your rebellion against God and God's just, right wrath toward your rebellion. Jesus steps into the middle of that and brings the peace of his blood, shed on the cross, absorbing all of God's wrath toward those who would believe and replacing it with God's pleasure in the imputed righteousness of Jesus given to us upon salvation.¹¹

Do you remember what the angel said when he appeared to the shepherds to announce Christ's birth?

Luke 2:10-11

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. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

We no longer have to be afraid. Instead, we behold our savior and the beautiful message of His birth: "God and sinners reconciled!"

¹¹ [Matt Chandler. "The Peace Jesus Brings." The Village Church.](#)

APPLY THE SCRIPTURE

Read Romans 15:13. Based on your understanding of Romans 5 (previous page), how would you explain this verse? What is the connection between peace, believing, and hope?

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

REFLECT AND PRAY

Reread Romans 5:1-11.

- What parts are good news that your soul needs to be reminded of today? Meditate on those. Thank Jesus for them.
- What part of this passage is the most difficult for you to believe? Meditate on it. Thank Jesus for the work that He accomplished and that it is true and that it is enough.
- Thank God for giving you His Son and providing a way for you to be reconciled to Him. Confess any areas where you are failing to functionally believe that Jesus's life and death are enough.

LISTEN

- "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" (Citizens)
- "O, Holy Night" (Sleeping At Last)
- "Perfect Peace" (Marvin Sapp)

Family Connection

READ

Romans 5:9-11 (NIRV)

The blood of Christ has made us right with God. So we are even more sure that Jesus will save us from God's anger. 10 Once we were God's enemies. But we have been brought back to him because his Son has died for us. Now that God has brought us back, we are even more secure. We know that we will be saved because Christ lives. 11 And that is not all. We are full of joy in God because of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of him, God has brought us back to himself.

P

DISCUSS

Romans 5:9-11 describes how we are made right with God and can have peace with Him. We are no longer God's enemy, but instead, we are adopted into God's family!

- What did Jesus do to make us right with God?

Answer: He died for us so that we could be brought back to God

- What does Paul (the author of Romans) say is the response of a person who has been saved by Jesus and made right with God?

Answer: That person is secure and full of joy because they know that now, instead of being an enemy of God, they are part of God's family!

- Romans 5:1 says that: "We have been made right with God because of our faith. Now we have peace with him because of our Lord Jesus Christ."

If faith is believing and putting our full trust in something, where do we need to put our faith in order to be made right with God?

Answer: We must put our faith in the work that Jesus accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection

According to Romans 5:1, why can we have peace with God?

Answer: Because of Jesus Christ

PRAY

As a family, thank God for bringing you back to Himself. Thank God that through Jesus's blood, peace with Him is possible.

Assuming that you have children in your family that have not yet put their faith in Jesus Christ, ask God to open their hearts and minds to the truth of what He's done for them. Ask that He would continue to use this Advent season to draw their hearts to Him and grow their understanding for the things of Him. Pray that they would come to know the saving work of Jesus personally and they would put their faith in Him.

WEEK 2: PEACE

WEDNESDAY: Pursue Peace

*“All glory be to God on high and to the earth be peace!
Good will henceforth from God to man: begin and
never cease!” -Nahum Tate*

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 9:14, Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Peter 5:6-7, Romans 12:18,
Corinthians 13:11, Ephesians 4:31-32

2

P

When Christ came, He made peace possible: first and foremost peace with God. Peace with God is foundational to all other peace we pursue. It is only after we've received vertical peace with God that we can pursue horizontal peace with each other. And keep in mind that when we discuss pursuing peace, we don't simply mean the absence of conflict; we pursue *shalom*: restoration and wholeness.

Today we'll look at two other types of peace that are possible because of the peace with God we've received through the blood of Jesus. The first is peace with our own soul.

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Hebrews 9:14](#). How does this verse speak to the personal peace that is possible through Christ?

Hebrews 9:14 (NIRV)

But Christ offered himself to God without any flaw. He did this through the power of the eternal Holy Spirit. So how much cleaner will the blood of Christ make us! It washes away our feelings of guilt for committing sin. Sin always leads to death. But now we can serve the living God.

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Philippians 4:6-7](#) and [1 Peter 5:6-7](#). What instructions do these verses give for how we might pursue inner peace? How do these instructions differ from culture's use of the phrase "inner peace"?

1 Peter 5:6-7

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Philippians 4:6-7

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.

Because we have peace with God, we can grow in peace with ourselves. Past sins and pain no longer have the power to paralyze because we understand and believe that Christ's blood paid the penalty for the sins we committed as well as the sins committed against us. We can begin to heal. When we trust Christ as our Savior, His peace comes to us. We can take our fear and guilt and anxiety to the Lord, and He will help us—His peace will protect our hearts and minds in ways we can't even comprehend.

And as we are growing in peace with ourselves, we can also begin to pursue peace with others.

APPLY THE SCRIPTURE

Read 2 Corinthians 13:11, Romans 12:18, and Ephesians 4:31-32. What do these verses remind us about who God is and what He has done? How should these truths impact our pursuit of peace with others?

Ephesians 4:31-32

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Romans 12:18

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

2 Corinthians 13:11

Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Family Connection

READ

Romans 12:18 (ICB)

Do your best to live in peace with everyone.

Ephesians 4:31-32 (NIRV)

Get rid of all hard feelings, anger and rage. Stop all fighting and lying. Don't have anything to do with any kind of hatred. ³² Be kind and tender to one another. Forgive one another, just as God forgave you because of what Christ has done.

P

DISCUSS

- What do these verses tell us to avoid or stop doing?
Answer: Get rid of anger and rage. Stop all fighting and lying. Avoid all hatred.
- Are there people you've hurt who you need to ask for forgiveness?
- What do these verses tell us to do?
Answer: Live at peace with everyone, be kind and tender to one another, forgive one another
- Who can you show God's love to this week through the way you treat them with kindness?
- Why are you able to forgive others?
Answer: Because God forgave us! When we remember that Jesus died so that we could have peace with God when we were his enemy, then we are able to pursue peace with others.
- Are there people who have hurt you that you need to forgive?

PRAY

Spend time as a family asking for God's help in pursuing peace. Thank God for His forgiveness. Ask for His help in forgiving others.

WEEK 2: PEACE

THURSDAY: Behold Your Savior

“How we direct our eyes, minds, hearts, and hands in the everyday will determine whom we ultimately worship and what we ultimately become. We were made to behold Him and be transformed in Him.”
-Ruth Chou Simons

P

SCRIPTURE

John 16:33, Philippians 4:6-7, Psalm 16:8-9, Psalm 62:8, 1 Peter 5:6-7, Colossians 3:15

It's often been said that *anxiety* is the opposite of peace.

If peace is confidence and trust in God's wise control of our lives, then anxiety is a distrust in God's control. It's assuming we know better; it's living as if we're in control.¹²

To be clear, we are not talking about clinical anxiety; we are talking about the anxieties of life that we all experience. In the Bible, the word for anxiety is *remna*—to be in pieces. For many of us, this state of being in pieces can often feel like the default of life. We often feel pulled in a million directions; a million fears and worries occupy space in our brain. We don't know how to get off the hamster-wheel of anxiety. We long for the wholeness of *shalom*. We know that it's offered to us in Christ, but we're just not quite sure how to *live* in it.

Because we have *real* worries. There is *real* trouble. We experience *real* pain.

The troubles of this world are no surprise or stranger to Jesus. In fact, before His death—a brutal death He knew was coming—He focused

12 [Timothy Keller. “Peace-Overcoming Anxiety.” Gospel in Life.](#)

on preparing His disciples for the troubles that they too would inevitably experience in this life:

John 16:33

“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

We take heart because He who knew no sin became sin so that we might become the righteousness of God (1 Corinthians 5:21). While there is pain and trouble and even tragedy on this side of eternity, it is conquered pain. It is conquered trouble. Through His death and resurrection, Christ has overcome the world. We can hope in Him. We can give our broken anxiety to Him and receive the beautiful fullness of peace that’s available through faith in Him.

So how do we “take heart”?

How do we fight back against the anxiety of everyday life? If we believe that Christ has conquered all sin and overcome the world, how does that practically change how we deal with the pain of life when it comes our way? How do we take heart in the Prince of Peace?

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Psalm 16:8-9](#) and note the connections between the words of the psalmist and our pursuit of peace.

Psalm 16:8-9

*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.*

We are single-minded in our beholding. We set our eyes on Christ. We remember what the angels kept together: *peace on earth and the glory of God* (Luke 2:10). We acknowledge that there is no peace apart from God. We cease trying to hold all the pieces together on our own. We repent of idolizing our worry and fear. We confess that often it becomes the very thing that we set our eyes on and behold.

Remember what the angel said to the shepherds? *Fear not. Behold.* Look at Christmas. Look at Jesus. Marvel at who He is. Praise Him for what He accomplished. Reflect on His promises. Look at your Savior. *Fear not. Behold Christ!*

APPLY THE SCRIPTURE

Read [Philippians 4:6-7](#), [1 Peter 5:6-7](#), [Philippians 4:19](#), and [Colossians 3:15](#). What do these verses reveal about who God is and what He has done (or will do)? In light of that, what instructions do they give us to live out?

1 Peter 5:6-7

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Philippians 4:6-7

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 4:19

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 3:15

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

When we see Christ for who He is and we trust Him as the one in control, we are able to do two things:

- Cast our cares/anxieties on Him
- Give thanks to Him

When we actively and continuously cast our cares on the Lord and give thanks to Him, we are habitually acknowledging with our lives that He occupies the throne...*not us*. Guarded with the truth that Christ, who is our peace, now sits at the right hand of God, we can rest. We can let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.

REFLECT AND PRAY

How often are you casting your anxieties on God? What about giving thanks to Him for who He is and what He has accomplished? What does the presence or absence of these spiritual disciplines in your life say about your functional belief of God as ruler?

Spend time participating in these spiritual practices:

- Confess where you are slow to trust or hand over control.
- Cast your anxieties on Him. (Get specific!)
- Give thanks.

P

LISTEN

- “Behold the Savior” (Meredith Andrews)
- “Do Not Worry” (Ellie Holcomb)

Family Connection

READ

Philippians 4:6-7 (ICB)

Do not worry about anything. But pray and ask God for everything you need. And when you pray, always give thanks. 7 And God's peace will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. The peace that God gives is so great that we cannot understand it.

John 14:27 (ICB)

"I leave you peace. My peace I give you. I do not give it to you as the world does. So don't let your hearts be troubled. Don't be afraid.

DISCUSS

- Why don't we have to be afraid? (John 14:27)

Answer: Jesus gives us His unique and perfect peace

- When we are feeling worried, what should we do? (Philippians 4:6-7)

Answer: Pray to God. Give thanks to Him. Ask Him for everything you need.

PRAY

- Take turns giving thanks to God. Consider making a list of all you have to be thankful for and then allow different family members to thank God for items from the list.
- Take turns going to God with your worries. Lay them at his feet. Thank God that He's in control and you can trust Him.

