



Advent

JESUS AND THE STORY OF THE WORLD

Advent 2018

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Introduction

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings

of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. 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.

- 1 Peter 1:8-13

The King is coming. Jesus Christ has come and will come again. This is the hope of the Church whom He purchased with His blood. It is the eager expectation and desire of His people. His coming is our joy, for He is our treasure, our greatest good.

Advent, formed from a Latin word meaning "coming" or "arrival," is about the coming of Christ. It's the traditional celebration of the first advent of Jesus and the anxious awaiting of His second. The season is a time for remembering and rejoicing, watching and waiting, and a time to reflect upon the promises of God and to anticipate the fulfillment of those promises with patience, prayer and preparedness.

History and Traditions

The Advent season officially commences on the fourth Sunday (Advent Sunday) before Christmas and continues until Christmas Eve or Day. Various theological traditions celebrate the season through an array of customs. Perhaps the most popular tradition associated with the season is the use of an Advent calendar to mark the month of December. Modern Advent calendars typically include 24 "windows" that are opened (one per day) to reveal a poem, portion of Scripture, story, picture or small gift. As more windows are opened, expectancy increases in awaiting the final day, which represents the first advent of Christ.

Another popular tradition involves the use of an Advent candle or candles. This symbol is borrowed from the emphasis throughout Scripture of Jesus Christ being the Light of the World (Matt. 4:16; John 1:4-9, 8:12). Those using one candle burn a little each day to mark the progression of the season. Each day a bit more of the candle is burned to represent the anticipation of Christmas. Others use a wreath with five candles in the middle. Each week a new candle is lit in anticipation of the final lighting on Christmas Eve or Day.

You also often see an emphasis on particular colors in the celebration of Advent. Whereas modern Christmas celebrations focus on red and green, the historical colors of Advent are purple (symbolizing royalty) and blue (symbolizing hope). Given the association of purple with Easter and Lent, modern Advent celebrations often emphasize blue.

Advent Guide

Our Advent guide serves as an introduction to the Advent season to awaken the angst of waiting, longing and yearning for Christ. The hope is to feel the ancient angst of Israel and allow that to inform our own anticipation. The guide consists of five weeks of material with each week containing a personal devotional, group devotional and family devotional.

The guide will take us on a journey from the longing of the Old Testament saints for the Messiah, to Christ's first advent, to the longing that we now experience for His return. We will see hints and shadows of God's promises of a Messiah, His fulfillment of those promises in His blessed Son and the promise of a future advent when Christ will return and all will be made new.

Group and Family Devotionals

A number of things compete for our time, attention, affections and resources during the holiday season. In the blink of an eye, the beauty, spirit and intent of Christmas can be consumed by the clamoring of commercialism and activities. A time intended to remember and celebrate the birth of the promised Messiah and look ahead to His promised return can quickly become centered on things that are superficial and temporal. As you think about and plan for the coming weeks, prayerfully consider what you want this season of Advent to be marked by for your group or family.

Devotional Week One: Sin

December 2 - 8

Week one focuses on how God created everything perfectly, how sin entered this world, and how that sin separates us from our Holy God.

Scripture Reading

Ecclesiastes 3: 11-15

We are obsessed with eternity, seeking to obtain it in earthly ways, yet we cannot see that God is the "eternal" that we really need. God has made everything perfect. It could not have been made any better or at a better time than when God made it. Man may be able to see all that God has made, but we have a very hard time fully understanding it all from the beginning to the end.

Take for example the building of a house. When a house is first being built all we see is the foundation, the rock, the steel framing of the foundation, the concrete, and the free standing pipes for the plumbing. As the work progresses, we see the framing of the floors, the walls, and the ceiling. Next the exterior walls begin to take shape and the roof is put in place. At some point, the finishing work on the inside of the house is completed, furniture is moved in place, and finally the house is finished. At this point, and only at this point do we see the true beauty or perfection of the finished house.

For the same reason, we have a hard time understanding why bad people seem to get rich or obtain all the power or come out ahead all the time. Or why do bad things happen to good people. These situations are much like the house being built. At first all we see is the foundation or the unfinished walls. It is not until the end when we are reunited with the Father, and only then, that we will be able to see all His creations in context and understand them from beginning to end. At that time we will see that everything truly was created perfectly and at just the right time. We will see the 'perfect' in all of God's creation and plans when we finally get to see it all as He had planned in the end.

