



Hope **REKINDLED**



An Advent devotional inspired by Sarah Kointz

HOPE REKINDLED

The tradition of Advent exists to remind Christians of the three comings of Christ.

- As a tiny babe in a manger at Bethlehem.
- As the risen Savior into our hearts.
- As our triumphant King at the end of the age.

When we commit to an Advent Scripture reading plan, we create space for Christ during one of the busiest times of the year. Each day of this Advent reading plan includes a scripture, a devotional reflection written by someone from the DBC family and a prayer.

Throughout the four weeks of readings you will be invited to slow down, remember, anticipate and rejoice in all that Jesus Christ has done and all that He has promised to do. May these readings help point your heart towards Jesus this Christmas.

Suggested reading schedule:

Week 1: Dec 1-5

Week 2: Dec 8-12

Week 3: Dec 15-19

Week 4: Dec 21-25

ADVENT WEEK 1 - PROMISE

Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.
Isaiah 41:10 (NLT)



WEEK 1 DAY 1

JESUS GIVES US STRENGTH

Read: Isaiah 40:9-11

Do you remember the year when Christmas was cancelled? I'll never forget. It was December 2020 and we were expecting our second child. Being pregnant during Advent had my soul humming a joyful song of anticipation.

Alone at the first ultrasound, the tech turned the screen and in that moment everything changed. The notes of my anticipation song twanged with confusion. Then became an off key reverberation of shock and disbelief. My eyes were seeing triple: three tiny homes for three tiny babies.

One was empty. Our teeniest gone before we even knew of their existence. My song, a moment ago vibrant, now a lament. The Lord simultaneously gave and took away.

There were still two more babies. One smaller than the other. We got to our knees with prayers of hope and of miracles. I yearned for community to carry me through this deep grief and joy. But we were literally alone. I was alone. No one to hold my hand in the subsequent three appointments that would confirm that our teeny one was not growing. Had no heartbeat. Ceased to be. I had only Jesus.

Only Jesus to tenderly carry me to the still waters where He gently cared for my broken spirit. Only Jesus to draw us close in His heart and send friends to our doorway to cry with us when they couldn't come inside. Only Jesus to protect and strengthen the life of the last tiny baby.

"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness...Therefore I will delight in weakness...in difficulties, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

Advent, while a time of anticipation can more often than not be a painful time. A time of loss, grief, loneliness and stress. Knowing, and clinging to our Sovereign Jesus who is on the throne did not and does not diminish grief. But it did carry me.

"I have learned to kiss the waves that throw me up into the Rock of Ages." - Charles Spurgeon

-Danae Blum

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, show us Your Good News. Reveal Your strength and power in our lives. Draw us close and protect us as a shepherd protects his flock. Lead us into Your presence and help us remember Your promises.

WEEK 1 DAY 2

JESUS LIGHTS OUR PATH

Read: Isaiah 2:2-5

One afternoon this fall, I was driving our daughter to a birthday party. We had just nicely started out when I remembered that the road was under construction. Sure enough, half-way there, we found ourselves sitting at a red light in the middle of nowhere. We waited. And waited. It didn't take long for my little backseat driver to get impatient: "This doesn't make any sense, mom! Why are we just sitting here? The light must not be working! We should just ignore it and drive on!" After a few more minutes, an on-coming vehicle went by. Finally, the light turned green and we were on our way again. As we drove, we noticed that the road ahead was only wide enough for one vehicle at a time. The waiting had - of course - been for good reason.

Learning to walk in the light of the Lord has been a life-long journey for me. There have been unforeseen stops and detours along the way. I don't always understand what God is doing in my life, but as I make the daily decision to draw near to Him, He shines His light into my heart and changes the way I see things. This process requires me to slow down so that I can listen and reflect on what He is saying through His Word. It takes time...time for His kingdom to grow in my heart, time for His love to really sink in, time to learn to trust and submit to His leading. Often in His light, I see attitudes and habits that need to change. As I confess my sin and turn to the Lord, He cleanses and reshapes me. And His promise refreshes my soul: *"If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7).