WEEK 2: PEACE

FRIDAY: Pray to God

“An accurate gauge of our level of faith is how and how much we pray. A growing prayerful dependence on God is evidence of our growing spiritual maturity. And the more we pray in faith in everything, the more we experience the peace of God.” –Jon Bloom

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 34:14, 1 Peter 3:11, Romans 8:6, Isaiah 26:3, Psalm 62:8

This week we’ve celebrated the gift that is the Peace of Christ. We’ve been reminded of the good news that the angels proclaimed to the shepherds: peace is possible—peace with God, peace with ourselves, peace with others. We’ve accepted the call to behold Christ and focus on the peace He brings. We’ve examined our hearts and minds for where we are prone to let fear and anxiety reign, and we’ve practiced the discipline of surrendering our anxieties to Christ and thanking Him for all that He’s done.

Today, we want to practice allowing peace to rule by setting our hearts (and minds) on the Prince of Peace.

READ AND RESPOND

Last week we examined the call to fight for hope with our minds. Similarly the Bible calls us to engage our minds in our pursuit of peace. Read [Romans 8:6](#) and [Isaiah 26:3](#). How do these verses speak to the work in our minds?

P

Romans 8:6

For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

Isaiah 26:3

*You keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you.*

How do we get this peace? We cease living as though we can fix all of our broken pieces and we begin daily laying them at the feet of the One who restores: the Prince of *Shalom*.

How does peace rule our hearts? We stop endlessly striving after faith and we set our eyes on the Faithful One.

We behold our Savior.

As writer and artist Ruth Chou Simons puts it: “Our eyes are rudders that will direct our hearts. We get to choose where we set our gaze. We become what we behold.”¹³

Refocusing is transformative. As we cast our cares and anxieties on Christ and behold the Prince of Peace, we become people of peace.

In his poignant article, “Rest in the Prince of Peace,” Jon Bloom reflects on the lines from the old hymn, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” written by Joseph M. Scriven in 1855:

¹³ Ruth Chou Simons. *Becoming and Beholding*. Harvest House Publishers, 2019.

APPLY THE SCRIPTURE

Reread 1 Peter 5:6-7, Philippians 4:6-7, Philippians 4:19, Colossians 3:15.

Spend time thanking God. He is trustworthy. He is your refuge. He is your peace.

End by asking for God to create the pattern in your life of casting your worries on Christ.

Is there a particular verse from this week that you need to write out and place somewhere as a reminder to set your gaze on Christ? What truth from this week could serve as a quick refocusing tool as you behold the Prince of Peace?

LISTEN

- “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” (Chandler Moore)

Family Connection

How as a family can you set aside time to *pray to God* together?

Here are a few suggestions:

- Look back at the list you made last week of God’s promises and His character. Spend time thanking God for who He is, what He has done, and what He’s promised to do.
- Share with each other what you are worried or anxious about. Parents, model what it looks like to “pour your heart out to God”—to lay your worries and anxieties at the feet of Jesus—and then, help your children do the same.
- Listen to our “Songs of Peace” Spotify playlist for the week. Are there any lines from these songs that you could turn in to prayers to God? Maybe even write them down, or allow your kids to paint them on paper or a canvas and hang it in your home as a reminder that Christ is our peace.
- Choose a verse to memorize and discuss how memorizing God’s Word can help pursue peace. (Consider choosing one from the Weekly Family Guide)

P

WEEK 2: PEACE

SATURDAY: Share Your Peace

“Christmas means that, through the grace of God and the incarnation, peace with God is available; and if you make peace with God, then you can go out and make peace with everybody else. And the more people who embrace the Gospel and do that, the better off the world is. Christmas, therefore, means the increase of peace—both with God and between people—across the face of the world.” -Tim Keller



SCRIPTURE

Matthew 5:9

Just as Christians should be known as hopeful people, we should also be marked by our pursuit of peace. After a while, non-Christians who do life with us should recognize that we handle the troubles of this world differently.

APPLY THE WEEK’S SCRIPTURES

Take a moment right now and think about how you’d articulate the peace that you have in Christ. What did Christ accomplish to make you right with God? Why are you able to pursue peace with others? How are you able to have peace rule your heart and mind even in the midst of trouble and heartache?

Matthew 5:9

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

As children of God, those who have been made right with God, we are now sent out into our world as peacemakers. We now get to spread shalom to those around us.

Check out Tim Keller's description of peacemakers from his book *Hidden Christmas: The Surprising Truth Behind the Birth of Christ*:

Peacemakers are people who, through making peace with God, have finally learned how to admit flaws and weakness, how to surrender their pride, how to love without the need to control every situation. These new skills have enormous power to diffuse conflicts, to facilitate forgiveness and reconciliation between people. Christians should be fanning out into the world being peacemakers, agents of reconciliation among the races and classes, among the members of families, and between neighbor and neighbor.¹⁵

What does it look like this weekend for you to join Jesus in His mission and be a peacemaker in Columbia?

Is there a relationship in your life that you know is a bit off or broken? As much as it depends on you, what can you do to bring shalom to that relationship? Is it a phone call? An invitation for coffee? Remember that because of the peace you've received through Christ, you can now lead in humbly admitting where you've wronged someone and ask for forgiveness. You can also graciously extend forgiveness to others. Go. Make the phone call. Have the coffee...*and* the difficult conversation. Increase the peace in Columbia through your reconciled relationship.

Is there someone that God has placed in your life that you know is hurting? Someone who's experiencing the pain and tribulation of life? A co-worker? A neighbor? How can you bring a glimpse of God's restoration by meeting a physical need? And while doing so, how could you share about the peace you've received through Christ?

¹⁵ Timothy Keller. *Hidden Christmas*. Viking, 2016.

How could you go out and be a peacemaker to the hurting and vulnerable in our city? Consider joining us in our mission to bring the peace of Christ to our Serve the City Partners. Check midtowncolumbia.com/servethecity for a list of opportunities to serve this Advent season. Prayerfully ask the Lord to use you to bear witness to His peace.

PRAY

As you go about your weekend, pray for eyes to see the hurting and vulnerable—the broken. Pray that you'd have boldness and compassion to step in as a peacemaker. Pray boldly that Columbia might see the increase of peace and shalom through Christ in you.

LISTEN

- “Begin and Never Cease” (The Oh Hellos)

Family Connection

READ

Matthew 5:9 (ICB)

*Those who work to bring peace are happy.
God will call them his sons.*

DISCUSS/PLAN

As a family, think through how you can display the peace of Christ this Advent season.

- Are there projects or initiatives that your children's school(s) are already doing to serve the weak or vulnerable in our community? How can you partner with them and intentionally pray for and discuss these service opportunities as a chance to share the peace of Christ by meeting tangible needs?

- Are there specific neighbors that God may be calling you to share the peace of Christ with this season? How could you tangibly put God's love and the peace that He offers on display?

*(Through making cookies and writing notes? By meeting a tangible need like helping with yard work or repairs? By making a meal or better yet, inviting them into your home for a meal? By inviting them to join your family for a festive holiday activity around our city?)**

- Is there a verse from this week's guide that has stood out to your family as particularly encouraging? Consider making some sort of craft or ornament that you could write the verse on and give to others.

PRAY

Ask God to give your family a heart for peace. Pray for opportunities to share the peace you have in Him with others. Pray that as you serve this Advent season, you would do so with joyful hearts, remembering that you get to put God's love and peace on display to a world in desperate need of *shalom*.

Additional Resources

“Shalom: “Peace.” *The Bible Project*. thebibleproject.com/videos/shalom-peace/

Matt Chandler. “The Peace Jesus Brings.” *The Village Church*. tvcresources.net/resource-library/sermons/the-peace-jesus-brings

Timothy Keller. *Hidden Christmas*. Viking, 2016.

Timothy Keller. “Peace-Overcoming Anxiety.” *Gospel in Life*. gospelinlife.com/downloads/peace-8598/

Ruth Chou Simons. *Beholding and Becoming*. Harvest House Publishers, 2019.

Jon Bloom. “Rest in the Prince of Peace.” *Desiring God*. desiringgod.org/articles/rest-in-the-prince-of-peace

Family Guide Week 2

CANDLE OF PEACE SUNDAY FAMILY DEVOTION

Last week we celebrated that God gave us Jesus to be our light and our hope.

Light the “Hope” candle from last week.

This week, we are going to celebrate that God gave us Jesus to be our peace and make a way for us to be right with God.

Let’s look at what the angels said to the shepherds on the night that Jesus was born:

Have someone read [Luke 2:8-15](#) out loud.

Luke 2:8-15 (ICB)

That night, some shepherds were in the fields nearby watching their sheep. ⁹ An angel of the Lord stood before them. The glory of the Lord was shining around them, and suddenly they became very frightened. ¹⁰ The angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, because I am bringing you some good news. It will be a joy to all the people. ¹¹ Today your Savior was born in David’s town. He is Christ, the Lord. ¹² This is how you will know him: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a feeding box.”

¹³ Then a very large group of angels from heaven joined the first angel. All the angels were praising God, saying:

*¹⁴ **“Give glory to God in heaven, and on earth let there be peace to the people who please God.”***

¹⁵ Then the angels left the shepherds and went back to heaven. The shepherds said to each other, “Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened. We will see this thing the Lord told us about.”

P

What did the angels tell the shepherds? (*Don't be afraid! We are bringing good news! Today, your Savior has been born! Praise God! Because of Jesus, peace is possible!*)

Light the “Peace” Candle

The angels were so excited to tell the shepherds the good news that a savior, Jesus Christ, had been born.

Through Jesus, it is possible to have peace with God. Instead of being an enemy of God because of our sin, we can be adopted into God's family!

But that's not all! Because of Jesus, peace on earth is actually possible too!

Let's read what Jesus told his disciples and best friends before He died on the cross:

Have someone read [John 14:27](#).

John 14:27

“I leave you peace. My peace I give you. I do not give it to you as the world does. So don't let your hearts be troubled. Don't be afraid.”

Jesus was leaving His followers—those who trusted in Him—His peace. And He told His friends that because they had His peace, they didn't have to be afraid!

The peace of Christ gets rid of our fears! We don't have to be afraid! Praise God for the gift of peace through Jesus!

DISCUSS

- When do you feel afraid? Because of Jesus, what can you do when you are afraid?
- As a family, how can we remember and celebrate the good news that Jesus brings peace this week?
- Remind each other that Jesus brings light and peace whenever you see Christmas lights this week.
- Any time someone expresses fear, remind each other that you don't have

to be afraid—that you can praise God because through Him, we have peace (more on that to come this week!)

PRAY

Let's thank God for the gift of peace through His Son, Jesus. Let's thank Him that we don't have to be afraid and that peace is possible. Let's ask God to help us trust Him and His promises. Let's ask Him to help us see the peace offered to us through Jesus as bigger and better than anything else that may or may not appear under our tree Christmas morning.

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THE BIBLE PROJECT FAMILY QUIZ (MONDAY)

“Shalom: “Peace.” *The Bible Project*.

thebibleproject.com/videos/shalom-peace/

What is the Hebrew word for peace in the Old Testament?

Answer: Shalom

What does shalom mean?

Answer: Complete or whole

What is the Greek word for peace in the New Testament?

Answer: Eirine

What was Jesus’ birth announced as?

Answer: The arrival of eirine

What are Jesus’ followers now called to do?