God wants us to be happy in life. When we remain aligned with his plan for our life is when we find happiness in the things we have. We will not need things, big boy toys, and lots of money or power to have joy. God has a plan for each of us. We need to stay focused on this plan, and not get distracted with our own desires in hopes of being satisfied in life.

The everyday job or work that each of us does is not only a gift from God but should be used to serve God. We must use what God has created for the good of others. We were not created to find pleasure

in ourselves. When we use what God has given us for the benefit of others, we are sharing His love with them.

An article from CBN News dated 1/7/18 gives readers a behind the scenes look at Russell Wilson, the quarterback for the Seattle Seahawks of the NFL. Russell Wilson has never shied away from being outspoken about his faith. He told CBN in that article, "In terms of my faith I believe I'm here for a reason. I believe God placed me in this city for a reason. That never wavers for me, I'm going to trust that the Lord has put me here. And I'm excited about the game. I'm excited about the moment. And hopefully it's the best 60 minutes of my life." The article goes on to say the Wilson uses his social media presence to bring glory to God by tweeting scriptures and encouraging words. Russell Wilson is using what God has given him in terms of athletic talent and his willingness to share God's love to bless fans and teammates alike. Most likely, none of us will ever be the quarterback of an NFL team, but we can use what God has given us to bless others and share God's love too.

To "revere or fear" God is to stand in awe of Him. We should all stand in awe of God for who He is! It is impossible to fulfill your God given purpose if you do not do this. Everything that God has done is forever and can't be changed. What God has done, man should be in awe of. Nothing that God has created needs anything added to it, taken away from it, or altered in any way to make it more perfect. His creation is perfect from beginning to end.

There is nothing new happening today or nothing that will happen in the future that has not already taken place in some form or fashion. Just as Adam and Eve sinned and were driven from the Garden in the beginning, Man today has fallen in sin and has been separated from God as well. Romans 3:23 confirms that ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All means ALL! Not just Adam and Eve in the Garden, but every man, woman, and child since that time. In Romans 3: 10-12, Paul tells us that "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Application

Seeking to be successful on our own terms and efforts, doing things our way, will not only fail to bring you total satisfaction, but cause you to fail to respect God's plan for your individual life. Listen to God, focus on His plan for your life and realize the joy in what you already have. The latter part of verse 15 tells us that God seeks that which has been driven away. Sin is the reason Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden and sin is what drives us away from God.

This advent season when we celebrate the birth of Christ, remember that it is your sin that made His birth, death, and resurrection necessary. This was God's perfect plan to seek what has been driven away. Take time this week to reflect on the cost of your sin. Not just the fact that your sin separates you from God, but also the fact that it cost Christ His life! Take time to reflect on the great love of the Father to create a perfect plan that would allow us to be reunited with Him in spite of our sins.

Group Devotional

Read Isaiah 8:11-14 together and answer the following questions.

1. How does fear of God free you from fear of man?
2. How does fear of God make you feel safe ?
3. In what areas do you have misplaced fear?

Read Isaiah 8:17-22 together and answer the following questions.

1. When the flood comes, whom do you consult?
2. Does that person "chirp and mutter" with advice on circumstances?
3. Does that person address the heart, point to Christ and advise waiting on the Lord?

Prayer

Spend time praying together for hearts that are open in anticipation of what God will do among you in this season. Pray for expectant and eager hearts that are deeply affected by the reality of Christ's first advent and future return.

Family Devotional

Begin by summarizing the spirit of Advent with your family. Tell your children that Advent is a time to celebrate the first coming of Christ and to wait in eager anticipation for His return.

Read Isaiah 9:2 together and answer the following questions.

1. Were there any words that you did not recognize or understand?
2. The Bible says the people were walking in darkness. What is that darkness a picture of?
3. Who is the "great light" that was promised?
4. This passage is a prophecy, which means it is talking about something that would happen in the future. What or whom do you think Isaiah is talking about?

Prayer

Pray through Isaiah 9:2. Give thanks to God for shining light in the darkness by sending His Son to save us from our sins and ask God to help us enter into the Advent season with joy and anticipation.

