

A THRILL *of* HOPE

A THRILL *of* HOPE

XX



XXIV

ADVENT
DEVOTIONAL

A THRILL *of* HOPE

A THRILL *of* HOPE

A THRILL *of* HOPE

WK



01

HOPE PROMISED

“Long lay the world
in sin and error *pinning*”

Elohim,

Immanuel, God with us,

this has been Your plan since you spoke light and there was light.

From when skies, waters, and land were separated:

Where you opened your storehouses of wind
and winged wonders took their first flights through the air.

Where currents and waves were formed
and sea creatures explored the deepest depths for the very first time.

Where moss and grass grew
and creatures on the land took their very first wobbly steps.

As Your breath formed us,
reflecting all goodness and beauty and life

You claimed us as Yours.

When we surrendered, not to You, but to rebellion,
as the world lay in sin and error pinning-

Your plan did not change,
for You do not change.

You are, and always have been,
God with us.

As we left the garden
and wandered and wept and wailed and waited
Your cloud and Your fire led us.

As we cried out to You in the wilderness
You heard our cries and answered them with a promise.

A promise of freedom.

A promise of salvation.

A promise of mercy.

A promise of a living hope.

Lord, turn our ears to hear Your promise
again and again and again –
that we have always been Yours.

We will *always* be Yours.

O, unchanging God,
that we would live as if this promise is true.

Forever and ever.

I will FIND YOU

READ: GENESIS 1-3

The hope of Advent begins in the dark.

In the beginning God spoke a word and called forth light from darkness. Out of His fullness He invited mankind to dwell with Him. He offered His intimate presence as He walked with them, spoke to them, and provided for them. It was, as He said, very good.

But then, in an act of disobedience and disbelief, Adam and Eve chose life apart from God. Rather than commune with the Creator, they listened to another voice and found themselves naked and ashamed.

In any other religion with any other god, this would have been the end of the story. This sheer act of betrayal would have separated them, would have ended them in that very moment. But not in this story. Not with Almighty God. He would not let them go without a fight.

God came looking for them. He clothed them, He invited their confession, and He set boundaries for their good. Even in the midst of a curse, the brokenness of shalom, God had already set a plan in motion. Adam and Eve were forced to leave Eden and the presence of God, but God would come for them. He would send a Rescuer. He would one day dwell with His people again and give them rest.

As we enter this Advent season, may we be encouraged to wait with hope for the promised Rescuer. The One who has come will come again and restore all things. So let us light the candles and immerse ourselves in the story of a God who would move heaven and earth to be with His people. “Even now, come Lord Jesus.”

INVITATION

Watch for the sunrise and pray with the psalmist, “I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.”

Psalm 130:6

Advent is a season that welcomes our hopes and fears, our waiting, and even lament.

What are you longing for?

Confess it freely in the presence of a gentle and merciful God.



READ: GENESIS 5

I *will* WALK WITH YOU

INVITATION

How does the pace of our world affect your walk with God?

How would you describe the pace of your life right now?

What words or phrases would accurately depict the speed of your body, mind, and soul?

At a cursory glance, Genesis 5 can be a slightly depressing narrative. The genealogy after Adam is a long list showing the line of Adam from Seth to Noah. We read name after name and the repeated motif, “This man lived, had kids, and then he died.” But then, in verse 24, we read of Enoch. “After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked *faithfully* with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters.”

We know that God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden, but then mankind lost access to the place where heaven and earth connected. Sin disrupted the rhythm of communion. How is connection with a holy God possible outside of Eden?

Yet we read that Enoch walked with God. Even before commandments, before the tabernacle and temple, before the coming of Jesus, God was accessible to His children. *Enoch walked with God*. Stand amazed for a moment. The preposition is astounding: Enoch walked WITH God.

Going on a walk with someone can have many variations, but each one conveys proximity. Whether we walk beside or behind another, steps can fall into rhythm, words or silences contribute to fellowship, and nearness cultivates intimacy.

Enoch was pleasing to God and journeyed straight from Earth to Heaven, because he not only lived by faith (Heb. 11:5), but he also lived his life in intimate communion with God. God was near and Enoch noticed. Or perhaps more beautifully, Enoch noticed an Almighty God willing to bend low and walk with His creation. Before Immanuel was promised by name, Enoch sensed that “with-ness” was the heart of God’s character.

I will KEEP THE COVENANT

READ: GENESIS 15

God set His redemptive plan in motion. He called a people to Himself beginning with an old man and a barren woman. He promised them a legacy that would bless the world, and a place to live and to worship. He promised Abram a place to dwell with God as His set apart people.

And now, years later, when Abram still had no heir and no land to speak of, he asked the Lord how he could be certain. This man had the boldness to question. “Why is the promise so slow in coming? Why have you waited until this feels impossible?”

Yahweh doesn’t rebuke or argue. The Lord’s response is to speak in Abram’s terms in a way he can see and receive.

Abram asks: “God, how am I to know that it will all be mine?”