Answer: Create peace

FAMILY CONNECTIONS (TUESDAY-SATURDAY)

Be sure to check out our daily mini family devotions located at the end of each day in the adult guide. Each mini family devotion coordinates with the adult theme for the day and includes a Scripture passage, discussion questions, and a family prayer prompt.

DAILY FAMILY CONNECTION SCRIPTURE RECAP

Sunday: Luke 2:8-15, John 14:27

Monday: Isaiah 26:3

Tuesday: Romans 5:9-11, 1

Wednesday: Romans 12:18, Ephesians 4:31-32

Thursday: John 14:27, Philipians 4:6-7

Friday: *Choose a verse to memorize as a family*

Saturday: Matthew 5:9

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SONG RECOMMENDATIONS

- Check out our [“Songs of Peace”](#) playlist on Spotify (search user: midtowncolumbia) for the complete list of songs for the week.
- Watch the following animated music video from The Rizers: John 14:27 (Do Not Be Afraid): [youtube.com/watch?v=LjJPrsdCT3Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjJPrsdCT3Y)
- Watch (or listen) to Ellie Holcomb’s song, “Fear Not” based on Isaiah 43:1 ellieholcomb.com/blog-2/2019/5/2/fear-not-lyric-video

MOVIE CONNECTION

Watch the short (30 minute) animated classic, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. As you watch, pause and talk about Linus and his security blanket. And then pay attention to what happens as Linus recites Luke 2:8-14. (*Spoiler alert: He drops his security blanket--the one he’s famous for always having with him. As a family, pay attention to the exact moment that he drops it and be ready to discuss!*)

You can check out Jason Soroski’s excellent article about the moment in the film here: Jason Soroski. “Just Drop the Blanket.” *Gospel Coalition*. thegospelcoalition.org/article/just-drop-the-blanket/

SHARE THE PEACE IDEAS

As a family, think through how you can display God's love and the peace of Christ this Advent season.

See page 52 for ideas.

WEEK 3: JOY

SUNDAY: Jesus is Our Joy

“Joy is the serious business of heaven.” -C.S. Lewis

SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:8-20

READ AND OBSERVE

Read [Luke 2:8-20](#). Note your observations. Pay attention to the angel's message and the shepherds' response.

Luke 2:8-20

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made

known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Light the 3rd Candle.

Click here for our Week 3 Family Candle Lighting Devotion on page 136.

This week we light the third candle that represents the joy of Christ. This candle is often referred to as the “Shepherds’ Candle,” as we, like the shepherds, rejoice in response to Christ’s birth.

It is fitting that we look at the gift of joy after examining the gift of peace because the two are intertwined. Without the peace of Christ, we cannot experience the joy of Christ; our inner joy is the result of our objective peace with God.

Jesus’ birth is announced as good news of great joy. The Good News of Christ—the gospel—is one of joy. The angels proclaimed this to the shepherds who at once set off to see for themselves. Upon experiencing joy wrapped in swaddling clothes, they shared the good news. They told everyone: Joy is here! And they rejoiced, praising God for all they had seen and heard.

And that is where we will begin on this third Sunday of Advent. Like the shepherds, let's rejoice in the good news of Christ's birth. For we know that His birth is the fulfillment of the prophecy; we know that in Him we find hope, and peace, and ultimately joy. Let's look to Him as our treasure this week and, like the shepherds, be marked by our rejoicing.

REFLECT AND PRAY

- As you read this account in Luke, what stood out to you about the character of God?
- While this is certainly a familiar passage, was there anything that you noticed for the first time?
- Did any new truths stand out to you about yourself in light of who God is or what He accomplished through sending His Son?
- Pray and ask the Lord to reveal Himself more deeply to you this week as you study His Word and examine the joy found in Christ. Thank Him for this gift of joy. Ask the Lord to reveal anywhere that you are looking to this holiday season to bring you the joy that is only found in Him.



LISTEN

- “Joy Has Dawned” (Kings Kaleidoscope)
- “Angels We Have Heard on High” (The Modern Post)

Family Connection

Complete the lighting of the 3rd Advent candle.

[Click here for the Family Candle Lighting Devotion on page 136.](#)

WEEK 3: JOY

MONDAY: The Meaning of Biblical Joy

“Christian joy is a profound decision of faith and hope in the power of Jesus’ own life and love.” –The Bible Project (“Chara/Joy”)

SCRIPTURE

Philippians 3:1, Matthew 5:11-12, Acts 5:41, Acts 13:52, 2 Corinthians 6:10, Isaiah 51:11, Romans 15:13

How do you hear the word *joy* used most often in our culture? Perhaps it’s as someone describes an extraordinary event or experience. Maybe you hear it used interchangeably with the word *happy*. Lately, our culture has shifted a lot of their energy to eliminating people and possessions that do not elicit *joy*. Does this pair of pants spark joy when you hold it? If not, toss it. Does this person fill your joy tank? If not, cast her out of your inner circle. Culturally speaking, joy seems to be a level of ultimate happiness that we are able to achieve if we can just decipher the right combination of people, possessions, and experiences in our life.

In the Bible, there are many sources of joy that people find in the beautiful, good world that God created. We see people finding joy in their harvest (Psalm 65:11-12), a good bottle of wine (Psalm 104:15), at a wedding (Jeremiah 33:11), in their children (Proverbs 23:24-25), and with a good friend (Proverbs 27:9).

And these things are good. It is right to recognize and take joy in God’s creation. But the Bible’s definition of joy extends beyond that because biblical faith offers a unique perspective on joy—joy that is possible in *all* circumstances.

READ AND RESPOND

Read Philippians 3:1, Matthew 11-12, Acts 5:41, Acts 13:52, and 2 Corinthians 6:10. How do these verses broaden our definition of joy? How do the various uses of joy/rejoice here differ from how you see culture approach it? Do any in particular stand out as the most counter-cultural?

Philippians 3:1 (NIV)

*Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord!
It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.*

Matthew 5:11-12 (NIV)

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Acts 5:41 (NIV)

The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.

Acts 13:52

And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 6:10

Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

The writers of *The Bible Project* sum up biblical joy this way: “Joy is an attitude that God’s people adopt, not because of happy circumstances, but because of their hope in God’s love and promise.”¹⁶

When the Israelites were led out of slavery and into freedom, the first thing they did was sing for joy in the middle of the desert (Psalm 105:43). They had not even reached the Promised Land, but that didn’t stop them from rejoicing in God’s promise and their hope in Him. In fact, the phrase “joy in the wilderness” became a marking phrase of God’s people as they rejoiced in the hope of God’s promises even in very difficult times.

This theme appears again when the prophet Isaiah anticipated the day when God would raise up a new deliverer:

Isaiah 51:11

Those the Lord has rescued will return.

They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads.

Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

¹⁶ [“Chara/Joy.” The Bible Project.](#)

This is also why it was so significant that the angels proclaimed that Jesus's birth was "good news of great joy."

Throughout His time on Earth, Jesus rejoiced in His father, placing His hope in the Father's promises and love. Jesus also taught His followers the same "joy in the wilderness" mentality (Matthew 5:12).

After Jesus's death and resurrection, early Christians became known as "full of joy" even when they were persecuted. When Paul addressed the early Christians, he referred to joy as a gift of God's spirit:

Romans 15:13 (NIV)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So joy is a good feeling, but it's more than that; it's a soul-level good feeling that the Holy Spirit produces in us that allows us to see the beauty of God's love and put our hope in Him.

PRAY AND REFLECT

- Where have you made joy too small a thing?
- Confess to God where your joy has looked more like the world's definition of joy than the one laid out in Scripture.
- Pray that the Lord would fill you with all joy as you trust in Him.

LISTEN

- "Hail the King" (Citizens & Saints)
- "Glory" (Gungor)

Family Connection

Watch the Bible Project's 4-minute video: ["Chara/Joy"](#) and check out the family quiz questions in **this week's Family Guide on page 138**.

READ

Romans 15:13 (NIRV)

May the God who gives hope fill you with great joy. May you have perfect peace as you trust in him. May the power of the Holy Spirit fill you with hope.

DISCUSS

- According to the Bible, where does our joy come from?

Answer: God fills us with great joy

- What else does this verse say God does?

Answer: He gives hope. He makes perfect peace possible as we trust in Him. The Holy Spirit fills us with hope

- What things in life give you the greatest joy? Take some time as a family to thank God for the gift of joy. Thank God for creating us to enjoy Him and His creation.

PRAY

Thank God for the gift of joy. Ask Him to fill the members of your family with a great joy for Him. Pray that this week you all would be able to actively celebrate the good news of great joy that Christmas is all about!

WEEK 3: JOY

TUESDAY: The Gospel of Joy

“What Jesus accomplished on the cross has the power to set us free from sin and set us up for joy.”

–Jackie Hill Perry

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 2:8-10, Romans 15:13, Galatians 5:22-23, John 16:14, John 15:1-11, Hebrews 12:2

Christ’s birth brought great joy. When the shepherds experienced it, they rejoiced and made known to all they encountered that *joy had arrived*. The wise men had a similar response upon encountering Jesus:

Matthew 2:8-10

And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.”⁹ After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

The shepherds encountered Jesus, and rejoicing was their response. The wise men, the very men sent to kill Jesus, *rejoiced exceedingly with great joy* as the star guided them to the Christ child. And when we come face to face with the beauty of who Christ is and what He has done, it should lead us to similar rejoicing.

But even this rejoicing is not entirely of our own doing. When we put our faith and trust and hope in Jesus, the Holy Spirit actually produces joy in us; the Holy Spirit causes us to see all that is beautiful and worthy and lovely in the person and promises of God—and our response is rejoicing!

READ AND OBSERVE

Read Romans 15:13 and Galatians 5:22-23. Mark in the text the work of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

The Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to rejoice in the Lord! But what does this look like on a day-to-day basis? Jesus explained to His followers how joy connected with their daily spiritual lives:

APPLY THE SCRIPTURE

Read Jesus's instructions in John 15:1-11. Mark words that repeat, transitional phrases, and anything else that stands out to you.

John 15:1-11

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me,

so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

What does Jesus's teaching reveal about the character of God? In turn, what do we learn about ourselves? What should be our response?

In verse 11, Jesus explains that these instructions are given so that we would experience the fullness of joy. According to Jesus, how do we get the *fullness of joy*? What's the connection between joy and our daily spiritual lives?

Joy comes from seeing, knowing, loving, and trusting Jesus. If we are abiding in Christ and finding our satisfaction in Him, then we will rejoice in Him. Musician and author Jackie Hill Perry describes the connection this way:

Jesus brought us into fellowship with God and by doing so he's brought us to where real happiness is found. What Christ has done has made us alive to all that God is. Now we can live as he would have us live, in obedient delight.¹⁷

¹⁷ [Jackie Hill Perry, "When Temptation Holds Out Pleasure." Desiring God.](#)

Choose to abide in Christ today. By the Holy Spirit's power at work in your life, choose to see Him as the most beautiful, glorious, soul-satisfying thing. *Rejoice!*

REFLECT AND PRAY

- What does it look like for you to walk in delightful obedience today as it relates to John 15?
- What daily spiritual disciplines might help you as you abide in God and rejoice in Him?
- Thank God for the work of the Holy Spirit that enables you to have joy and be satisfied in Christ.