Devotional Week Two - Grace

December 9 - 15

Scripture Reading

Isaiah 53: 4-12

Isaiah 53: 4-12 is the majestic mountain peak of God's grace upon humanity that began building from chapter 52 verse 7. In these verses we hear the declaration that a savior would suffer and die for his people. That the Grace of God would not be restricted to the bloodline of Abraham, but to those of all the Nations that trust in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah spoke these words to Israel almost 700 years before the birth of Immanuel. (God with us). It would not be until Luke Chapter 1 verse 31 that His name would be revealed; the name that is above every name; the name to which every tongue shall confess and every knee will bow; the name Jesus.

Isaiah was commanded by God to reveal this terrifying path of redemption and Grace that our Savior was to take. "Pierced for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities". By his "wounds we are healed." But this path was no accident or accomplished by sheer luck. "Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him..." verse 10. And it was done to "make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities," verse 11.

What Isaiah had spoken of was nothing new. It was a greater revealing of the Grace and love of God as he spoke to Eve after the very first sins of mankind were committed in Genesis Chapter 3 verse 15.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

Application

On the day of Jesus's crucifixion, he being the offspring of Adam and of David, was crushed, and murdered. Yet, three days later, he defeated sin and death forever for those that trust in Him.

This week, read Isaiah 53: 4-12. Spend some time alone and think about these words written over 2,700 years ago which foreshadowed the death of Jesus Christ. In those days they longed to know who this savior would be. Today, you can know Him by name.

Read the scripture and realize, that God loves you and has paid for all of your past, current, and future sins and iniquities. Remember and know the depths of His love and the sufferings He endured on your behalf.

Group Devotional

Read Isaiah 53: 4-12 together and answer the following questions.

1. Why did Jesus die on the cross?
2. Whose sins did he pay for?
3. Can any of your sins that you committed in the past send you to hell?
4. Can any of your sins that you commit tomorrow send you to hell?
5. When Jesus was being crucified how did the father look at Him?
6. How will God treat you if you trust in the work of His son Jesus?

Read Romans 8:31-39 together and answer the following questions.

1. What does Christ's death on the cross mean for you?
2. How does this work of Grace by Christ change how you live your life?

Read Romans Chapter 6

Prayer

Spend time thinking about the promises of God and thanking Him for His faithfulness to those promises. Ask the Lord to shine light into the depths of your heart and grant you deeper faith and repentance.

Family Devotional

Read John 1:1-5 and answer the following questions.

1. Were there any words that you did not recognize or understand?
2. Who is being talked about in this passage? How is He described?
3. How did Jesus, the Light of the World, overcome the darkness of sin?
4. Where do you see the darkness of sin in your own heart and life?
5. Where do you see the effects of Jesus in your heart and life?

Prayer

Pray through John 1:1-5. Thank God for the gift of His Son and ask Him to open your heart to a greater understanding and appreciation of the gospel this Advent season.

Recommended Activity

Make your home as dark as possible. Describe the darkness and how each person feels while sitting in it. Talk about what it would be like to do even the most simple of things - like walking from one point to another. Slowly bring light into the room. Begin by lighting a small candle. Talk about how the presence of even that small amount of light changes what you see and how you feel. If you have a fireplace, light a fire. Then turn on the Christmas tree or a lamp. Continue until the room is fully lit. As the light increases, talk about how its presence and strength overpower the darkness.

Devotional Week Three - Forgiveness

December 16 - 22

Week Three focuses on forgiveness of our sins and the only source of that forgiveness, Jesus Christ.

Scripture Reading

Ephesians 1:3-8

God has blessed each of us with every spiritual blessing in heaven in Jesus Christ. "In Christ" means the blessing is something that only Christ can give us. It is NOT something we can achieve or earn on our own. Galatians 3:28 says "There is neither Jew or Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. We are all 'righteous' before God because of what Christ did for us on the cross and not because of anything that we have done for ourselves. It is for this reason that we are equal in God's eyes.

Matthew 5:20 says to "Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal." Heaven is where we will find our true rewards and treasures. Verse 4 goes on to tell us we are chosen. We have been adopted into the eternal family through Jesus Christ. In legal terms, being adopted carries with it all the full standings that being a biological child of a family carries.