God answers: “Bring me a heifer, a goat, and a ram...”

The Lord God cuts a covenant with Abram. He passes through animal halves and physically demonstrates His faithfulness. God swears by himself. “THIS is how you know. If I fail, may I bleed. And if you fail, Abram, may I bleed.”

Abram was asked to wait after God’s declaration and promise, over a decade for his son Isaac, and hundreds of years beyond his own life before his descendants would enter the promised land.

Waiting is a part of God’s promises. The pause invites us to remember God’s past faithfulness and seek his present nearness.

And so, when we ask God in our own moments of waiting and doubt, “How can I be certain? How can I know that you are for me and with me even in this moment?”

He answers with another covenant made in blood. “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” John 1:29

INVITATION

In what areas of life is waiting the most difficult for you right now?

How might God be using waiting to produce deeper trust in you?

Sit with the Lord and consider this question in His loving presence.



READ: GENESIS 28

I *am* IN THIS PLACE

INVITATION

Consider the past 24 hours
in the presence of God.

Ask Him to show you His abiding
presence throughout your past day - the
places you weren't even aware of Him.

Jacob lay down to sleep, seeking nothing but rest from his family drama and long journey. But he awoke with an awe-inspiring revelation: *God is here and I wasn't even aware of it!* A campground with a rock bed played host to the God of the universe.

Think back on your own story of faith. How often has an everyday location become the place where the ordinary and the sacred collide? Not many of us would claim to have witnessed the same vision of Jacob: angels ascending and descending a stairway—one that rests on earth and reaches straight into heaven. And yet, Jacob's realization, fear, and awe at the presence of God is beautifully universal.

The Lord who fills heaven and earth (Jeremiah 23:24) also makes Himself seen, heard, and known by those willing and ready to notice. The God who planned the rescue, walks with His children, confirms His covenant, and dwells with His people also makes himself readily available amidst the ordinary.

This season is often known for its sense of *hurry*. It demands much busyness and activity. We prepare our homes and calendars—but do we slow and savor to prepare our hearts? Jacob's recognition of the holy came in a moment when he stopped, in the very place where he rested.

How might our souls receive the gift of God's presence if we were to slow our pace? Oh that we too might lay our heads down and marvel with Jacob, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." Genesis 28:16a

I *will* GO WITH YOU

READ: EXODUS 32-33

My daughter refuses to go to our basement on her own. It's light and pleasant, but still she remains insistent. "I'm not going without you... please come." How can I refuse her longing? As much as I desire her independence, I know the reassurance and rest from worrying that my presence provides. She simply doesn't want to go on the journey alone.

In Exodus 32, the Israelites forsake God, their Deliverer, and worship a golden calf. In response to their sin, He responds, "I have relented in destroying these people who have worshiped idols instead of me, but I will not go any further with you. Go ahead to the land I promised. It's yours. Go with angelic protection, I promised that too. But I cannot go with you."

Imagine the terror felt by Moses and the people. This is the God who heard their cries, freed them from slavery, and covenanted to *be their God*. Yahweh now says that His promises remain, but His presence does not.

And so, Moses set his tent outside the camp and sought the Lord on behalf of the people. He cried, "If your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here... What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" Exodus 33:13

God's guiding presence is what sets His people apart. Moses does not want to take one step further without the Lord. Is the same true of us?

In His mercy, God relents and blesses, "My presence will go with you and I will give you rest." The Lord is gracious to give us His presence despite our sin.

May we remember that God's promises fall short without His presence on the journey. May we know that the goodness of the promised land rings hollow without the *God of promise* to dwell with us.

INVITATION

What are you trying to journey through without God?

Sit with Him and imagine how His presence might change your perspective on this journey.



READ: ISAIAH 7:10-14

I *will* BE WITH YOU

INVITATION

Sit with the lyrics of “O Holy Night.”

Read them slowly.

How is God inviting you to respond to the poetry and imagery of the song?

“God, just be with us.” How many times have those words been uttered in prayer? As the people of God, we recognize that our most desperate need is for God to be near. We long for His wisdom, power, and presence. How good is it then, when we realize that the identifier for Messiah will be His WITH-ness? God’s presence with us is as sure as His name.

The Old Testament gives us a wide array of titles for Yahweh. He identifies Himself both in name and in action. All-sufficient One, The Most High God, Jehovah, The Lord is My Banner, The Lord Who Heals, The Lord is There, The Lord Our Righteousness, The Everlasting God, Elohim, The Lord Will Provide, The Lord is Peace, The Lord of Hosts. What rich and beautiful promises found in the names of God! And then, in the book of Isaiah as the time of the promised Rescuer draws near, we hear the signpost of the Messiah to come. The sign is His name, Immanuel, and His name means *God with us*. Out of every descriptor that could be chosen, God reminds us of His heart and purpose from the very beginning: to dwell with His people. God issues this name with a promise prior to the fall of Jerusalem, captivity of the people, and centuries without even a word from Heaven. He is seemingly absent. But we cannot mistake God’s silence for His absence. He has made sure of that with the promised name of Immanuel.