-Charman Hoff

Prayer:

Lord, we invite You to establish Your kingdom in our hearts. Teach us Your ways so we may walk in Your paths. We want to see Your light shine into the darkness of this world. We long for Your glorious return!

WEEK 1 DAY 3

JESUS COMFORTS

Read: Isaiah 52:7-9

Earlier this year (2024) Jordan Davis released a song titled 'If Good News Sold'. The song gives story lines surrounding big 'personal news stories' that would never make global headlines. The premise is that if these personal news stories dominated front page columns, the world would seem a lot more enjoyable.

Thousands of years earlier Isaiah expressed similar sentiments. '*How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news*'. He goes on to describe a dramatic exuberance from a multitude of people that receive this news.

Consider a difference between the time of Davis and Isaiah though. The threshold of news worthy stories has exponentially shifted. In 2024 news is cheap. Nearly all humanity has the option to create or view news that suits their preferences by the simple task of finger movement. News in Isaiah's time was delivered a little bit differently. News worth sharing would be discussed in a local community. But for news to reach further destinations, it required messengers. Someone would choose to commence on a journey. The messenger described in Isaiah would have experienced increased risk and energy to traverse mountainous ranges. With higher cost comes increased value.

The news Isaiah writes about is not a cheap news feed to be scrolled through. This news is something so important to relay that people are willing to put their life on the line.

What is this incredibly valuable news? The gospel of Jesus Christ! That through Jesus there is miraculous restoration. That was once broken has been renewed. Although Isaiah did not know Jesus' name, he knew that God was a God of restoration. And he understood that this news was so important, it needed to be proclaimed everywhere! Imagine that. A 'personal news story' to everyone who believes as well as a headline needing global attention! I don't know of any other news so impactful and comforting!

Praise God for His restoration. How will the good news you have in Jesus affect the 'headlines' in your life today? Be comforted by the security we have in Him!

-Joe Harms

Prayer:

Father, proclaim Your peace and salvation message to our hearts. Fill our spirits with Your joy, that we may testify to Your goodness and provision in the presence of our peers. Comfort and redeem us from all unrighteousness, that we may rejoice in Your goodness all the days of our lives.

WEEK 1 DAY 4

JESUS FILLS OUR HEARTS WITH JOY

Read: Isaiah 40:5

What exactly *is* this glory we'll be seeing? Moses wanted to know too, so he asked, "Please show me your glory." And God replied, "You can glimpse my back as I pass by. But not my face, Moses. Because you'd die." (Exodus 33)

I wonder if God concealed his face for more than Moses' earthly preservation. What if God was saving this occasion, this unveiling, for all of us? Isaiah says we *all* will see God's glory.

Think of when the groom lifts the veil of his bride and the whole room shares in the sacredness of that moment. So romantic and joyful! I wonder if this glory-revealing is going to be his *face*.

I can't tell you how many times I've longed to see God. Especially when I feel like the battles will just never be won. I desperately want tangible reassurance that He's with me. But next to a Holy God, my unworthiness will be apparent. Like Moses, will I burn up in the presence of a righteous God?

Oh. I don't want to become more aware of my insufficiency, or die, thank you very much. Yet this longing for God never does fully go away. I find myself wanting to see him again and again. One Sunday as I was pondering this, a song spoke to me afresh,

Who breaks the power of sin and darkness? The King of Glory...

There it is again. Glory.

He took my place, laid down his life, that I would be set free.

Jesus doesn't want me to dread his coming. He broke the power of my darkness and offered me his own sparkling white covering. The shirt off his very own back. How can I refuse such a proposal? I can wear it, and it will cover me. Who can take it away from me?

My longing to see him is fitting, because he has made a way for me to be ready. The trials of this life are more bearable when I remember they will one day melt before him.

Lord, I'm so glad you will show us your glory. I can't wait to see you.

-Jayna Snider

Prayer:

Speak tenderly to our hearts today, Father God. Comfort us with Your promises, strengthen us with Your provision. We are weary and worn out from our time here on earth; encourage our souls by revealing the glory of what lies ahead.