Verse 7 tells us we are 'redeemed' through Jesus shed blood and are forgiven of our sins. Jewish law required the Israelites to buy back or redeem family property that had been purchased by someone outside of the family. The law also required the Israelite family members to buy back other family members who had fallen into slavery for one reason or another. Jesus wasn't bound by any Jewish law to redeem us. He died on the cross, paid the price for us with his blood, willingly as part of God's plan of redemption for our salvation.

To trespass or sin means to 'miss the mark' or 'miss the target'. We have all missed the target or mark for what God had originally planned for our lives because of the presence of sin in our lives. We have NOT met the standards God had set out for us, but yet He has forgiven us our sins. This is a blessing or gift we could NEVER repay. However what we can do is to be faithful to the one who has given us that gift by striving daily to meet the mark of holiness He has set out for us.

Finally, v8 tells us that he has 'lavished' upon us these blessings. Lavished does not mean a little sprinkling of blessings. To say it means a 'lot' of blessings still falls way short of what God has blessed us

with. It means God has poured out blessing on us in such an abundance that we should be way more than satisfied.

As a little boy growing up, I can remember making shopping trips with Mom to the local TG&Y store in the town. You could get just about anything you wanted at this store, ranging anywhere from small appliances to groceries. This was for all practical purposes the forerunner of what we know today as Walmart. What set this store apart from most other stores was its redemption program. You see, this store would give you S&H Green stamps. The number of stamps you earned for each trip to the store was dependent upon the amount of your purchase for that day. They would also provide each shopper with numerous 'stamp books' within which you would 'lick and stick' your accumulated S&H Green stamps.

Each page of the booklet would have spaces marked for individual stamps to be placed on the page or a place marked off for a stamp of a larger denomination to be placed. So instead of having to place 10 individual stamps worth a value of \$1 on the page, you could place one stamp with a value of \$10 on the page. I can remember to this day, how 'good' it felt to be picked from among my siblings to put the stamps in the book after one of these shopping trips. Each stamp had to be placed specifically within the space outlined on the page. Kind of like coloring in a coloring book...you had to stay within the lines. Oh what memories!

After you completely filled one book of stamps, you started on another. This program was basically the same as what we have now with the various 'rewards' programs with some of the credit card companies. The more money you spend on a product, the more 'rewards points' or S&H Green stamps you could accumulate. This cycle would continue until you had accumulated enough stamps to purchase an item or items at the 'redemption' store. This store would 'redeem' the S&H Green stamps for a product or products of your choice. The store 'redeemed' the green stamps by paying the price of giving you a product in return for the green stamps.

Application

Redemption is not a novel idea from my childhood. This has been going on since Christ died on the cross to pay the price for or 'redeem' us from our sins. You see, in order for our sins to be forgiven and for us to be reunited with the Father, there had to be a price paid, a redemption, for us because of our sins. Jesus filled up the "S&H Green stamp" booklet, if you will, with His blood that He willingly shed at Calvary. It is this redemption that allows us to be forgiven of our sins. Because of what Jesus did on the

cross and the resurrection from the grave, we are all equal in the eyes of God. He now sees us through the redemptive power of Jesus shed blood.

The challenge is this. Stop and think what your eternal life would look like without that redemption and forgiveness of sin. It's plain and simple....NO hope and an eternity doomed to be lived out separated from the Father!

During this Advent week, take time with your family to stop for a moment and really give thought to the forgiveness of your sin through the redeeming power of Jesus shed blood. Reflect on the price paid for that forgiveness. What did YOUR sin and YOUR sin alone cost our Lord and Savior at the cross? Really stop and think about it. Make it a personal reflection; it was personal to Jesus when he died for YOUR sins. Reflect on the truth that forgiveness does NOT give us as Christians a 'blank' check to continue our lives of sin. Reflect on the fact that His forgiveness of sin sets us all free at the foot of the cross to live a life filled with the promise and hope of an eternal life with Him in heaven one day.

Group Devotional

Read Mark 2:1-12 and Colossians 1:13-14 and answer the following questions.