LISTEN

- “Mvmt I, Rejoice! Rejoice! (The Oh Hellos)
- “O Come All Ye Faithful” (JohnnySwim)

Family Connection

READ

John 15:9-11

I loved you as the Father loved me. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ I have obeyed my Father's commands, and I remain in his love. In the same way, if you obey my commands, you will remain in my love. ¹¹ I have told you these things so that you can have the same joy I have. I want your joy to be the fullest joy.

DISCUSS

- What do these verses teach us about Jesus?

Answer: He loves us the way that God loves Him. He obeys God's commands. He wants us to have the fullness of joy.

- What do these verses teach us about ourselves?

Answer: We are perfectly loved by Jesus. We can have the same joy that Jesus has.

- What do these verses teach us about how we can have joy?

Answer: We can have the same joy that Jesus experiences with God if we will remain in Jesus's love and obey His commands.

PRAY

Thank Jesus for loving you with His perfect love. Thank Jesus that through Him and His Holy Spirit, you can have joy. Ask God for His help as you learn to remain in His love and obey His commands.

J

WEEK 3: JOY

WEDNESDAY: Rejoice in All Circumstances

“So though trials may come, I can be confident that he will give me the sustaining grace for them. I can rejoice in suffering because I know I have a living hope.”

–Trillia Newbell

SCRIPTURE

Philippians 3:1, Philippians 4:4, Philippians 2:14-15, Philippians 4:10-13, Philippians 1:6, Philippians 1:12, Philippians 4:19

READ AND OBSERVE

Finding joy and satisfaction in God is a mandate. It's not optional. Note the instructions given in each verse:

Philippians 3:1

Philippians 4:4

We know that the Holy Spirit produces joy in us and that it's through daily abiding in Christ that we can have the fullness of joy. But what are we to do with verses like Philippians 4:4 where Paul calls Christians to “rejoice always.” Is it really possible to have joy and rejoice in all circumstances—even those where joy feels impossible?

First, we must clear up a common misconception. If joy is more than mere happiness, then the opposite of joy is *not* sadness. If joy is a soul-level gladness coming from a confidence in the person and promises of God, then the opposite of joy is actually *hopelessness*.

Tim Keller describes joy as a spiritual buoyancy that comes when we are rejoicing in God.¹⁸ Similarly, Pastor H.B. Charles Jr. calls Christians people of “stubborn joy.” He goes on to explain that our joy is not “*hypocrisy*. *It does not deny the facts. And it is not merely optimism or positive thinking. Christian joy is real and rational. We rejoice in the Lord always.*”¹⁹

Because we've placed our hope and faith in the person of Jesus and we have the gift of the Holy Spirit living inside giving us the ability to see God's beauty and goodness, we can rejoice no matter the circumstances.

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Philippians 4:10-13](#). What has Paul learned is the secret to having joy in all circumstances? (*Hint: It's not winning a football game*)

¹⁸ Tim Keller. “Peace- Overcoming Anxiety.” [Gospel in Life](#).

¹⁹ H.B. Charles Jr. “Don't Let it Stress You Out!” [H.B. Charles Jr.](#)

Philippians 4:10-13

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Isn't it amusing how widely out of context Philippians 4:13 is used? When we see it in the context of Paul's letter to the church in Philippi, this inspirational coffee mug verse takes on a whole new meaning. Turns out it has less to do with winning sporting events and more to do with where we, as Christians, gain our strength to have joy in all circumstances. The secret is faith in God's sovereignty. John Piper explains it this way:

The secret is faith in God's sovereignty and in the sweetness of Christ. When we have little and have lost much, Christ comes and reveals himself as more valuable than what we have lost. And when we are overflowing with abundance, Christ comes and he shows us that he is far superior to everything we have.²⁰

We can have joy in all circumstances because we have faith in the sovereignty of God and sweetness of Christ. Let these verses remind you of His sovereignty today:

²⁰ [John Piper. "What is the Secret of Joy in Suffering?" Desiring God.](#)

Philippians 1:6

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:12

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel,

Philippians 4:19

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

The beauty is that God even gives us the faith needed to have joy in all circumstances. In her article, “Sorrowful Yet Always Rejoicing,” Author Trillia Newbell summarizes this God-given gift so poignantly:

The beauty of faith is that it isn't derived from me. God graciously gives me faith to believe his promises to sustain me to the end. He gives me faith to trust that he is with me in my days of trouble. All good things, including the faith to endure trials, is from him (James 1:17). So though trials may come, I can be confident that he will give me the sustaining grace for them. I can rejoice in suffering because I know I have a living hope. I know that my hope will bring me to an eternal glory. I will one day rise and be with Christ forever. I can rejoice in suffering today because I know that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put me to shame, because God's love has been poured into my heart through the holy spirit who has been given to me. (Romans 5:1-5).²¹

REFLECT AND PRAY

- What encouragement from today's reading do you need to focus

21 [Trillia Newbell. "Sorrowful, Yet Always Rejoicing. Desiring God.](#)

Family Connection

READ

Read part of Paul's letter that he wrote to the church of Philippi while he was in jail:

Philippians 4:11-13 (NIRV)

I'm not saying this because I need anything. I have learned to be content no matter what happens to me. ¹² I know what it's like not to have what I need. I also know what it's like to have more than I need. I have learned the secret of being content no matter what happens. I am content whether I am well fed or hungry. I am content whether I have more than enough or not enough. ¹³ I can do all this by the power of Christ. He gives me strength.

DISCUSS

- What does it mean to be content?
- What has Paul learned is the secret to being content no matter what is going on in his life?

Answer: Through Jesus who gives him strength, Paul has learned to trust God in all things and in all circumstances

- What are some circumstances or things about your life that you wish you could change? How can you apply Paul's teaching to your circumstances?

PRAY

Thank God that through the power of Christ you can have joy in all circumstances. Pray through specific needs and circumstances that members of your family have. Ask God for the faith to trust His goodness and thank Him that He gives you the strength to rejoice no matter what!

WEEK 3: JOY

THURSDAY: Rejoice for Your Safety

“Joy is the emotion of salvation.” –Jim Johnston

SCRIPTURE

Philippians 3:1, Psalm 16:2, Psalm 73:25, James 1:16-17

READ AND OBSERVE

Read Philippians 3:1. Why does Paul tell Christians to rejoice in the Lord?

Philippians 3:1

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

Paul connects our rejoicing to our safety; in this way, our joy should function as a spiritual health barometer. If we are satisfied in Christ, we will rejoice in Christ. But if we stop beholding Him and take our eyes off of the sweetness of Christ, we will lose our joy.

So let's take some time today to gauge our joy:

As Christians, we should be people of great joy! We have the Holy Spirit producing joy in us, giving us the ability to see God's goodness and sovereignty. We know that through Christ, we have the fulfillment of joy. Yet there are a lot of miserable Christians walking around—perhaps if you were honest, you'd even self-identify as one. You know these things to be true about God, yet functionally, your life is not marked by joy.

As we honestly assess our joy, we must examine if we functionally believe that God is good—He alone is good—and all good is from Him.

APPLY THE SCRIPTURE

Read [James 1:16-17](#), [Psalm 16:2](#), [Psalm 73:25](#). What do these verses reveal about God? In turn, what do they teach us about ourselves?

Psalm 16:2

*I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord;
I have no good apart from you."*

Psalm 73:25

*Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.*

James 1:16-17

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

God is good. God alone is good. And all good comes from God.

We can delight in God because *He* is our joy. As we gauge our joy, we must ask ourselves if we are looking at other things to bring the satisfaction that only God can bring. In his article, “Why Are So Many Christians Unhappy,” Jim Johnston explains why this is so critical:

It’s important for every Christian to be convinced that God is good. And what’s more—God alone is good. If we are not absolutely convinced that God alone is good, we will not be able to say “no” to other gods that promise joy but deliver sorrow. We don’t dare to imagine that there is even a sliver of good apart from God and his will for our lives. Every ounce of good in this world comes from God. Nothing can possibly be good unless it comes from God. A joyful Christian believes this truth. He banks his life—and his joy—on it.²²

Johnston goes on to argue that the most miserable Christians are those who try to live with a foot in both worlds: they claim that God is their treasure and source of joy but they are still searching for satisfaction and security outside of Him. Instead of enjoying the gifts and thanking the Giver for them, they are still looking to the gifts themselves to provide something that they were never meant to provide.

In her hilarious essay, “Kids, We Eat Food, Not Crayons. Not Boogers,” author Gloria Furman compares the way her young children eat crayons, boogers, and other non-food items to how we search for satisfaction outside of Christ: “In the desolate wilderness of a fallen world the only place we can find what our souls crave is in God himself. But out of habit we reach for that which is not bread and things that fail to satisfy us.”²³ We are making idols out of the grown-up version of boogers and crayons. We are looking to relationships or jobs or money or looks to bring us the joy that only God can.

We are searching for joy but we will only find sorrow.

And we will do this out of habit. Without minds engaged and hearts looking to be strengthened in Christ, we will mindlessly fill our souls with things that don’t satisfy. We will chase after lesser gods and we will enter the danger zone without even realizing it.

²² [Jim Johnston. “Why Are So Many Christians Unhappy?” Desiring God.](#)

²³ [Gloria Furman. “Kids, We Eat Food, Not Crayons, Not Boogers.” Desiring God.](#)

We must begin to recognize when we are looking for satisfaction and security outside of God. We must begin to notice when we start treasuring the blessing over the Blessor.

To be clear, this does not mean that as Christians we are to walk around with blindfolds on, shutting out all of the pleasures of this world. In fact, it's quite the opposite! Christians should know more about joy than anyone else because we are thinking about the God who created this faint pleasure that's a small taste of what it will be like when we are in His presence and goodness for all eternity.

In his book, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, C.S. Lewis describes his personal goal of taking every pleasure that he encounters through a “channel of adoration” that goes beyond simply giving thanks for the pleasure. Lewis writes that his aim is to receive the gift and recognize its divine source as a single experience:

There need be no question of thanks or praise as a separate event, something done afterwards. To experience the tiny theophany is itself to adore. Gratitude exclaims, very properly, “How good of God to give me this.” Adoration says, “What must be the quality of that being whose far-off and momentary coruscations are like this!” One’s mind runs up the sunbeam to the sun. If I could always be what I aim at being, no pleasure would be too ordinary or too usual for such reception; from the first taste of air when I look out the window—one’s whole cheek becomes a palate—down to one’s soft-slippers at bedtime.²⁴

Today, allow your mind to run up the sunbeam to the sun! Allow the pleasures of this world to point you to Jesus. Hope in Him and His goodness; your safety depends on it!

²⁴ C.S. Lewis *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*. HarperOne, 2017.

Family Connection

READ

Psalm 16:2 (ICB)

I said to the Lord, "You are my Lord.

Every good thing I have comes from you."

James 1:17 (ICB)

Every good action and every perfect gift is from God.

These good gifts come down from the Creator of the sun, moon, and stars. God does not change like their shifting shadows.

DISCUSS

- Where does every good thing come from?

Answer: God

- Why is it important for us to remember that every good gift (or blessing or pleasure) comes from God? Why is this particularly important for us to remember during this Christmas season?
- How can we help each other remember that God is the giver of every good gift?