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” Isaiah 7:14. This was the light to guide Israel in the silence and hope to sustain their weary hearts.

This is our hope in the waiting and darkness.
The King is coming to dwell with us!

WK



02

HOPE PROVIDED

“The weary
world *rejoices*”

Messiah,

Jehovah Jireh,
In the dark, under the night sky
You created—God’s promise born
and placed in a manger.

Born not with a loud, victorious roar
but in the still silence of the night,
ushering into the earth
a new and glorious morn.

One where the promise was realized.

One where truth was not just told,
but seen.

You lived and loved and led
Your people to recognize Your light
and take it to the ends of the earth.

You confused those who thought they
would recognize you but couldn’t.

And comforted those who could never
imagine the freedom you came to offer.

You sought after and celebrated.

You called and claimed.

You heard and healed.

You inquired and informed.

You pursued and persuaded.

You sat *with*

And wept *with*

And laughed *with*

And walked *with*.

You still do, You still are, You always will.

Jesus, invite us back to that blessed night.

Let our eyes look upon You
and see your faithful love and
glorious goodness.

Let us marvel and rejoice in the
mystery of Your Holiness.

Let us call you by Your name.

Let the weary world rejoice.

Jesus, Immanuel.

God *with* us.

Forever and ever.

Without HOPE

READ: EPHESIANS 2:12-13

In the middle of the night, when dawn seems furthest away, your troubles might seem nearest. When all around you is quiet, it may feel that everything inside you is screaming for attention. In the absence of other noises and distractions, your fretful thoughts are free to roam. You're distressed by complicated family dynamics, or financial commitments you aren't able to meet. You've experienced loss, and the grief feels especially painful. You have so many decisions demanding your attention, and in the middle of the night, when you can't do a thing about them, they seem to accumulate, to feel overwhelmingly weighty and complex.

Perhaps it is not outside pressures that trouble you, but internal battles. Perhaps you are haunted by the darkness in you – the darkness of your sinful flesh that, though you belong to Christ, you still must put to death day by day. Perhaps, in the darkness, you feel hopeless.

When nighttime is full of sorrows, the coming of the dawn brings hope. The rising sun fills our eyes with actual, earthly brightness, and the light of day raises depressed spirits. Better still, every time the earth completes another twenty-four hour rotation, every time that big flaming ball peeks over the horizon and spreads its shining rays across the landscape, every time the physical sun of this world rises, it reminds us of the much deeper truth that dawn HAS come. A new and glorious morn broke on that first Christmas, when Jesus's arrival brought a thrill of hope to the weary world.

You lived in this world without God and without hope, today's passage says. Are there any darker words than these?

BUT NOW you have been united with Christ Jesus. Are there any words more full of dawn-breaking light??

Yes, the darkness is real. But the dawn is realer. Night is defeated by dawn, and the arrival of Jesus defeats our sin – every day, and every night.

INVITATION

Look at the sun today, and think about it symbolically.

Think about its light, dispersing the darkness.

Where in your life do you need the reminder that the light of Jesus has defeated darkness?



READ: ROMANS 15:4

INSTRUCTED *in* HOPE

INVITATION

Read Psalm 69:1-9

(from which today's passage quotes).

List any ways these verses give
you hope in your walk with the Lord.

What things come to mind when you think of education? Reading, writing, and arithmetic, no doubt. Science and history, too. Probably some art, some music, some home-ec, some sports. All the academic things, with some extracurriculars thrown in for well-roundedness, right?

What about living selflessly? Or bearing reproach? How about patiently living in harmony with one another, building each other up, and attaining hope through endurance? Were those classes part of your education? Dying To Self 101, with a prerequisite in Sanctification? Such are the matters of our spiritual education!

All of academia looks to the past, the present, and the future. Education looks to the past, not just for history classes but because that's where all subjects were born. Education happens in the present, and education's purpose is to equip us for the future. As we walk the halls of the University of the Soul, as we sit at the feet of Jesus to be taught, we look back at what was "written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us," and we look forward "as we wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled." According to today's passage, hope is the thing upon which the past and the future hinge. These things, written in the past, "give us hope" in the present, and continue to teach us as we anticipate the future.

Learning is a gift, and education of any kind is very nearly always a thing of hope. Education has raised slaves out of servitude and the poor out of poverty. Education provides opportunities where none seemed possible. The education of Scripture – the education that speaks to our souls of virtue and transcendence and unity in Christ and eternal life – gives the best kind of hope, the hope of God's glorious promises for and in us, fulfilled.

Patiently HOPING

READ: ROMANS 8:23-25

If you've ever gone kayaking, you might have had this experience: You leave the shore full of energy and strength and optimism, and the current works with you, taking you out onto the fresh, inviting water. Away you paddle, and yes, it's work, but it's also fun! Invigorating! Lovely! As the minutes or hours march on, you start to slow down, your body tiring. You turn your boat towards shore, and groan when you realize how far away it is. Now the current is working against you, and for every one paddle that took your kayak out, it seems you must do ten to cover the same distance going back. Hungry, thirsty, sunburned, and sore, you fight against the water, eyes locked on shore, until at last – at last – the nose of your boat scrapes sand, and you have arrived.