1. Who are the friends you would call at 3 a.m. if you were in a crisis or needing to confess sin? Why them?
2. In what ways is sin like paralysis?
3. Why did Jesus first say, "My son, your sins are forgiven?" instead of first healing his infirmities?
4. When did you first experience the power of Jesus to heal sins? What freedoms has His forgiveness granted you? How often do you think on that time? How does it still affect your heart and actions?
5. What new insight about the kingdom of God and Himself does Jesus reveal in Mark 2:1-12?

Prayer

Pray together for a greater and richer understanding of the profound implications of the gospel. Ask that the Lord would open your eyes to behold the wondrous glory of the Son who gave His life to save sinners.

Family Devotional

Read Mark 2:12 and answer the following questions.

1. Were there any words that you did not recognize or understand?
2. If you were one of the sick man's friends and you saw the huge crowds, what would you have done?
3. Why did the friends want to take the sick man to Jesus?
4. Who are the friends who you can talk to about Jesus?
5. Why does Jesus say the man must have his sin forgiven first? What does this mean about our hearts before God?
6. In what ways is sin like being sick?
7. What freedoms do we have when we are forgiven by Jesus for our sins?

Prayer

Bless the Lord for the grace that He gives us in forgiveness of sins. Take the opportunity to confess shortcomings and struggles in front of and with your children and thank the Lord for the grace of His Son to save us from our sins.

recommended Activity

Act out the Christmas narrative over the next few days:

- 1st night: Read and act out Luke 2:1-7.
- 2nd Night: Read and act out Luke 2:8-20.
- 3rd night: Read and act out Matthew 2:1-12.

Christmas Eve - Family Discipleship Time

Set aside ten minutes to talk about God's faithfulness in sending a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

Scripture Reading

Luke 2:1-20

Song

Sing or listen to "Silent Night" together. As you do, read carefully through the lyrics and explain any words that might be unfamiliar to your kids. Ask them what they learn about Jesus from this song.

Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child
Holy infant, so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace
Silent night, holy night
Shepherds quake at the sight
Glories stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born!
Silent night, holy night
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace
Jesus, Lord at thy birth. Jesus, Lord at thy birth.
Silent night, holy night
Wondrous star lend thy light
With the angels let us sing
Alleluia to our King
Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born!

Prayer

Have one person pray, thanking God for His incredible faithfulness in sending Jesus to save His people from their sins.

Devotional Week Four - New Hearts and Lives

December 23 - 29

Scripture Reading

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

We work hard to attain wealth, position and family – the shiny image of the American dream. But for all our well- packaged morality, we go to sleep with the notion that something is off. The work we put in each day comes up short of satisfaction. These things don't make us happy but, instead, make us cynical. We operate out of a fractured understanding of who we are meant to be.

God created the world to reflect His glory. The world existed in shalom – an all encompassing peace, wholeness and beauty. But darkness and depravity flooded the world, shattering that reflection of glory like the glass of a mirror, sending shards and splinters of shalom and light lost into the darkness. Our toys and entertainment are at best a way to try and put the pieces together and, at worst, a means to distract ourselves, to medicate pain from the aching lack of wholeness.

We stand in front of the mirror each morning to prepare for the day. We brush our teeth, fix our hair and head out the door. We see ourselves clearly because of the light and the image in the glass. We leave the house confident about ourselves and the day ahead. Yet only through the light of Jesus Christ and the mirror of the Word of God do we see our true selves. It is our identity in Christ, our new nature as His children, that gives lasting confidence for the days ahead. It is His presence that mends the reflection of God in us, fitting shards and splinters together into wholeness.

In his book *Spiritual Depression*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the famous Welsh minister, spoke of the inner monologue that runs in each of us:

“Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them, but they start talking to you, they bring back the problem of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you.”

The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul:

'Why art thou cast down'-what business have you to be disquieted? You must turn on yourself, upbraid yourself, condemn yourself, exhort yourself, and say to yourself: 'Hope thou in God'-instead of muttering in this depressed, unhappy way. And then you must go on to remind yourself of God, Who God is, and what God is and what God has done, and what God has pledged Himself to do.

For some the daily monologue might be one of despair and depression. For many it is the overestimation of innate worth and goodness. For all, it involves the embrace of an identity formed by perceived value in things external of God's opinion. We listen to ourselves. We trust ourselves rather than fixing our hearts and minds on Him.

If we would know who we really are, then we must consider what God has said of us.