PRAY

As a family, thank God for the pleasures and gifts He gives. Pray that as a family, your joy and adoration would be grounded in Him and not the gifts themselves. Ask that over the last week of Advent, your family would grow in gratitude and adoration for Jesus.

WEEK 3: JOY

FRIDAY: Rejoice Always

“We will never know that God is better than all these other distractions until we stop long enough to taste and see that He is.” –Ruth Chou Simons

This week we’ve celebrated the gift of joy in Christ. We’ve thanked God for Christ’s birth that brought us the gospel of *great joy*. We’ve unpacked how the Holy Spirit produces joy in us and gives us the ability to put our faith in the sovereignty and sweetness of God. We’ve seen that in order to have the fullness of Christ’s joy, we must abide in God and in His love. We’ve examined how it’s possible to have joy in all circumstances and how we can grieve and endure all trials with hope through God who gives us strength. Yesterday we acknowledged the danger in looking to anything other than God for our joy. We were reminded that He is the giver of all gifts and finding soul-satisfying joy in delighting in Him is critical to our spiritual health.

Today, we want to set aside space to *rejoice in the Lord*—to relish in the sovereignty of God and the sweetness of Christ. True joy is a gift *and* it must be fought for.

Here are a few things you may consider doing today as you fight for joy:

This list is compiled from John Piper’s book: [When I Don’t Desire God: How To Fight For Joy](#).²⁵ You can download the book for free [here](#).

Resolve to attack all known sin in your life by the power of the Holy Spirit

²⁵ John Piper. *When I Don’t Desire God: How To Fight For Joy*. Crossway Books, 2013.

Here are some helpful categories to think through with the goal of putting all sin to death:

- Sins of commission (*things you are doing that you shouldn't be doing*)
- Sins of omission (*things you're not doing that you should be doing*)
- Wanting what you shouldn't
- Not wanting what you should
- Any way you're not believing God at His word

Realize that the battle is primarily a fight to see—to see God for who He is

Make a list of the characteristics of God. Meditate on them. Reflect on who you are in light of who He is and who He has created you to be. For additional resources, check out the Midtown sermon series, “Worthy” and Jen Wilkin’s book, *None Like Him*.

Meditate on the Word of God day and night

Re-read the Scripture in this guide. Choose some to memorize. If you haven't already, sign up through Midtown to receive the Bible Reading Plan straight to your inbox every morning.

Pray earnestly and continually for open heart, eyes, and an inclination for God

Write out your prayers. Sing songs that point your mind and heart to Him. Seek to behold Him in the moments of your everyday life.

Learn to preach to yourself rather than listen to yourself

What lies are you tempted to believe? Where do you find yourself searching for satisfaction and value apart from Christ? Know where you are “prone to wander” and fight your feelings with the truth of the gospel.

Spend time with God-saturated people who help you see God and fight the fight

Reach out to a LifeGroup member or other friend and together, fight for joy by practicing some of these disciplines or through sharing some of your responses and reflections from the week.

Make a proper use of God's revelation in nature

Use your time to intentionally practice the discipline of directing your adoration “up the sunbeam to the sun” (from the blessing to the Blessor)

Read great books about God

Unsure where to start? Go to midtowncolumbia.com/bookstore or check out our “Additional Resources” page each week in this Advent Guide for a few recommendations.

LISTEN

- “Rejoice, Rejoice” (The Oh Hellos)

Family Connection

DISCUSS

Below you will find a few ideas for how to spend some time this weekend rejoicing in God together.

- Choose a verse from this week and commit to memorize it as a family. For an additional activity, take the verse and create Christmas ornaments with it (maybe even make them to give as gifts) or paint the verse onto a canvas or color pictures with the verse written at the top and display it somewhere in your house.
- Pray for open eyes and hearts that care about the things of God and treasure Him above all else.
- Depending on the weather, get out in nature as a family. As you experience the pleasure and beauty found in nature, give thanks to God and allow the experience to grow your adoration for Christ and joy in Him.
- Remind each other that all good things are from Him!
- Plan an activity with another family from your LifeGroup that allows you to treasure Jesus together.
- Read a favorite book about Jesus. If you haven't already, check out *God's Promise*, *The Garden the Curtain and the Cross*, or *God's Very Good Idea*.

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Philippians 1:27-28](#). What does Paul tell the church in Philippi will be a visible sign of their salvation?

Philippians 1:27-28

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

Paul tells the church to live in a way that makes the gospel look worthy or valuable. His call to believers is to “Live worthy of the gospel.” How do we make the gospel look worthy? Together, we pursue the faith of the gospel. Together, we strive to treasure Jesus above everything else because we know that He is what our souls need. His goodness and mercy are deserving of all of our praise and adoration.

The way that we live should call attention to the gospel—our very lives should put the *good news of great joy* on display! We make the gospel appear worthy not by simply believing in it, but by living our daily lives in a way that displays that we’ve come to treasure Jesus and the things that He says are important above everything else. When our very lives *rejoice* in Him, we are showing people what saving faith looks like.

The word *rejoice* is a call to joy. The early church used it as a way to greet and depart from one another. It served as a spurring one another on in the faith—a reminder that by doing so, we are living out our faith.²⁶ We are making the gospel look beautiful to people who have not yet experienced it.

This week, we invite you to join with other Christians as side by side, you strive to make the gospel look worthy through your rejoicing in it.

What does it look like to throw a Christmas party with this goal in mind?

²⁶ [H.B. Charles Jr. “Rejoice Always.” H.B. Charles Jr.](#)

How might we model this to our children by how we spend our time and money and energy over the next week?

How might we engage and serve with one of our Serve the City partners in a way that celebrates and points those we meet to the joy and hope found in the gospel?

Maybe this starts with sitting down with someone who knows you well and asking them to “mercifully point out” any areas of your life that may seem to contradict this goal. Would you care enough about the spreading of the gospel in our city that you’d allow someone to speak into any areas where through your words, actions, or attitude you are living (or at least giving the impression) that something is more valuable or worthy than the gospel of Christ? Would you consider allowing someone to speak into that and then give them permission to pray with you as you set your mind and heart on rejoicing in Christ.

We are thankful for the opportunity to strive side by side to make the gospel of Christ look worthy through our rejoicing in Columbia this week.

PRAY

Ask the Lord to give you eyes to see where through your words, actions, or attitudes you are allowing something other than Christ to look more valuable and worthy of your praise. Confess and repent, setting your mind on Christ and taking on the call to rejoice in Him. Pray that He would use you this week to put the beauty of the gospel on display—that people would be drawn to Him through the way you live out your faith.

LISTEN

- “All Glory Be To Christ” (Kings MHM)
- “Rejoice” (Modern Post)

Family Connection

READ

Philippians 1:27

Be sure that you live in a way that brings honor to the Good News of Christ. Then whether I come and visit you or am away from you, I will hear good things about you. I will hear that you continue strong with one purpose and that you work together as a team for the faith of the Good News.

DISCUSS/PLAN

As a family, discuss what it means to “live in a way that brings honor to the Good News of Christ.”

Brainstorm ways that you can work together as a team to put the Good News of Jesus on display! How can this be your family’s mission as you approach the next five days leading up to Christmas?

- As you will probably be spending more time together over the next few days, discuss how the ways you interact, serve, and love each other could bring honor and glory to the Good News of Jesus.
- Are there neighbors or friends that you could invite into your home this week to participate in a family Christmas tradition or festivity in hopes that they may see that Jesus is who you all celebrate and treasure?
- Are there neighbors or friends that you could invite to come with you to our Christmas Eve gathering?
- How might this goal impact the way you participate in gift giving and receiving? As a family, brainstorm a way you could give this week that honors Jesus and shows off that He is the best and greatest gift.

This may also be another excellent opportunity to discuss as a family how and why you all approach gifts on Christmas morning the way that you do.

PRAY:

Pray that as a family you would work as a team to put the Good News of Jesus on display. Ask Jesus to show you people that need to know that He is the greatest and best gift. Ask for hearts this week that would celebrate Jesus and His birth above everything else and that you'd remember that all other pleasures and joys this week are meant to point to Jesus.

Additional Resources

“Chara/Joy.” *The Bible Project*. thebibleproject.com/videos/chara-joy/

Tim Keller. “Peace- Overcoming Anxiety.” *Gospel in Life*. gospelinlife.com/downloads/peace-8598/

John Piper. “What is the Secret of Joy in Suffering?” *Desiring God*. desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-the-secret-of-joy-in-suffering

Trillia Newbell. “Sorrowful, Yet Always Rejoicing.” *Desiring God*. desiringgod.org/articles/sorrowful-yet-always-rejoicing

Jim Johnston. “Why Are So Many Christians Unhappy?” *Desiring God*. desiringgod.org/articles/why-are-so-many-christians-unhappy

Gloria Furman. “Kids, We Eat Food, Not Crayons, Not Boogers.” *Desiring God*. desiringgod.org/articles/kids-we-eat-food-not-crayons-not-boogers

Family Guide Week 3

CANDLE OF JOY SUNDAY FAMILY DEVOTION

During the first week of Advent, we celebrated that God gave us Jesus to be our light and our hope.

Light the “Hope” candle.

Last week we celebrated that God sent Jesus to bring peace and make peace with God possible.

Light the “Peace” candle.

This week we will celebrate that Jesus brings joy! This third candle is often called the “Shepherd’s Candle” because with it, we remember how the shepherds rejoiced when they saw Jesus with their own eyes.

Do you remember what the angel said when he appeared to the shepherds in the field? He said:

“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news. It will bring great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. Here is how you will know I’m telling the truth, you will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:10-11)

When the angels left, the shepherds decided to go to Bethlehem because they wanted to see for themselves this baby that the angel had told them about:

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby. The baby was lying in the manger. After the shepherds had seen him, they told everyone. They reported what the angel had said about this child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said

to them... The shepherds returned. They gave glory and praise to God. Everything they had seen and heard was just as they had been told. (Luke 2:16-20)

When the shepherds saw Jesus, they rejoiced. And when they left, they couldn't keep this amazing gift to themselves; they went and told everyone of the great joy they'd found lying in a manger.

And even when they returned home, what did they do? They praised God for sending them Jesus—a Savior! They gave thanks to God because they had experienced this *good news of great joy* for themselves!

Light the “Joy” Candle.

When Jesus was born, his birth fulfilled God's promise to send a Savior—a Messiah who would make a way for us to be right with God. And that good news should fill us with joy, just like it did for the shepherds long ago. Once we know and experience the love God showed for us through Jesus, our response is to rejoice!

Jesus is who we celebrate this Christmas. True joy is found in Him and Him alone!

DISCUSS

- What do you think it would have been like to be one of the shepherds who met baby Jesus?
- How has Jesus been good news in your life specifically? Take some time to celebrate His work in the lives of your family.
- Do you ever find yourself forgetting that Jesus is who we celebrate at Christmas? When does this tend to happen?
- What can we as a family do over the next 10 days to make sure we are anticipating and celebrating Jesus above anything else this Christmas season?

PRAY

Let's spend some time thanking God for sending Jesus—our great joy! Let's confess anywhere that we are looking to this season to bring us the kind of joy that only He can. Let's ask God to help us see the gift of Jesus as the biggest and best gift.