Jesus's arrival in the world and in your heart brought the gift of hope. When that hope was fresh, it may have invigorated you the way the edge of a body of water invigorates a kayaker. But life in this weary world often makes us groan, and there are too many days when heaven's shining shores seem impossibly far away.

Hope is a tricky thing. It often seems to evade us. But hope is not a feeling, it's a promise. We received it as a gift when we were saved, and it is ever before us. On the days that make our very souls groan with weariness, hope is still there. Elusive? Faint? Distant? Sometimes. Sometimes it feels so far away, we can't even see it. But it's always there. "In this hope we were saved...we wait for it with patience."

If today is making you groan, remember the hope in which you were saved. Keep your eyes locked on Jesus, and keep on rowing.

The shore IS coming.

INVITATION

Is there an area of your life making you groan with weariness today?

Write a prayer asking God to turn your groaning to hope.



READ: ACTS 2:25-26

RESTING *in* HOPE

INVITATION

Consider when you are most in need of hope—is it in the midst of your pride or the midst of your failures?

What is a specific way you can keep the Lord “always before you” today?

We usually think of hope as being the opposite of hopelessness or despair, but hope can be the antidote to some of the more “ordinary” cares that plague us too. When we are feeling anxious, discouraged, or indecisive, hope can answer. When we are overburdened or fretful, hope can soothe. And when we are overworked, overstimulated, and overtaxed relationally, hope can give us rest.

Hope can set my pride in order, too. When I am too caught up in this world, when my identity has become too closely tied to my accomplishments and the way others perceive me, I need to join David in seeing the Lord “always before me.” It was the Lord’s presence that kept David from being shaken, not worldly success or the adoration of his people. Rich, powerful, angsty, polarizing King David experienced life’s highest highs and lowest lows, and in the Psalms he continually claimed God’s presence as his anchor, his hope.

God is your only true hope in the midst of your lowest lows. But you know what? He’s your only true hope in your highest highs, too. Your success does not supplant God’s sovereignty, nor do your failures in this world replace your adoption into the kingdom of heaven.

From Jesus’s lowly arrival in a manger, to his death on a criminal’s cross, to his exaltation to the right hand of God, He has known all the lows, and he is literally the Most High. In all his earthly life, Jesus was never shaken, because he was never parted from his Father’s sustaining company. In your lows and your highs, remember that God is always before you. You can give up the battle to earn your way out of lows and into highs, and allow yourself to rest in hope instead.

REJOICING *in* HOPE

READ: ROMANS 5:1-2

Chipper Chelsea sees only the good in things. Every day is a gift, every person an angel. Good times, they are here to stay, and bad times, what are those? Chelsea is #tooblessedtobestressed, and she wants to help you feel the same. Next time you're having a rough day, she's got just the verse for you.

Authentic Austin is Chelsea's "real" and "raw" counterpart. Austin tells it how it is, and he's here to bring some gravity to the discussion. Sin is an ever-present pest, guilt and shame are monsters to be constantly fought, and he has PhD in lament. The struggle is real.

When faced with pain, Chelsea says there's nothing to be sad about because God is good. After all, if she's too blunt about life's sorrows, doesn't that demonstrate a lack of faith? With our future hope secure, doesn't that negate present grief and sadness?

When asked what God is teaching him, Austin sighs and says he's realized more than ever what a sinner he is. He's the dog returning to its vomit, he's Jonah running away from the Lord, he's Balaam – so thick-headed he wouldn't hear the Lord even if He made a donkey speak.

On the one hand, we can put on a smile no matter what, somehow believing that the more cheerful we are, the more faith we have. On the other, we can turn faith into a somber affair, believing that the more raw and broken and anguished our souls are, the more "real" they are.

The hope God calls us to isn't one that sugarcoats life's hardships, nor is it cynical about life's joys. To the Chelseas out there: life is well and truly hard. You can say so. Be honest. It's okay, because "we have been justified through faith, [and] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." To the Austins out there: brokenness isn't more "spiritual" than joy, and sanctification is real. We stand in grace, and we "boast in the hope of the glory of God." The way of Jesus grieves what has been broken by sin, even as it rejoices in our blessed hope.

INVITATION

Do you tend to be more
of a Chelsea or an Austin?

How can you ask God to help you
think rightly about your faith today?



READ: 1 JOHN 2:8

HOPE *is* SHINING

INVITATION

Are you more likely to be depressed
by the troubles of this world, or lured
by its beauties?

How can you keep your eyes
more thoroughly fixed on the
hope of heaven today?