WEEK 1 DAY 5

JESUS SETS THE CAPTIVES FREE

Read: Isaiah 9:2-7

As I reflect on the Prince of Peace my NIV Study BIBLE notes for Isaiah 9:6 write, "Prince of Peace, His rule will bring wholeness and well being to individuals and society.

A few years ago, I was helping my younger brother on the farm. We worked, cooked and talked together. I had noticed that he was not as strong as usual and daily getting weaker. Doctors had no idea why.

I came back to Dalmeny to pack for an indefinite stay at the farm. Meanwhile, my daughter gently urged me to begin attending church in Weyburn. While I was gone, my brother was moved to his daughter's home; now he was barely able to walk. On a Sunday morning in the Weyburn church I had a vision of myself in a hole, desperately gripping the edge. Then, I saw the light shining down surrounding me. At that moment, I knew my brother was dying and I would fall deeper into the darkness. I also knew that as long as I kept my eyes on the light, I'd be safe. The Prince of Peace didn't remove the grief and brokenness, but he did walk with me every step of the way. As the senior Pastor spoke, it was as if God had placed the words in his mouth. Words that would reach deep into my heart. After my brother's death, I told my son, "I wanted to go first." His response was, "God has more for you to do." Those words brought immeasurable peace.

A few years later my son died. As I grieved I knew Jesus, my Prince of Peace, would once again strengthen me. I had His promise in Isaiah 40:31. "*Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint.*" Jesus continued to light my path. I remembered the light beaming down into the pit. My Saviour was drawing me closer to Him.

I had the comfort of the words He'd given to my son, "God has more for you to do." I believe it was His nudging that had a dear friend share the following encouragement with me: When sadness fills your heart, when tears overflow in your eyes, Always remember three things: God is with you. Still with you. Always with you.

I have joy as I watch my grandkids grow and share their faith in the Lord. Jeremiah 31:13 says "*I will turn their mourning into joy.*" I am free from overwhelming grief and despair as I give thanks to the Lord, "*For He is good and His love endures forever.*" Psalm 107:1

Father, may you bless and fill us with your truth, grace and peace each day.

-Val MacFarlane

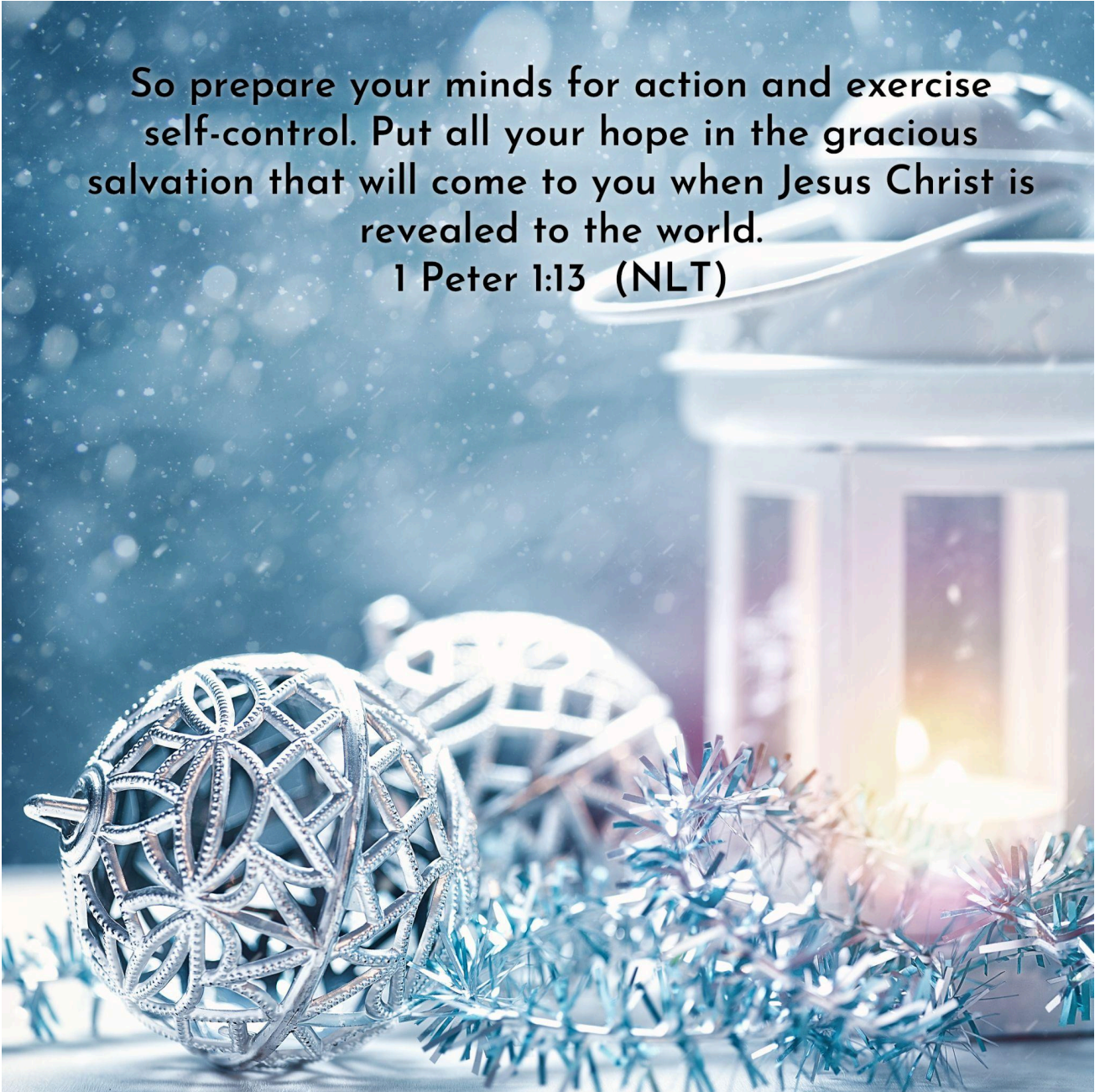
Prayer:

You are our Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. Sow the seed of truth in our hearts today, that we may reap Your bountiful harvest in our lives. Give us victory over all who oppress us and shield us from the dangers of this world.

ADVENT WEEK 2 - PREPARATION

So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world.

1 Peter 1:13 (NLT)



WEEK 2 DAY 1

JESUS FULFILS HIS PROMISES

Read: Luke 1:46-55

In Luke 1 we read about Mary's song of praise. It was a song of praise in the unknown of what lies ahead. Imagine Mary who received the message from an angel that she is going to have a child. Not just any child but the son of God. Overwhelmed with her situation and unknown, she praised God.

Have you ever been overwhelmed with your situation? When I look back in my life there were times of not knowing what was ahead. I remember sitting alone asking God to help because I saw no path forward. I asked Him to help me to rest in His hands.

Now looking back on those times, I can see that God showed up in amazing ways. So often in my uncertain times, God was working through it all. I have been incredibly blessed in how He has been right by my side through all situations. It was not always the way that I wanted things to work out, but His will was worked out. He promises to never leave us or forsake us. I can say that God has never left me - He has always been by my side. There is no way I can count all the times and ways He has carried me.

Luke 1:46-48

My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

-Dave Thiessen

Prayer:

Father, You are great and worthy of our praise. Satisfy us with the truth of Your Word as we draw near to You during this Advent season. Help us see the beautiful gift of Your promise fulfilled in Bethlehem, in the Christ-child You sent to seek and save the lost

WEEK 2 DAY 2

JESUS SAVES US FROM OUR SIN

Read: Matthew 1:18-25

Dear Mary

It's the Christmas season again. The time when we focus on the birth of your Son, Jesus. I can't imagine all the wonders, excitement, fear and joy that went through your mind when the angel shared that you, Mary, would give birth to the Son of God who would save us from our sin. Did you have dreams for Jesus? Thinking back to when I was pregnant with my children, my greatest dream for them was that they would love and serve your Son, God's Son, with all their hearts.