THE BIBLE PROJECT FAMILY QUIZ (MONDAY)

“Chara/Joy.” *The Bible Project.* thebibleproject.com/videos/chara-joy/

How is biblical joy different than everyday joy?

Answer: Biblical joy is an attitude that God’s people adopt not because of happy circumstances but because of their hope in God’s love and promises

What phrase marked God’s people?

Answer: “Joy in the wilderness”

Why is it significant that when Jesus was born, the angels announced His birth as “good news of great joy”?

Answer: Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah’s birth would bring joy and the people chose to wait with joy

What were the early Christians known for?

Answer: Being “full of joy”

FAMILY CONNECTIONS (TUESDAY-SATURDAY)

Be sure to check out our daily mini family devotions located at the end of each day in the adult guide. Each mini family devotion coordinates with the adult theme for the day and includes a scripture passage, discussion questions, and a family prayer prompt.

DAILY SCRIPTURE RECAP

Check out the end of each day for family discussion questions and prayer prompts that go along with each day of adult reading

Sunday: Luke 2:20

Monday: Romans 15:13

Tuesday: John 15:9-11

Wednesday: Philippians 4:11-13

Thursday: Psalm 16:2, James 1:17

Friday: Choose a verse to memorize as a family

Saturday: Philippians 1:27

SONG RECOMMENDATIONS

Check out our “[Songs of Joy](#)” playlist on Spotify for the complete list of songs for the week.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

God’s Very Good Idea by Trillia Newbell

The Christmas Promise by Alison Mitchel

VIDEO RECOMMENDATION

Check out this 4-minute animated video from Phil Visher (the creator of VeggieTales) that answers the question, “What Special Message Did the Angels Bring?”

jellytelly.com/blog/what-special-message-did-the-angels-bring-christmas-5-minute-family-devotional

*The rest of the 5-minute videos in the series “Big Questions About Christmas” can be found at jellytelly.com/blog/big-questions-about-christmas-a-new-5-minute-family-devotional-plan

*All video segments come from Phil Visher’s video, *Buck Denver Asks... “Why Do We Call it Christmas?”*

SHARE THE JOY IDEAS

As a family, think through how you can display God’s love and the joy you have in Jesus this Advent season. Brainstorm ways that as a family you can work as a team to put the Good News of Jesus on display. How can this be your family’s mission as you approach the days leading up to Christmas Day?

- As you will probably be spending more time together over the next few days, discuss how the ways you interact, serve, and love each other could bring honor/glory to the Good News of Jesus.
- Are there neighbors or friends that you could invite into your home this week to participate in a family Christmas tradition or festivity in hopes that they may see that Jesus is who you all celebrate and treasure?

- Are there neighbors or friends that you could invite to come with you to our Christmas Eve gathering?
- How might this goal impact the way you participate in gift giving and receiving? As a family, brainstorm a way you could give this week that honors Jesus and shows off that He is the best and greatest gift. *This may also be another excellent opportunity to discuss as a family how and why you all approach gifts on Christmas morning the way that you do.*

WEEK 4: LOVE

SUNDAY: God So Loved

“But amid all the busyness, the message of Christmas brings us back to first principles. It shows us what love is. And the first principle is this: Jesus gave everything he had, because he loved us. He gave his body to the cross, because he loved us. Before that he lived his life in a loveless world because he loved us. But first of all he came because he loved us.” -Sinclair Ferguson

Christmas week is finally here! The waiting is almost over. In a few days we will get to celebrate all that we’ve been anticipating: the arrival of Emmanuel- God with us. Our prayer is that you approach this week with a renewed sense of wonder in God’s love.

SCRIPTURE

John 3:16

READ AND OBSERVE

Read John 3:16. Note your observations from the passages, paying particular attention to what the texts tell us about God’s love.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Light the 4th Candle.

Click here for our Week 4 Family Candle Lighting Devotion on page 176.

In John 3:16, the “so” is not an amount of love but a way of loving. John isn’t saying, “God loved so much” or “God loved very much.” But rather, “*God loved this way.*” God’s love is more than a feeling; it is active.

What is the way that God loved? He gave us Jesus.

John 3:16 (HCSB)

For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

In his book, *Love Came Down at Christmas*, pastor Sinclair Ferguson writes of Christ’s love for us:

Why did he come? Because he loved us. Why did he die? Because he loved us. Why did he love us? Because he loved us. If we lose sight of that, we will never love him properly. Perhaps we will never be able to love anybody properly. For until we have tasted his love, we can never fully appreciate why love makes us willing to sacrifice everything. If we are going to live lovingly as well as sacrificially, we must look to the One who did both.²⁷

We want to meditate on this costly, active love this week. We want to celebrate God’s gift of love. We want to revel in the wonders of it and be amazed by the power of it.

Celebrate God’s love. Speak of it. Praise Him for it. Point others to it. Read of it. Sing of it. This is the meaning of Christmas.

REFLECT & PRAY

- Christmas is almost here. When you hear that, what feelings come to mind? Are you anxious about anything? Pour your heart out to God because He cares for you!
- Where is your hope? Is it set on Christ or has it drifted elsewhere? Confess and set your mind fully on Christ. Be serious about treasuring Him above everything else that the next few days

27 Sinclair Ferguson. *Love Came Down At Christmas*. The Good Book Company, 2018.

may bring. Retell your heart and mind the truth of the gospel.
Celebrate God's love as the greatest gift.

LISTEN

- “How Deep the Father’s Love” (Kings MHM)
- “Now Behold the Lamb” (Kirk Franklin & Family)
- “Joy to the World” (Casting Crowns)

Family Connection

Complete the lighting of the 4th Advent Candle.

[Click here for the Family Candle Lighting Devotion on page 176.](#)

WEEK 4: LOVE

MONDAY: This Is Love

“Truly wondrous is the whole chronicle of the Nativity. For this day the ancient slavery is ended, the devil confounded, the demons take to flight, the power of death is broken, paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed from us... a heavenly way of life has been in planted on the earth...” -St. John Chrysostom

SCRIPTURE

1 John 4:7-12

READ AND RESPOND

Read 1 John 4:7-12. Note your observations from the passage, paying particular attention to what the text tells us about God’s love.

1 John 4:7-12

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

Notice the verbs working together in the passage, particular in v.7: love, born, knows. We're able to love because we are born from God and we know God. That word "know" comes from the Greek word *ginosko* and means more than simply understanding a set of facts. Rather, in the Bible "to know" implies relationship. The verb "knows" in v.7 is what's called an "active indicative" verb, implying that this is an ongoing command. The logic then follows that the more we continue to know God, intentionally seeking to deepen our relationship with Him, the more empowered we are to love others. Our loving others through dying to our needs and wants is evidence that God is at work in us. Author Dorothy Day says it like this, "I really only love God as much as I love the person I love the least."

Christmas then becomes this tangible reminder of God's self-initiating, self-sacrificing, self-giving love to us. When we were unlovable, God sent His Son Jesus so that we might know Him. When we were enemies to God and one another, God came down so that we might love Him and love one another. Because Jesus was born, we can now be born into the family of God.

REFLECT & PRAY

- Reread 1 John 4:7-12. In light of who God has revealed Himself to be, what should you do in response?
- What characteristics of God should be praised?
- What specifically can you thank God for that was revealed in today's Scripture? What do you need to confess?
- Where are you not appropriately responding in light of these truths?
- Where do you need to repent and take intentional steps in a different direction with a renewed mind?

LISTEN

- "Joy to the World" (Casting Crowns)

Family Connection

READ

1 John 4:7-12

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

DISCUSS

- According to v.8 God is what?

Answer: Love

- What are things that you love?
- How is God's love different from what we love?

Answer: We tend to "love" things we like a lot, but God's love is a committed love that gives and serves others. He's committed to our good and His glory.

- How do we know God loves us so much?

Answer: Jesus!

- What are some things you can do to show God's love to others today?

PRAY

Thank God that He loves you more than you can ever imagine. Thank Him for showing His love to you through sending His Son Jesus. Ask that God work in you to grow more and more thankful for Jesus even when Christmas is over.

WEEK 4: LOVE

TUESDAY: The Meaning of Biblical Love

“How deep the Father’s Love for us. How vast beyond all measure. That He would give His only Son to make a wretch His treasure” -Stuart Townend

SCRIPTURE

Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:36-40, Romans 5:6-8

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Deuteronomy 6:4-5](#), [Leviticus 19:18](#), and [Matthew 22:36-40](#). What instructions do these verses give and how do they connect with the description of God’s love we read about yesterday?

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Leviticus 19:18

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

Matthew 22:36-40

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.³⁸ This is the great and first commandment.³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

For thousands of years, Jewish people have prayed the words of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 every morning and every evening. The Hebrew word used for love in this prayer is *ahavah*. The word *ahavah* shows the basic care that one person has for another. It’s a fairly broad word used to describe many different types of affection throughout the Old Testament.

In Deuteronomy 6:4-5, the command is to *ahavah* the Lord:

*“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall **ahavah** the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*

In Deuteronomy 7:7-8, Moses describes the Lord’s love for the people of Israel using the same word:

*It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples,⁸ but it is because the Lord **ahavah** you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.*

Moses tells the Israelites that they did nothing to earn God’s love, but God gave it because it is who He is. God’s love has no beginning and no end. It is not out of duty that God shows His love, but rather, it is an affection that He experiences. The prophet Hosea compares God’s *ahavah* for His people to the love that a husband has for his wife or a parent shows for a child.¹

¹ [“Ahavah/Love.” The Bible Project.](#)

But God's love is more than a feeling or affection; it is something God *does*. His love is an action. God's love gave us Jesus.

And when Jesus entered the world, He had a lot to say about love.

Jesus spoke Aramaic and the actual word he used for love was *rakhmah*. As Jesus' followers spread His teachings around the world, they translated them into Greek and the word they used for love was *agape*.

The way that Jesus's followers expressed the meaning of *agape* was by looking to the teachings and life of Jesus. They looked to the one who *was* love for their definition of it.²

When asked the most important command in the Jewish scriptures, Jesus first quoted Deuteronomy 6:5, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart." He quickly followed it up with another command from Leviticus, "Love your neighbor as yourself." By stating both as the most important command, Jesus was teaching His followers that the two go hand-in-hand: our love for God will overflow into and be expressed in our love for people.

Jesus went on to teach that this love for others includes those who cannot offer us anything in return...and it even extends to our enemies. And when we extend this kind of love to the weak and vulnerable or our enemies, we are reflecting God's love; we are putting His love and character on display.

Jesus didn't just *teach* on love—He lived it. Jesus perfectly loved God and others. He was constantly loving and serving the marginalized and hurting around Him. And when it came to his enemies—Jesus allowed them to nail Him to a cross and kill Him—because He loved them.

REFLECT & PRAY

- Thank God for His love. Praise Him for who He is—that He is love.
- Where do today's verses challenge you? Is there one in particular that you need to meditate on or pray through?
- What is your personal application today? In light of who God is and the *agape* love we see lived out in Jesus, what should you do in response?

² ["Agape: Love." The Bible Project.](#)

LISTEN

- “Because of Your Love” (Phil Wickham)

Family Connection

Watch the Bible Project's 4-minute video: "[Agape: Love](#)" and check out the family quiz questions in **this week's Family Guide on page 178**.