There is a flower called the Evening Primrose, and, as you can probably guess from its name, the blooms of an Evening Primrose open not during the day but during the night. In all the sunshiny hours of the day, while all the other life and loveliness of the earth is active, these flowers sleep. It is the coming of the night that awakens their beauty, and the coming of dawn that sends them back to sleep. Even more peculiar is the Queen of the Night flower – large and luminous, soft and fragrant, this cactus flower not only blooms at night, it blooms only one night a year.

By contrast, there's a pretty little flower called a Moss Rose, and its flowers unfurl only when touched directly by the light of the sun. These delicate flowers stand tall in the light of dawn, turning their colorful faces towards the sun as though in worship. While Evening Primroses and Queens of the Night only share their loveliness in the borrowed light of the moon, Moss Roses come alive when the true light shines.

Life in this world is a life lived at night. There is so much beauty, so much loveliness, but it is all seen in a mirror dimly (1 Cor 13:12). Jesus's birth signaled the dawn, and we live in the reflected light of his life and common grace until He returns, when He will bring the full light of the new and never-ending day.

The darkness is passing, and the true light is already shining, as our passage today says. Sometimes the borrowed light of night shows us its beautiful flowers and sometimes its woes. But the coming of Jesus reminds us of our hope that all darkness will soon pass. The troubles of night will be gone for good, and the dimly reflected, pretty things of this world will be replaced by a glorious and transcendent beauty we cannot yet fathom.

We live in the night, but we look to the dawn.

WK



03

HOPE PIERCED

“Chains shall He *break*”

Son of God,
Suffering Servant,
You entered the city as branches waved,
their fronds creating sounds of welcome.

Voices cried out, “Hosanna in the highest!”

And You wept for Your children,
knowing the beautiful voices that welcomed You one day
would be turned into angry, vicious shouts demanding Your death the next.

And yet, for these very voices
You entered, endured, and agonized.

As the tip of the spear pierced Your side
You paid the debt for every sin, every lie, and every painful denial of Your name.

Gracious God,

In our confusion make clear to us the path of life.

A life with You, the plan first penned.

Turn our gaze to this Man of Sorrows
who was pierced for *our* transgressions.

When we are tempted to believe the lie
that on that dark day, all hope was pierced, wounded, and gone forever.

Let us rather know the truth
the lavish love that was poured out and hope *endures* forever.

Reveal to us Your radiant and glorious light
where darkness is no more.

Where sin cannot grow and hide and destroy.

Where every chain that threatens to wrap itself around our ankles
and pull us down to the pit
is broken by the power of Your name.

Where death is put to death.

Where the serpent is under Your heel.

And once again we rejoice as we proclaim your glorious name,
King of Kings
Forever and ever.

REVEAL *our* EMPTY HOPES

READ: GENESIS 22:1-18

Abraham experienced the goodness of God's promises. A son promised. A nation promised. Widespread blessing promised. Then Abraham experienced the goodness of God's provision. After many years of waiting, God showed up in spectacular fashion, providing a son in a way only God could.

But then Abraham experienced the painful shattering of his hope. God asked Abraham to sacrifice his child, the one that He had promised and provided. Isaac embodied all that Abraham longed for and all he had placed his hope in. Wasn't this God's plan— to produce blessing through his son? Why would God ask Abraham to kill his only hope for the future?

With this request, God asked Abraham to remember where his hope lied and step out in faith, trusting that the Lord would provide, just as He had before. He had to believe that God was *the* source of blessing, rather than looking to Isaac as his means of hope.

We might be tempted to shift our gaze from the Giver of our provision to the goodness of the thing He has provided. Our hearts can quickly turn from believing God holds the key to our fulfillment to instead trusting the good gifts to be the source of our joy and success. We can easily elevate the treasured evidence of God's faithfulness into an object of worship. It is then, as with Abraham, that God might loosen our grip on our false hopes.

Sometimes God asks us to sacrifice our hope on the altar so that we might remember that *He* is the only One who can provide hope.

INVITATION

As you sit with the Lord, ask Him to show you the things you have placed your hope in that are not Him.

Read Psalm 71:5.

Ask God to be your true source of Hope.



READ: EXODUS 15-16:12

REDEFINE OUR IDEA *of* BLESSING

INVITATION

What are you longing for in this season?

If God never brings deliverance in that longing, what does it look like for you to continue to hope in Him?

When we are in a season of longing or suffering, our minds are fixed on what relief might look like. We dream of rescue, plenty, and redemption. The Israelites were full of this kind of hope as they languished in Egypt. The work was hard, the rules tyrannical. “God deliver us” became their hearts’ refrain.

God responded. He brought them a leader. He brought mighty plagues. Then He brought the thing they most longed for—deliverance from their enemy! Just like that, their hopes were realized and their dreaming could cease, for God had provided the victory they had prayed for!

And yet, days later, they found themselves thirsty and longing again. Weeks later, their stomachs grumbled and they wished for the “luxurious” captivity they had once wanted deliverance from. Why would God deliver them from one awful fate just to place them in a desert?