Think about the following passages on identity:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

- Ephesians 1:3-6

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

- 1 John 3:1-3

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

He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

- John 1:9-13

Application

If only we would believe. If only we saw ourselves daily as new in Christ - free from shame, condemnation and isolation. If only we would behold the truth of

the gospel with the eyes of our hearts enlightened. We are simultaneously in need of Jesus for deliverance from sin and loved by God with fullness and affection reserved for the closest of kin.

The offer in our salvation is to live out the inheritance given to us in Christ - new hearts and lives. We can spend our days living out a fractured image, a broken self

- or have the shards and splinters of our true selves made new in Christ.

C.S. Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity*:

“Christianity seems at first to be all about morality, all about duties and rules and guilt and virtue, yet it leads you on, out of all that, into something beyond. One has a glimpse of a country where they do not talk of those things, except perhaps as a joke. Everyone there is filled full with what we should call goodness as a mirror is filled with light. But they do not call it goodness. They do not call it anything. They are not thinking of it. They are too busy looking at the source from which it comes.”

A day is coming when these new hearts and lives will live in a world where the very light by which we see comes not from a star but from the presence of Christ. And then, there will be no more shards and splinters, but endless and perfect reflection of His glory and joy in His presence.

Group Devotional

Read Ephesians 1:3-22 and answer the following questions.

1. Do these images portray how you typically think of yourself?
2. What words or phrases stand out to you and why?
3. What language of sonship do you see in this passage?
4. What does it mean to be a son or daughter of God?

Read 1 John 3:1-3 and John 1:9-13 and answer the following questions.

1. In what areas of your life has the fatherly love of God failed to penetrate?
2. How have the realities of regeneration and adoption changed your life?

3. Do you think of God primarily as a King or as a Father? What is the benefit of holding both images in mind as we worship?

Prayer

Ask the Lord to enlighten the eyes of your hearts that you may know the hope to which He has called you in Christ, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might (Eph.1:18-19).

Family Devotional

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18 and answer the following questions.

1. Were there any words that you did not recognize or understand?
2. What does it mean to "behold"?
3. What does it mean to "reflect"?
4. Whom or what does this passage tell us to behold?
5. Whom or what does this passage tell us to reflect?

Tell your children that the Bible tells us that the children of God spend time looking in the Word of God to see Jesus and to become like Him. As we look to Him, we become like Him because He works in us through the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

Thank the Lord for the beauty of His Son and ask Him to give you a heart that delights to know and love Jesus more fully.

Recommended Activity

Find a mirror in your home and stand in front of it as a family. Ask your children to study the reflection in the mirror for a full minute and then have everyone describe what they notice about the outside appearance of the family. Now ask them how they would describe each person on the inside. Is there a difference in words? How do they describe the character of mom, dad or a sibling?

Tell your children that the way a person looks on the outside is only a part of who they are, but the way they look on the inside, in their heart, is their deepest identity. Our identity tells us whom we belong to and what kind of person we are. The children of God are people who love and trust Jesus Christ, and

that changes the way they look on the inside. You can't see it in a mirror like the one in your home, but the Word of God shows us who we are to look like: Jesus.

Devotional Week Five - All Things New

December 30 - January 5

Scripture Reading

Luke 2:1-7

A good advertising campaign aims only to sell more products than competitors. A great advertising campaign strives to discover our humanity, to reach through the medium to touch us, to understand our deepest longings and to create in us a need for more.

Everyone wants something for Christmas: from toys to high-tech gadgets to jobs to relationships to peace on earth and everything in between. Christmas is a season of longing. People eagerly anticipate the new. We look forward to opening gifts which offer the hope that the new inside will fulfill our current longing. But then a month, a season or a year passes, and the newness fades, and the longing returns. This year's gifts become tomorrow's landfill stuff.

Pause and reflect

- Think about the greatest Christmas gift that you ever received as a child. What was it? Where is it now?
- Spend a few minutes thinking about the various gifts that God has given you. What are some of your most precious gifts?

Our error is not in yearning, but in the object of our desire. The deepest recess of our humanity longs for the new. We so desperately seek to experience newness that we settle for caricatures of what we really want and need. God made us for far more than attaining new things; He made us to be made new and to have this newness shape and direct our identity and love.