When you acknowledged and accepted the angel's words to you by saying "I serve the Lord," it tells me that you loved and served God long before that day. I believe your parents taught you about God, His grace and mercy. My parents taught me about how your Son gave His life for my sin so that I could live with Him forever. Dennis and I wanted to prepare our children for Jesus' second coming so we shared Christ's gift with our children too. And now we continue to share Jesus with our grandkids and all my Bible Discovery kids.

You had the privilege of Jesus living and walking with you. But that's not much different for me, for us today. Before Christ left this world, He promised us the gift of His Spirit to live within us. Today I treasure this gift. I know He lives in my life and is my every day, every moment help.

Thank you for being obedient in God's plan to rescue us. My prayer is that I will be obedient to share Emmanuel, God with us.

Together we wait for Jesus to come and reign forever,

-Faith Friesen

Prayer:

Prepare our hearts to receive the gift of Jesus Christ this Christmas. Help us understand what it means to have God with us, every moment of every day. Thank You, Heavenly Father, for fulfilling all your promises to us and sending Your Son to save us from our sins

WEEK 2 DAY 3

JESUS JUSTIFIES US

Read: Romans 3:21-26

It isn't a difficult challenge to look back on my life and take specific note of the many times that I have fallen short. Times I've made foolish choices or lacked patience or lashed out in anger, the list goes on.

And when I reflect on these things I am often filled with different emotions, I'm disappointed in and frustrated with myself, I feel shame for choices I made, I justify something I've done, or I feel a sense of helplessness. And yet, there is one who sees me in my brokenness and sinfulness and he does not share those feelings.

He instead does what seems unimaginable, He declares me righteous. Not because I'm deserving of it or am a nice enough person but because from the very beginning of history when humanity first rebelled He had a plan to bring His beloved creation back to Himself. I'm encouraged knowing that He wasn't surprised that we couldn't meet His standard, that when He outlined His law describing what was required to be in relationship with Him, He wasn't scrambling for a new plan when humanity inevitably fell well short. But from the start He knew that He would send His Son to suffer and die so that the price of my sin could be paid and I could be made right in His eyes.

It is a truth that I so easily forget as I lose myself in what I feel about what I've done but Paul reminds me that even though I, like everyone else, fall horribly short of His glory His sacrifice justifies me and declares me righteous.

And in that incredible declaration is freedom. Freedom from the sin and shame and frustration I pile on myself. What a perfectly loving, perfectly just God we serve.

-Jaydon Berg

Prayer:

Thank You, Heavenly Father, for revealing Your righteousness and mercy through Your Son, Jesus. Thank You for giving us faith to believe He is the only one who can save us. And thank You for justifying us freely by Your grace through the redemption of Christ.

WEEK 2 DAY 4

JESUS PRAYS FOR US

Read: John 17:13-19

My first encounter with the living God within the pages of scripture was early on in my faith. 1 Corinthians 15:35-38 (MSG) *“You plant a ‘dead’ seed, soon there is a flourishing plant...What we plant in the soil and what grows out of it don’t look anything alike. The dead body that we bury in the ground and the resurrection body that comes from it will be dramatically different.”*

I knew from the spirit bursting within me that this verse was for me. I had given my life to Jesus, I was dying to my old life. I had entered into his life giving grace and was being sanctified. But I did not understand the extent to which this verse would come true in my life.

Who I am now and who I was before Jesus don’t look anything alike. But it didn’t happen in one magical moment. It has been a process of walking out my faith, learning about God through his Word, in prayer, and in fellowship with His people. Listening to the convictions He placed on my heart. Allowing Him to prune the branches that do not bear fruit in my life. Learning to be in this world, but not of it.

Being sanctified is a journey. It will not be complete until the day we see Jesus face to face. Jesus’ prayerful words spoken while still on earth remind us that we are set apart, protected in His truth until that day. Thank you Jesus!

-Christa-Ann Willems

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the gift of Your Word. Sanctify us by Your truth and teach us how to live in a manner that brings joy to Your heart. Thank You for sending Jesus to intercede for us.