This is our story. We live in longing, placing our hope in the earthly things to come. We imagine victory, relishing the goodness of the next chapter, only to find that when we are given the object of our longings, it falls terribly short. But what if God’s design is for our earthly desires to fall short? What if there is goodness in the desert?

After the people of Israel grumbled, God revealed His glory in a cloud. This cloud would go with them. This glorious God would lead them. This generous God would make provision each day for their needs. God pierced their hopes so they could lean into Him, so they could find that the real blessing was His presence. He brought them into the desert, to a land they had never longed for or dreamed of, to turn their hearts away from the false hope of earthly blessing and toward the eternal hope of an ever-present God of blessing.

REMIND US *of* THE SOURCE OF BLESSING

READ: PSALM 51,
2 SAMUEL 12:1-14

When we read the early years of David's life, we see why God selected him to be king of Israel. Full of courage, patience, and kindness David waited on the Lord through perilous and painful circumstances. David's life reverberated with a deep trust in God and an unwavering faithfulness to God's calling.

In those early years, David couldn't help but be dependent on the steadfastness of God. Without a home or a legitimate title David needed God's provision. He needed His presence in the lonely nights of exile. He needed God's hand of victory over his enemies.

But then David received the victory. He got the promised kingdom. He gained power, might, and protection of his kingship. Once he had all that he had longed and waited for, he began to lose sight of his need for the one true King. God knew the hearts of man. He knew that if they had an earthly hope to point to they would miss the true source of hope. Even David, who had a heart oriented toward God, lost sight of who held the true authority.

It took the faithful wounds of a friend, Nathan, for the scales to fall from David's eyes. He had taken a blessing that was not his to have. David believed he knew what was best for his life and ignored the commands of God. Sometimes God shatters hope to remind us that *He alone* is the giver of blessings. There are times when we need our hopes crushed to reveal that the plans God has for us are much deeper and richer than the ones we try to manufacture ourselves.

What if our broken hopes are an invitation to bless the goodness God has already given us?

INVITATION

What blessing do you believe
God is withholding from you?

Share that with Him and ask Him
to deepen your faith that His plans
for you are good.



BROADEN *our* UNDERSTANDING OF GOD

READ: JOB 1:6-12, 42:1-6

INVITATION

What reasons do you believe to be the source of your suffering?

Instead of dwelling on why you are suffering, rehearse the aspects of God's character that have surfaced in the midst of your painful season.

We live in a narrative that assigns blame to suffering. Not unlike Job's friends, we search for the source of our pain. Perhaps we have sinned. Or maybe we aren't as faithful to God as we ought to be. Or perhaps we just need to know more, find the right answer.

But in Job's story we see none of these things is the reason he suffers. Job is devoted to the Lord, wise in his actions, and walking uprightly. So why must Job experience hardship?

John 15:2 tells us, "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it might bear more fruit." Sometimes God cuts away good things. Sometimes God chooses to allow suffering even when we are walking with unwavering faith. In those seasons, like Job, we can wonder where God is or why we find ourselves amidst shattered hopes.

In these moments, weeks, and years of suffering, is it possible God is breaking us to deepen our abiding in Him? As Job says, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye *sees* you" (Job 42:5). Job spent days questioning God, doubting His motives, unsure of why he would be pierced so thoroughly. But as God reveals Himself to Job—the vastness of His power, the depths of His wisdom, His eternal reign over creation—Job is humbled. Who is he to question the wisdom and power of God? Even though God has the power to change his circumstances, Job's eyes now perceive that it is God's wisdom that stays His hand. Through the piercing of Job's hope in what he *thinks* he knows of God, God deepens Job's trust in the character of God.

COMPLETELY *redefine* HOPE

READ: ISAIAH 53

“Who would’ve thought God’s saving power would look like this?”
(Isaiah 53:1 MSG)

I wonder if these words came to the minds of the disciples as they sat hiding after Jesus’ crucifixion. The man they had so hoped would be their Savior was just pierced and crushed. How on earth could He rescue them now?

No one imagined God’s big plan for hope would come through suffering. How could grief and sorrow produce anything of value? How could death lead to resurrection and renewal?

Only a God wise beyond our understanding could see the deep rooted hope that is born from longing. Only a holy God could see that a Savior who bears our suffering could bring about true and eternal salvation. Only a loving God could see what a gift it would be to our souls to have a Savior who intimately knows what it is to suffer. Only Immanuel, God with us, would choose to be with us in all things, even in our raw and broken places.

Our God, the God of hope itself, calls us out of a superficial hope. False hope tells us that the circumstances and outcomes will determine our security, joy, and belonging. But the Author of Hope reveals that true satisfaction comes when our souls are anchored in Him, despite our circumstances. Isaiah declares that “out of the anguish of his soul he shall see, and be satisfied” (v. 11). Through Jesus’ unwavering gaze at the joy set before Him, He endured anguish and found complete satisfaction. It was Jesus’ suffering that gathered His people into His eternal kingdom.