We long for the insignificant when we were made to long for Christ who said, "Behold, I am making all things new" (Rev. 21:5). Christ has come and will come again to bring the newness we were made to experience, the newness that will last forever, the newness that will enable us to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

But to understand this glorious end, we must remember that in the beginning, God spoke into the darkness and created light. God is light, and in Him is no darkness (1 John 1:5). This God of light created humanity in the image of His illumination so that we too might be light bearers. Though God

created humans to shine forth like stars in the universe, the Fall reduced humanity to flicker like light bulbs with shorted wires and fractured filaments, unable to radiate the brilliant light that our Maker intended.

Though hope seemed lost, God foretold a message of hope, through the prophet Isaiah, that one day the shadows and deep darkness would come to an end with the appearance of a “great light” (Isa. 9:2).

Pause and reflect

- How has this Advent affected your life?
- Have you been able to slow down and get out of the rut of consumerism and commercialism and press in to the Lord? If so, spend time thanking God. If not, spend time confessing and asking for strength to pursue greater intentionality in the season.

Jesus Christ, the “great light,” appeared to humankind to bring the end of shadowed empty life (Matt. 4:16; John 1:4-9, 8:12). Through the sorrow and shadow of the cross, He turned dark to light and day from night.

If Jesus has truly turned on the cosmic lights to a darkened world, why then does the world still seem lightless? Our world is still dark because the end has yet to come. Jesus brought about the beginning of the end. This dawning of the Son gives us the sure hope that one day God will bring the full light of day and the end of darkness marked by the everlasting luminosity of glory. On that glorious day, the sun and moon will no longer be the governing lights of the world, for there will be new luminaries: The LORD “will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory” (Isa. 60:19-20; Rev.21:23; 22:5).

In this new city of God, night will be no more, and days of mourning will come to an end. There will be no tears, no pain and no death. Children of the light “will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:4).

The promise of Jesus to make all things new includes not just the new heaven and the new earth. Jesus promises to make us new, as well. At the second advent of Jesus, all the sons and daughters of God will be finally and completely redeemed, restored, renewed and resurrected to live in the city of God on the new earth as God’s image bearers. We will be made new with resurrected bodies that are imperishable and immortal, fully able to reflect God’s glory so that we might fully enjoy the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Though this renewal is a future reality, it has present implications. Even now the light of God's glory pierces the darkness.

Even now the light of the gospel cleanses. Even now the light transforms. May we lean into this light during this Advent season and experience the brilliant radiance of God's grace.

Pause and reflect

- If you are truly honest with yourself, what are you longing for this Advent season?
- Do your longings lead to misplaced hope or do they lead to a hope that transforms? What misplaced longings are you using to numb yourself?
- Do you believe that God is able to satisfy your deepest longings for acceptance and love?
- What areas of your life do you desire for God to make new?
- As a child of light, what are you doing to reflect the light of God to those around you?

Group Devotional

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 and answer the following questions.

1. What does it mean to be children of the light? What does it mean to be in darkness?
2. Paul is certain that Christ is coming back to make all things new. Then why is it so important to live as children of the light?
3. Why is Paul pleading with the Thessalonians to "keep awake" and to "be sober"?
4. How are faith and love like a breastplate? How is the hope of salvation a helmet?
5. Paul says that we are not destined for wrath but for salvation. What is this future element of salvation?
6. What is the connection between hoping for Christ's return and encouraging and building one another up?

Prayer

Pray for the soon return of Christ to make all things new.

Family Devotional

Read Numbers 6:24-27 and Revelation 22:3-5 and answer the following questions.

1. Were there any words that you did not recognize or understand?
2. Do these passages have any similarities?
3. Do you speak blessings to one another?
4. What are some dark places in your heart that you need the light of Jesus to expose?
5. Do you want to see Jesus face to face?
6. How does a person become a child in the family of God?

Prayer

Close your time by praying together as a family. Parents, pray blessings in the name of Jesus over your children. Teach your kids the blessing from Numbers and practice saying it to each other.

Recommended Activity

Make place mats for your Christmas meals. On one side, write or draw something that reminds you of God's faithfulness to His promise of sending a Savior. On the other side, write or draw something that reminds you of God's promise that Jesus will return.