WEEK 2 DAY 5

JESUS FREES US FROM DEATH

Read: Hebrews 2:9-15

“Because God’s children are human beings - made of flesh and blood - the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of Death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.” (NLT)

Today is the final devotion of the week focused on preparation. The passage in Hebrews 2 reminds us of the reason why Jesus had to come to us, why Jesus had to become one of us and ultimately why Jesus had to die for us. *“Yes, by God’s grace, Jesus tasted death for everyone” (vs9b NLT)*

What an amazing thought to consider that by dying Jesus broke the power of the one who had the power of death. This act of God’s grace not only broke the power of death but in doing so set us free from the fear of dying.

As we journey through life, we all walk a path that is unique to ourselves. The joys and blessings or the difficulties and struggles can be similar to others but are set apart by our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual individuality. One thing we all share is the reality that one day our journey will be complete. When that day comes we as God’s children do not have to fear, but can fearlessly anticipate coming into God's presence.

May this truth rest on you. May it give you an eternal perspective as you go through your day and the season of the circumstances you find yourself in.

-Brian Thiessen

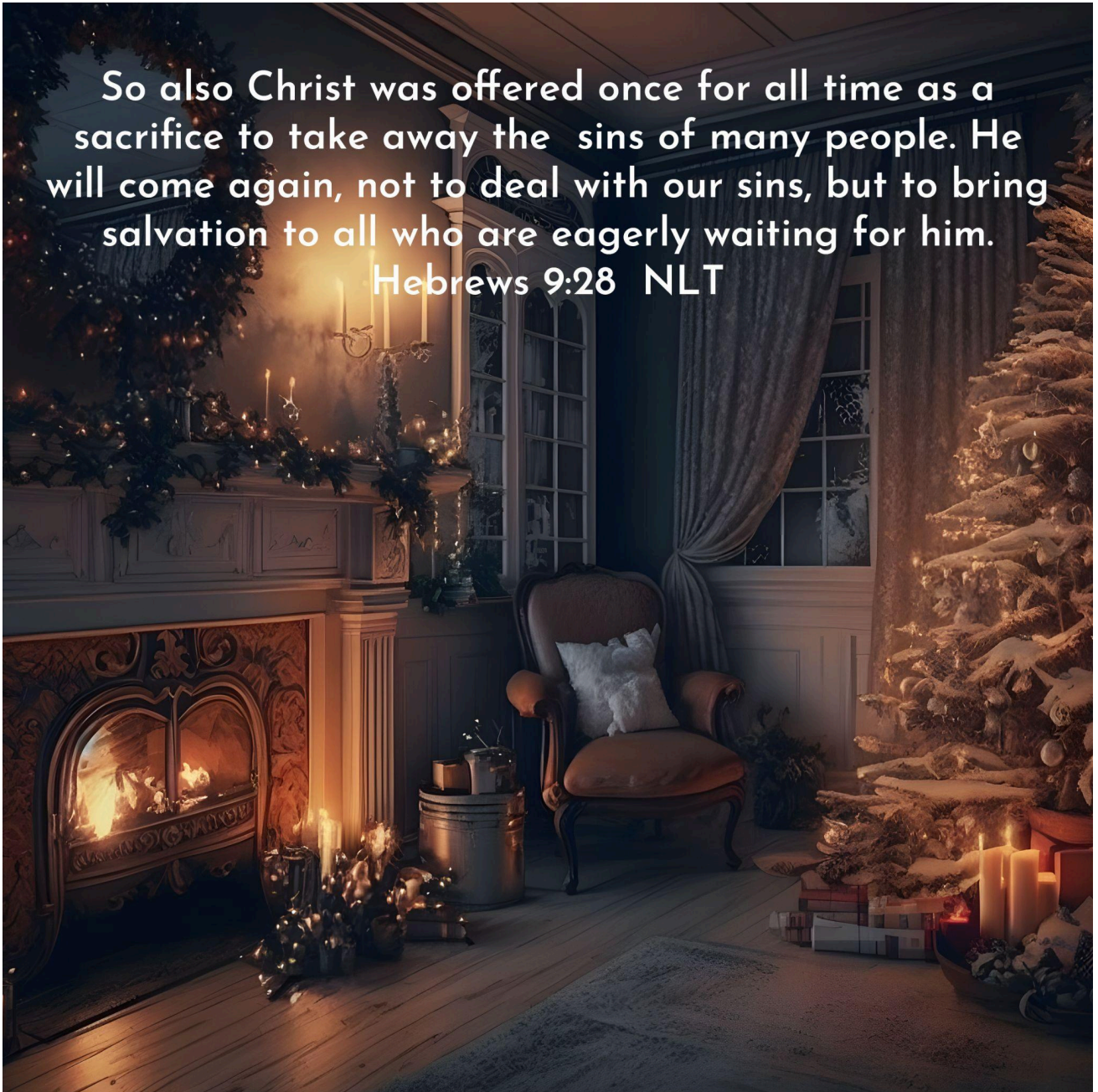
Prayer:

Thank you, Jesus, for Your generous sacrifice on our behalf. You were made perfect through suffering in order to sanctify us before God and free us from the fear of death. You tasted death for us so we can enjoy eternity with You. We are grateful.

ADVENT WEEK 3 - PEACE

So also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him.

Hebrews 9:28 NLT



WEEK 3 DAY 1

JESUS IS RETURNING

Read: Matthew 24:36-44

Yes! And what a great and triumphant celebration day that will be! Jesus will return for all who have believed in Him and His great sacrifice for our sins. When He returns we will be caught up with Him in a glorious celebration and taken to our new home prepared by Jesus himself. What a day that will be!

This passage in Matthew gives us a glimpse into what things will look like during the time of His return.

Like it was in Noah's day, our world is also filled with evil and violence, ramping up more and more with wars and rumours of wars, division, fighting, disregard for morals and truth, and on and on. Noah prepared for the flood by following God's instructions, and by living and preaching righteousness to the people around him.

Mathew talks of people carrying on with their work, but being prepared for Jesus' return. When He returns some will be left behind and some taken.

He also talks of a homeowner whose house was broken into because he didn't know when it would happen and didn't take security precautions. It was foolish to be unprepared.

So, in light of this, what should be our response when we think of Jesus' soon return? Believe! We know from Scripture that Jesus' return is sure. We don't know the day or hour, but there are many fulfilled prophetic signs that point to His soon return. Be watchful so we're not caught unawares! Be prepared by standing strong in our faith in the midst of a violent and corrupt world! And remember to encourage one another and share Jesus with those around us!

During this advent season, may our hearts be full of anticipation, longing, and peace, knowing that come what may, we have an amazing future ahead of us.

"Amen! Come Lord Jesus!" Revelation 22:20b

-Joyce Sawatzky

Prayer:

Father in Heaven, help us to be alert and keep watch for the day of Christ's glorious return. Though we do not know what hour, we know He is coming again. The promise of His return fills our hearts with peace and anticipation.

WEEK 3 DAY 2

JESUS IS PREPARING FOR US

Read: John 14:1-4

I can hardly wait for...? How many different answers did you get when you ask this question?

Sometimes it's hard to wait. The Bible mentions 'wait' over 100 times. Waiting reminds us we are at the mercy of God's timing and we face no power to change that. I'm sure all of us have at one time or another in our lives grappled with the issue of waiting for something. I marvel at Mary's complete trust. Obviously it was a God thing. But there must have been some history behind this trust. Her upbringing and her teaching in the temple must have prepared her for this miraculous announcement.

Can you imagine how she felt when she heard this news? Did she wait and ponder this news or did she immediately rush out and tell someone; maybe a close friend, maybe her mom, maybe a sister?

And then there's the matter of Joseph. Did she ever question what he would think? Did she ever wonder what his reaction would be? I don't know how well she knew him. Possibly it was an arranged marriage. Did she have confidence in his acceptance of this miraculous news?

Joseph was told by God in a dream that his fiancé was pregnant. What was his reaction? He obeyed God and did not end his relationship with Mary. But did they wait patiently or with fear of what people would say? They had to wait nine months for baby Jesus (Immanuel) to be born. Then Mary had to wait 30 years for Jesus to begin His ministry. No wonder she told the men at the wedding at Cana to "do whatever he tells you." She was ready for Jesus to come into His own and reveal to the world who he was.