Jesus did not pursue earthly satisfaction through ease and unblemished circumstances, but rather He pursued the goodness of His people that could only be born out of suffering.

INVITATION

Where have you seen grief and sorrow
produce something of value in your life?

Spend some time praising the
God of resurrection and renewal.



READ: LUKE 24:13-27,
EPHESIANS 3:20-21

GOD *can* DO MORE THAN WE IMAGINE

INVITATION

Sit with the God who is able to do
exceedingly more than we ask or imagine.

Ask God to open your eyes to the ways
He has provided for you in the past.

List that evidence of His goodness
and return to it when you need to
be anchored in hope.

Starting in Genesis, all of scripture pointed to a Savior. The holy men of Israel studied God's word trying to picture the One who would bring hope and deliverance to their nation. They *had hoped* He would be a mighty warrior. They *had hoped* He would deliver Israel from oppressive rulers. They *had hoped* He would come with a sword bringing immediate salvation.

No matter how many times men who loved God read through His word, they never accurately predicted how God would move—the ways He would come in humility, meekness, and sorrow. The minds of man cannot fathom the ways of God.

Our amazing God brought eternal hope, redemption, peace, and joy through the suffering of His Son. Full of mystery, He moved in power to bring about a more complete redemption and salvation than His people could imagine.

We, too, sit with God, praying for specific outcomes. We long for Him to come and deliver us from our suffering and pain in our predetermined ways. But all those years ago God pierced the expectations of His people in order to do exceedingly more than they could ask or imagine. He didn't just deliver them from an oppressive government, He delivered them from the oppressive weight of sin. He didn't just bring judgment on the evil of one nation, but instead brought justice for *all* evil and *all* people for *all* time.

So when God pierces our expectations of salvation, help, or hope, may we choose to believe that He is moving in ways far beyond our imaginings. He is bringing a Jesus-kind-of-hope to our circumstances, a hope that strengthens us with resurrection power.

WK



04

HOPE PREVAILED

“Let all within us
praise His Holy name”

King of Kings,

Lord of Lords,

Your creation bows in reverence to You
and sings praises to Your Holy name.

Mountain and meadow, frost and forest.

Each piece of lumber holds
Your glorious signature-
rings delicately sketched by Your pen.

From the wooden manger that held
Your newborn Son to the beams that
held His body as it was pierced.

With the rising and the setting of the
sun we remember all You are and all
You have done.

We look upon the sunrise knowing
You will fill each day with its
own certain hope.

We stand under the sky filled with its full
bright moon and silvery shooting stars
remembering the day You have given us.

We rejoice and are glad in it.

We fall to our knees in awe as we recount
the ways Your love and grace have saved us
again and again and again.

We cry out to You, as all who have come
before us have, to hold up our arms and
help us maintain a posture of Hope.

Not a passive wish, floating away
on the breezes that blow,
but a fighter's stance;
ever ready, ever trusting
You to provide the hope we need.

Lord of love, help us remember,
as we celebrate the birth of Your Son,
on this night divine,
Your hope that pursues us.

Hope that lived and died
and destroyed death.

Living hope that prepares
a place for us, with You.

You, O God, are too wonderful
to understand.

Our minds try to wrap themselves
around Your glory and they cannot.

Our words fail us as we try to describe
You and thank You with eloquent phrases.

Your name alone is all we can say,
Your name alone is all we need.

For today and tomorrow and tomorrow.

Let all within us praise Your Holy name.

Elohim,

Immanuel,

Messiah,

Jehovah Jireh,

Son of God,

Suffering Servant,

King of Kings,

Lord of Lords,

Alpha and Omega,

Yahweh.

Amen

LIGHT *is* COMING

READ: ZECHARIAH 14:6-9

Imagine walking a child through a garden in the dark.

The moon is nowhere to be found, no lampposts to illuminate a path, just the cover of the night sky. The plants are hard to see and even harder to pick as you don't want to tear the delicate stems or roots. The flowers are all the same, muted gray. No patterns, no vibrant colors, but you smell their lovely fragrance floating on the breezes of the night air. The plants all seem to have the same texture but to the touch some are smooth, some are rough, and some cause injury. You know there are creatures because you hear them fluttering and buzzing and crunching the dry leaves, but you cannot see where they are. You know you are in a garden but you cannot take in its full beauty. You try to describe this hidden beauty to your small child, but without the light, they cannot fully understand.

Since the exit of Eden, we have been walking through a dark garden. The "already" and the "not yet." God with us, but also sin and all of its effects. A foretaste – a shadow of what will be. Out of the corner of our eye, we catch glimpses of glory. We know we are in His creation, with all its beauty around us, and we know we cannot see it fully. Yet.

But soon sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus we will raise.

Jesus spent time in a dark garden, face to the ground praying that His Father's will be done. And so it was. And so it will be.

There is a day coming when day and night will shine the same and all will be made new. And all will be made right. Where waters and worship will flow without end. And all that has been hidden in shadows will shine in the Light of the Lord. Even once-dark gardens.