READ

Deuteronomy 6:5

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength.

Leviticus 19:18

Forget about the wrong things people do to you. You must not try to get even. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. I am the Lord.

DISCUSS

- How would you describe God's love?
- What can we learn about love from looking at the way Jesus lived and loved?
- How can our love look more like God's love this week?

PRAY

Thank God for His love for all people. Thank God for sending Jesus. Pray that more and more the way that you love other people would reflect the way that God loves you.

WEEK 4: LOVE

WEDNESDAY: God Shows His Love for Us in This

*“Wake up, O human being! For it was for you that God was made man. Rise up and realize it was all for you.”
-St. Augustine*

SCRIPTURE

Romans 5:6-8, 1 John 4:9-11

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Romans 5:6-8](#) and re-read [1 John 4:9-11](#). What do these verses teach us about the power of God’s love? How do these verses call followers of Jesus to love?

Romans 5:6-8

*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his **agape** for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Romans 5:6-8: For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 4:9-11

*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. ¹⁰ In this is **agape**, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to **agape** one another.*

1 John 4:9-11: 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Eucatastrophe. J.R.R. Tolkien, the author of The Lord of the Rings, made this word up. He took the familiar word “catastrophe,” this unexpected sense of dread, and added the prefix “eu” which in Greek means “good.” In a eucatastrophe, instead of something unexpected and terrible happening, something unexpected but wonderful happens instead. We see this in movies when the hero is rescued at the last second, or when the protagonist of a story suddenly overcomes the odds and proves victorious. The good guy is saved, the hero wins.

Romans 6:8 reminds who we are in the story: “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” God’s self-initiating love for us was not because we were the good guys. We weren’t the heroes. Jesus was the hero. When we were all heading for our own destruction because of sin, Jesus’ birth reverses our destiny. Jesus takes our catastrophe and turns it into a eucatastrophe - an unexpected, out-of-nowhere rescue. We were the enemies, and Jesus saved us. His birth 2,000 years ago sets off His rescue plan to turn enemies like us into friends.

Family Connection

READ

Romans 5:6-8

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person— though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 4:9-11

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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

DISCUSS

- What do these verses tell us about God's love?
- Do you have a hard time loving God and others? Why or why not?
- Does God still love you even when you have a hard time loving Him and others?

Answer: Yes!

PRAY

Thank God for sending His Son Jesus. Thank Him for loving you no matter what. Ask God to work through you so you can love others.

WEEK 4: LOVE

THURSDAY: Jesus is the Fulfillment of God's Promises

He who carved the edges of the cosmos curved Himself into a fetal ball in the dark, tethered Himself to the uterine wall of a virgin, and lets His cells divide, light splitting all white.

He gave up the heavens that were not even large enough to contain Him and lets Himself be held in a hand.

The mystery so large becomes the baby so small, and infinite God becomes infant. –Ann Voskamp

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 9:2, Romans 15:8-13, 2 Corinthians 1:20

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Isaiah 9:2](#), [Romans 15:8-13](#), and [2 Corinthians 1:20](#). What attributes of God are on display in these verses? Meditate on them. Celebrate them. Praise Him for them.

Isaiah 9:2

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

Romans 15:8-13 (NIRV)

I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews. He teaches us that God is true. He shows us that God will keep the promises he made to the founders of our nation. ⁹ Jesus became a servant of the Jews. He did this so that the Gentiles might give glory to God for his mercy. It is written,

“I will praise you among the Gentiles. I will sing the praises of your name.” (2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49)

¹⁰ Again it says, “You Gentiles, be full of joy. Be joyful together with God’s people.” (Deuteronomy 32:43)

¹¹ And again it says,

“All you Gentiles, praise the Lord.

Let all the nations sing praises to him.” (Psalm 117:1)

¹² And Isaiah says,

“The Root of Jesse will grow up quickly.

He will rule over the nations.

The Gentiles will put their hope in him.” (Isaiah 11:10)

¹³ May the God who gives hope fill you with great joy. May you have perfect peace as you trust in him. May the power of the Holy Spirit fill you with hope.

2 Corinthians 1:20

For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

REFLECT & PRAY

Today, let's make it personal. Take some time to reflect on these truths; to celebrate the specific ways you've seen them play out in your life. Let's thank God and glorify Him for the gift of Jesus in our lives! Praise Him for the truth that "all the promises of God find their YES in Him."

- The light of the world stepped into your darkness.
- Through grace and faith, you can place your hope in the saving work He accomplished.
- He made a way for you to have peace with God and pursue peace with others.
- In His birth, we celebrate the *good news of great joy*, and in Him, we discover the joy and satisfaction that our souls long for.
- Because of God's love, He sent Jesus. We know His love is true and trustworthy because He sent us Jesus.
- Light has come. The promises have all come true. Hallelujah.

LISTEN

- "Oh Light" (Gungor, All Sons and Daughters)
- "Light of the World" (Lauren Daigle)
- "Hallelujah (Light Has Come)" (BarlowGirl)
- "You Are the Living Word" (Fred Hammond)

Family Connection

READ

Lamentations 3:22-23 (ICB)

The Lord's love never ends.

His mercies never stop.

²³ *They are new every morning.*

Lord, your faithfulness is great.

Psalm 90:14 (ICB)

Fill us with your love every morning.

Then we will sing and rejoice all our lives.

DISCUSS

- What do we learn about God from these verses?
Answer: His love never ends, His mercy never ends, His faithfulness is great
- Because of what is true about God, what does the Psalmist do each day?
Answer: He asks God to fill him with His love so that he can rejoice in God every day

PRAY

Thank God for His never giving up, always and forever love. Ask for His help in remaining in His love and reflecting that love to those around you.

WEEK 4: LOVE

FRIDAY: The Steadfast Love of God (Christmas Eve)

Study everything that makes God wonderful and mimic to your heart's delight, as the joyful expression of your reciprocal love for Him.

-Jen Wilkin

SCRIPTURE

Micah 7:18-19, Lamentations 3:22-23, Psalm 90:14, Galatians 2:20, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Micah 7:18-19](#). What stands out to you? Note what the passage reveals about God's character.

Micah 7:18-19

*Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity
and passing over transgression
for the remnant of his inheritance?*

*He does not retain his anger forever,
because he delights in steadfast love.*

*¹⁹ He will again have compassion on us;
he will tread our iniquities underfoot.*

*You will cast all our sins
into the depths of the sea.*

The prophet Micah lived some 700 years before the birth of Christ, and much of Micah's book focuses on two main themes: judgment and restoration. His book also contains a significant prophecy about Jesus's birth in Micah 5:2. And in Micah 7:18-20, Micah speaks to the steadfast and compassionate love of God. In these verses, we read of what the Messiah will come and do: He will trample sin underfoot. This is the gospel of Christmas: Jesus Christ has defeated sin and death, and when we put our faith in Him, our sins are cast into the depths of the sea!

Because God delights in steadfast love, He sent us Jesus. He made a way for us to be right with Him, in relationship with Him, and able to delight in His steadfast love all the days of our lives.

We begin to wrap up our Advent Guide with a call to delight and be satisfied in the steadfast love of God. Writer Jen Wilkin reminds Christians why this call to love God is so critical to everything else:

*Your love for others is the overflow of your love for God. Your love for God will increase as you learn to know him better...We will not be known by just any kind of love—we will be known for the kind of love the Father has shown to us and we in turn show to others.*²⁸

READ AND APPLY

Read Lamentations 3:22-23 and Psalm 90:14. What do these verses reveal about the character of God? In turn, what should be our response?

Lamentations 3:22-23

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
²³ they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

²⁸ Jen Wilkin. *Women of the Word*. Crossway, 2014.

Psalm 90:14

*Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,
that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.*

As followers of Jesus who know that God is the source of all joy and satisfaction, we would be wise to look to His never-ending, always satisfying love every morning. In his article, “Evaluate Your Day Before It Begins,” Matthew Westerholm makes a case for developing the spiritual practice of coming before the Lord and asking Him to satisfy us with His steadfast love each morning. Westerholm describes the difference that such a practice could make in our lives:

While others spend the entire day searching for satisfaction, God satisfies His children at the start of their day. Having received satisfaction from God in the morning, believers are liberated each day to glorify God. The satisfaction of God sets us free to navigate our lives in faith. The world uses work to chase satisfaction through personal accomplishments. We are freed by God’s satisfaction, liberated to find joy whatever the circumstances. The world uses people to chase satisfaction through approval. We are freed by God’s satisfaction, liberated to glorify God by loving people—genuinely interacting and caring for them. God’s love helps us receive and interpret our circumstances instead of having our hearts controlled by them. Rather than looking at our schedules and hoping for a good day, or creating a plan to make a good day, we look to the satisfying love of God that He generously offers each morning.²⁹

29 [Matthew Westerholm. “Evaluate Your Day Before It Begins.” Desiring God.](#)

READ AND APPLY

Read Galatians 2:20 and 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. What do these verses say about Christ's love? What do they say about us? What should be our response?

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

If you have put your faith and hope in the saving work of Jesus, then the Holy Spirit lives in you, and He is producing the fruit of the Spirit in you so that you can look and love more like Him as you glorify Him with your life.

Abide in Him.

Set your hope in Him.

Find your peace in Him.

Behold Him.

Your sins have been cast to the bottom of the ocean.

Rejoice in Him and be satisfied in His love.

Light the Christ Candle

Click here for our Family Candle Lighting Devotion on page 180.

Today, on the eve of Christ’s birth, we celebrate that “all the promises of God find their yes in Him!” *Emmanuel*—God has come to live with us! Christ is the fulfillment of all of God’s promises. The Light stepped into the darkness. And through Him, we can have peace with God. Jesus became our peace. He became our joy. In Him we hope. In Him, we know love. Because He is love.

Hallelujah! Light has come!

REFLECT AND PRAY

- Where are you prone to search for satisfaction outside of God’s love?
- What would it look like for you to commit to “evaluate your day before it begins”? Would you commit in the new year to start each day by asking God to satisfy you with His steadfast love?
- Pray and ask God to satisfy you with His steadfast love. Confess where you are quick to turn for satisfaction other than Him. Ask for His help in abiding with Him more deeply.

LISTEN

- “The Steadfast Love of the Lord” (Dave Hunt)
- “Great is Thy Faithfulness” (Kierra Sheard)
- “He Who is Mighty” (Sovereign Grace)

Family Connection

Complete the lighting of the Christ Candle.

[Click here for the Candle Lighting Devotion on page 180.](#)

WEEK 4: LOVE

SATURDAY: THE GIFT OF CHRISTMAS (Christmas Day)

God gives God.

That is the gift God always ultimately gives.

Because nothing is greater and we have no greater need, God gives God.

God gives God, and we only need to slow long enough to unwrap the greatest gift with our time: time in His Word, time in His presence, time at His feet.

—Ann Voskamp

SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:1-20 and Romans 5:10-11

READ AND RESPOND

Read [Luke 2:1-20](#) and [Romans 5:10-11](#).

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were

there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Romans 5:10-11

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

God gives God.

Receive the gift. Open it. Slow down and spend time in His presence. Treasure it.

Look to Jesus Christ this Christmas. Behold Him. Glorify Him. Celebrate who He is and the work that He accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection.

God gives God.

Treasure this great gift—treasure Christ—this Christmas.

LISTEN

- “Prepare Him Room” (Sovereign Grace)
- “O Come Let Us Adore Him” (Shane & Shane)
- “God Made Low” (Sovereign Grace)
- “Here With Us” (Joy Williams)
- “The Unbelievable” (Sovereign Grace)
- “Alpha and Omega/Christmas Worship Medley (Isaiah & New Breed)

Family Connection

He's here! He's here! "The God who made us has come to live among us."¹

As a family, celebrate Him today. Treasure Him. Let all that you do point to Jesus.

READ

As a family read [Luke 2:1-20](#).

Luke 2:1-20

At that time, Augustus Caesar sent an order to all people in the countries that were under Roman rule. The order said that they must list their names in a register. ² This was the first registration taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And everyone went to their own towns to be registered.

⁴ So Joseph left Nazareth, a town in Galilee. He went to the town of Bethlehem in Judea. This town was known as the town of David. Joseph went there because he was from the family of David. ⁵ Joseph registered with Mary because she was engaged to marry him. (Mary was now pregnant.) ⁶ While Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have the baby. ⁷ She gave birth to her first son. There were no rooms left in the inn. So she wrapped the baby with cloths and laid him in a box where animals are fed.

⁸ That night, some shepherds were in the fields nearby watching their sheep. ⁹ An angel of the Lord stood before them. The glory of the Lord was shining around them, and suddenly they became very frightened. ¹⁰ The angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, because I am bringing you some good news. It will be a joy to all the people. ¹¹ Today your Savior was born in David's town. He is Christ, the Lord. ¹² This is how you will know him:

¹ Sally Lloys-Jones. *Song of the Stars*. Zonderkidz, 2011.

You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a feeding box.”

¹³ Then a very large group of angels from heaven joined the first angel. All the angels were praising God, saying:

¹⁴ “Give glory to God in heaven, and on earth let there be peace to the people who please God.”

¹⁵ Then the angels left the shepherds and went back to heaven. The shepherds said to each other, “Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened. We will see this thing the Lord told us about.”

¹⁶ So the shepherds went quickly and found Mary and Joseph. ¹⁷ And the shepherds saw the baby lying in a feeding box. Then they told what the angels had said about this child. ¹⁸ Everyone was amazed when they heard what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ Mary hid these things in her heart; she continued to think about them. ²⁰ Then the shepherds went back to their sheep, praising God and thanking him for everything that they had seen and heard. It was just as the angel had told them.

Below are a few questions to allow your family to reflect on this season of Advent:

- How did using this Advent Guide prepare you to celebrate Christmas?
 - What was your favorite part?
 - What was the most difficult?
 - What questions do you still have?
- What was the most important thing that you learned during this season of Advent?
 - What did you learn about God/Jesus?
 - What did you learn about yourself?

What is something that you would like to start doing or continue to do based on what you've learned about who Jesus is and who He's made you to be?

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Sally Lloyd Jones. "He's Here." *Jesus Storybook Bible*. Zonderkidz, 2007.

(Check out the 5-minute video of the story here:

[youtube.com/watch?v=E2y2FJqsv_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2y2FJqsv_8))

Sally Lloyd-Jones. *Song of the Stars*. Zonderkidz, 2011.

(Check out the 4-minute video of Sally Lloyd Jones reading the story here:

[youtube.com/watch?v=IFbm0wS3rlg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFbm0wS3rlg))

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

"Ahavah/Love." *The Bible Project*. <https://thebibleproject.com/videos/ahavah-love/>

"Agape: Love." *The Bible Project*. <https://thebibleproject.com/videos/agape-love/>

Jen Wilkin. *Women of the Word*. Crossway, 2014.

Sunday Family Guide Week 4

CANDLE OF LOVE SUNDAY FAMILY DEVOTION

During the first week of Advent, we celebrated that God gave us Jesus to be our light and our hope.

Light the “Hope” candle.

During the second week of Advent, we celebrated that God gave us Jesus to be our peace and make peace with God possible.

Light the “Peace” candle.

Last week we celebrated that Jesus brings joy and it is in knowing and loving Him that our souls find true satisfaction.

Light the “Joy” candle.

This week we celebrate God’s love for us!

How do we know that God loves us?

Have someone read [John 3:16](#):

John 3:16 (NLT)

For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

We know that God loves the world (and us!) because He gave us Jesus.

How did God show us how much He loves us?

Have someone read [1 John 4:9-10](#):

1 John 4:9-10 (NLT)

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. ¹⁰ This is real love—not that

we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

God sent Jesus into the world to die for us so that through Him, we can be made right with God and live forever with Him!

Light the “Love” candle.

The picture we are given for real love is the picture of God sending His Son into the world as a gift. Real love is *giving love*! And it is God’s powerful, giving love that we celebrate at Christmas; this love is what Christmas is all about!

Jesus is light in our darkness. He is our hope. He is our peace. He is our joy. And He is love! This week we are going to talk about this love. We are going to read about it. We are going to sing about it. And we are going to thank God for it!

DISCUSS

- How did God show His love for the world?

Answer: He gave His only Son

- Look back at 1 John 4:10. What does John say “real love” is?

Answer: Real love is God sending His Son to be the sacrifice for our sins

- If Christmas is the celebration of God’s love, what can we do as a family over the next four days to celebrate this love?

PRAY

Let’s spend time thanking God for His love that sent us His Son, Jesus. Let’s ask Him to help our hearts delight in Him and celebrate Him above all else this week.

A few additional activities to celebrate Christ’s love and anticipate Christmas this week:

- Birthday Cake for Jesus: As a family, bake and decorate a cake on Christmas Eve. Remind the children that Christmas is about celebrating Christ’s birth. Use this cake as a tangible way for (especially young) children to anticipate celebrating Christ’s birth and life. Set aside time on Christmas Day (perhaps after your big

meal) to enjoy the cake (maybe even sing Happy Birthday) and celebrate His birth!

- Have each family member make a Christmas ornament and write on it one way they have experienced Christ's love this year. (Imagine if you did this every year and then a tradition became reading and celebrating Christ's love and faithfulness in your family's life!)
- If God's love is a *giving* loving, what, as a family, could you do this week to reflect that giving love? Is there another family or person you could love sacrificially this week?

THE BIBLE PROJECT FAMILY QUIZ (MONDAY)

"Agape: Love." *The Bible Project*. thebibleproject.com/videos/agape-love/

1. How do we know that God's love is more than just a feeling? How did He demonstrate His love?

Answer: He sent us Jesus

2. What did Jesus teach about love?

Answer: We are to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and love our neighbors as ourselves. We are to love the weak, the needy, and our enemies because by doing so, we reflect God's love!

1. What does Jesus say is the most important command? (hint: there are two parts!)

Answer: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind; love your neighbor as yourself

3. What is our love supposed to do?

Answer: Reflect the love that God has for us

Friday Family Guide Week 4

CHRIST CANDLE FAMILY DEVOTION

Note: Today's reading is taken from Sally Lloyd Jones' *Jesus Storybook Bible*: "He's Here." *Animated readings of the Jesus Storybook Bible can be found on youtube: "He's Here -Jesus Storybook Bible, Sally Lloyd-Jones"* [youtube.com/watch?v=E2y2FJqsv_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2y2FJqsv_8)

Throughout Advent, we have studied and celebrated the promises of God that were made true in Jesus.

We've celebrated that Jesus is our hope.

Light the "Hope" candle.

We've celebrated that Jesus brings peace and through Him, peace with God is possible.

Light the "Peace" candle.

We've celebrated that true joy is found in Jesus.

Light the "Joy" candle.

And this week, we've celebrated God's love—a giving love—that gave us Jesus.

Light the "Love" candle.

Today we celebrate that the waiting is almost over! Today we celebrate Christ and that in Him, all the promises of God come true! Let's read the story of Jesus's birth together!

As a family, take turns reading these excerpts from the Jesus Storybook Bible:

Now, Mary and Joseph had to take a trip to Bethlehem, the town King David was from. But when they reached the little town, they found every room was full. Every bed was taken. "Go away!" the innkeepers told them. "There isn't any place for you."

Where would they stay? Soon Mary's baby would come.

They couldn't find anywhere except an old, tumbledown stable. So they stayed where the cows and the donkeys and the horses stayed.

And there, in the stable, amongst the chickens and the donkeys and the cows, in the quiet of the night, God gave the world his beautiful gift. The baby that would change the world was born. His baby Son.

Mary and Joseph wrapped him up to keep him warm. They made a soft bed of straw and used the animals' feeding trough as the cradle. And they gazed in wonder at God's great gift, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.

Mary and Joseph named him Jesus, Emmanuel—which means “God has come to live with us.”

Because, of course, he had.

Light the Christ Candle.

That same night, in amongst the other stars, suddenly a bright new star appeared. Of all the stars in the dark vaulted heavens, this one shone clearer. It blazed in the night and made the other stars look pale beside it.

God put it there when his baby son was born—to be like a spotlight. Shining on him Lighting up the darkness. Showing people the way to him: the Promised Child. Heaven's son. The Maker of the Stars. A baby sleeping in his mother's arms.

This baby would be like that bright star shining in the sky that night. A light to light up the whole world. Chasing away darkness. Helping people to see.

Emmanuel—God has come to live with us.

DISCUSS

- What do you think it would have been like to be Mary and Joseph? What about the shepherds?
- Why did God put the star in the sky on the night of Jesus's birth?

Answer: To show people the way to Jesus

- What does Emmanuel mean?

Answer: God has come to live with us

PRAY

Let's thank Jesus for coming to live with us and for being our rescuer! Let's ask Him to prepare our hearts to celebrate Him well over the next day and to see Him as the best gift and greatest treasure.

BOOK RECOMMENDATION

Read Sally Lloyd Jones' children's book: *The Song of the Stars*. (A YouTube version with her narrating is available at "Sally Lloyd-Jones Reads Song of the Stars: A Christmas Story.")

[youtube.com/watch?v=IFbm0wS3rlg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFbm0wS3rlg)) Discuss how this story connects to our waiting and anticipating of Jesus's birth this Advent season.

VIDEO RECOMMENDATION

Check out this 4-minute animated video from Phil Visher (the creator of VeggieTales) that answers the question, "Why Do We Have Christmas Trees?" (*The answer connects with God's love!*)

jellytelly.com/blog/why-do-we-have-christmas-trees-christmas-5-minute-family-devotional

*The rest of the 5-minute videos in the series, "Big Questions About Christmas" can be found at jellytelly.com/blog/big-questions-about-christmas-a-new-5-minute-family-devotional-plan

*All video segments come from Phil Visher's video, "Buck Denver Asks...Why Do We Call it Christmas?"

DAILY SCRIPTURE RECAP

Sunday: John 3:16

Monday: Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18

Tuesday: Luke 2:1-20 (*retelling in the Jesus Storybook Bible*)

Wednesday: Luke 2:1-20

Thursday: Lamentations 3:22-23, Psalm 90:14

SONG RECOMMENDATIONS

Check out our "[Songs of Love](#)" Spotify Playlist for our complete list of songs for the week.



midtowncolumbia.com



followingjesustgether.com