INVITATION

Ponder in what ways you can see eternal beauty around you and what ways it feels shrouded, hidden, or elusive.

How does creation cause you to wonder and worship?

Remember a place that caused you to stop in awe of God's beauty.



READ: LUKE 2:8-11

LIGHT *is* BORN

INVITATION

How has God's presence changed you?

Write down three specific moments you experienced God's presence with you and share with a friend or family member.

Sit with God and thank Him for His presence.

"The glory of the Lord shone around them."

This one sentence in the story of our Savior's birth speaks about the angel of the Lord who visited the shepherds the night Jesus was born. What does the glory of the Lord look like? How does it shine? Is it bright? Warm? Hot? Are there beams shooting out like an Arizona sunset? Were the shepherds blinded by the light of the Lord? Moses encountered God as fire in the burning bush (Exodus 3:6) and as cloud when he received the stone tablets (Exodus 34:5,29). The glory of the Lord is not something to look past, you cannot experience it without being changed.

Why did the angel of the Lord appear to these shepherds to deliver the good news? The new and glorious morn had just dawned, hadn't it? We have read and heard and told this story countless times and yet, the Word of God is alive and well. Sit in this story. Sink down deep into it, and let yourself see that in this one glorious sentence, we see who -- and how -- God is. God is the One who promised hope and He is the One who provides it.

Fall on your knees. O hear the angels' voices.

God's plan has always been to be *with* His people. He was *with* them in the garden. He was *with* them in the wilderness. He was *with* them in the temple. He was *with* them in the streets and boats and waves. He was *with* them in their homes and their churches. He was *with* them in their families and friendships. He was *with* them on a cross. He was *with* them when the curtain ripped in two. He was *with* them as they walked in sorrow. He was *with* them when they realized joy.

There in the fields.

There in the manger.

He was there and He is here *with* us.

Forever and ever.

LIVING IN THE LIGHT *of* THE LORD

READ: REVELATION 22:1-5

Have you ever stood at the edge of the ocean, feet in the sand as the waves wash over you, and you watch the light dance and reflect over the waters that seem to have no beginning or end? As you feel the warmth of the sun on your skin and the cool lap of the waters over your toes, there is a peace that envelopes you that you cannot explain. Not just comfort or enjoyment, although those are added gifts. You have a glimpse of glory and take a deep breath.

There is a day coming when this moment will not be fleeting, but unending. Where the brightest light cannot blind you, as you were created to be bathed in this light. God, the author of light itself, has been providing, promising, and offering light from the first, dusty breath. Every darkness ever seen, experienced, felt, or participated in will one day be no more. You will live in the light of the Lord. In this light, rivers will not flow out of Eden to the nations, but will all gather and flow back to God, their source. All injuries will be healed. All pain will cease. All that is wounded will be made whole by God Himself.

No longer will He be a lamp unto our feet but a Light *with* us, face to face. Unveiled.

It sounds too good to be true and yet, on this Christmas Day, know that this lavish gift is yours.

From the moment He called you His, *you have been His*.

From the prophecies of Isaiah (9:2) to the fulfillment in Matthew (4:16), God's plan has been clear all along – that the people walking in darkness would see a great light.

The story has been written. It does not end with celebrating His birth or even His death and resurrection. It ends back where it began, in a garden. Walking in the cool of the day. In the light of His glory, where all is good. With Him.

Glory, glory hallelujah.
Praise His Holy name.
Forever and ever.
Amen and amen.

INVITATION

This of a time you have experienced a peace that you cannot explain.

Thank God for the peace He offers and provides.

Say a prayer of thanksgiving and praise for Jesus.





ADVENT TEAM

Meagan South

Project Director + Editor-in-Chief

Sandra Bosscher

Creative Arts + Design Director

WRITING TEAM

Meagan South

Weekly Prayers, Week 4 Reflections

Ginger Ciminello

Week 1 Reflections

Elisa Watson

Week 2 Reflections

Katie Garcia

Week 3 Reflections

Advent is a time to prepare our hearts room, to wait in wonder, and to reflect on God's Holy power, goodness, and faithfulness.

This year's theme, "A Thrill of Hope" was inspired by the song *O Holy Night*. Each week a different stanza from the song was used to inspire written reflections of God's overarching story of rescue.

The visual design draws viewers into a journey from darkness to light, reflecting the anticipation of the Advent season. Starting with deep, shadowed colors that gradually transition into vibrant tones, the design mirrors the growth of hope as we approach the birth of our Savior. Light and color shift subtly throughout, creating a layered composition that invites reflection on our own journeys in faith.

Icons emerge week by week, representing the quiet anticipation from the dusk of night to the brilliance of dawn to the radiant light of the Savior in the manger. Together, these elements remind us of the transformation that light brings to darkness and the profound hope we have. Hope is not a wish, a thought, or something to reach for. Hope is found only in the person of Jesus.

Hope Promised
Hope Provided
Hope Pierced
Hope Prevails
Our Living Hope