What about us? What are we waiting for? We wait for Christmas where we celebrate the coming of baby Jesus. Are we waiting for the coming of KING Jesus? The Bible tells us He will come again. Are we waiting for that coming as eagerly as we await Christmas? Are we watching and waiting to hear the trumpet that will announce his second arrival? His first coming was announced to shepherds in a field by angels. His second coming will be announced by a trumpet blasting in the sky. Let's keep our hearts ready and be awaiting the second coming as eagerly as we wait for Christmas.

-Myra Zacharias

Prayer:

We trust Your plan and purpose for our lives and thank You for making space for us in Your family. How we long to be with You in heaven and enjoy the comfort and peace of our eternal home. Come soon, Lord Jesus. We are eagerly awaiting Your arrival.

WEEK 3 DAY 3

JESUS OBSERVES US

Read: Matthew 25:31-40

In the same way we anticipate the celebration of Christmas as a young child, we joyfully look forward to the return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

“When the son of man comes in all His glory...” we as His children will be called by Him, “Come you who are blessed”. What an amazing picture that has been painted for us!

The passage goes on to describe the opportunities presented to us now, in the present-to serve, to love, to feed and to visit humanity as an outpouring of our love for Jesus. To see these opportunities, we need to seek Him and open our ears and hearts to His voice, His prompting to make a difference, however big or seemingly insignificant to us. How often have you heard the comment “that text you sent”, “that call you made”, “that invitation you gave” came just at the right moment...a time of discouragement or struggle someone was dealing with. It's these little moments that bless us as well. These are times of growth as God moves us from a place of self-centeredness and apathy to a place filled with His grace and peace.

My prayer for all of us is that we would have the sensitivity to recognize God's voice and that our service to those around us would be a natural outflowing in response to His blessing of us.

Especially in this Christmas season when many are struggling, let us remember, whether it's a friend or stranger “whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me”.

-Ang Thiessen

Prayer:

We long to see You on Your glorious throne, Lord Jesus. We eagerly await the day when all the nations will gather before You and all will be set right again. Help us live righteous lives and share Your love with all we meet until that day come

WEEK 3 DAY 4

JESUS INTERCEDES FOR US

Read: Romans 8:31-39

How many of us have felt that surge of adrenaline when a car veers into our lane, oblivious to our presence? "What's wrong with them? Didn't they even look? How does someone like that get a licence?" we think.

Fast-forward two days, and now it's us pulling away from a stop sign when the screech of tires alerts us to the car we didn't see, slamming on their brakes to avoid broadsiding us. Suddenly, the finger we pointed is aimed back at us.

Isn't it striking how quickly roles can reverse? We expect grace from others, yet it's not always our first response.

Grace, however, is perfected by our Heavenly Father. Romans 8:33 (AMP) says: *"Who will bring any charge against God's elect (His chosen ones)? It is God who justifies us [declaring us blameless and putting us in a right relationship with Himself]."*

Our Heavenly Father's love is astonishing. He knew we would need a way, so he made allowance for that. He *"did not spare [even] His own Son, but gave Him up for us all"* (v. 32). And now, His Son, Jesus Christ, intercedes for us before the Father (v. 34). What a powerful image to reflect on - we're not standing on trial by ourselves, Jesus is there with us and He provides arguments on our behalf, not against us!

Let the love and grace of our Heavenly Father transform your heart and mind. Less judgement. More grace.

-Jon Kroeker

Prayer:

Your deep love for us has been revealed through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ - who now lives to intercede on our behalf. We do not deserve Your mercy and grace, Father, but we accept it with hearts full of gratitude and peace.

WEEK 3 DAY 5

JESUS PURIFIES US

Read: Titus 2:11-14

It can be so easy to lose perspective and forget what we as Jesus-followers are called to hold as our highest goal/priority - to honour God and live in a way that leads others to Him.

In our home, we love sports. Our calendar gets very full with all of the practices, games and tournaments that are scheduled for each of our three kids. Our family values competition in sports - trying to be the best you can be and playing at a competitive level. Competition can bring out great qualities like leadership, perseverance and determination, but it can also challenge one's character when things don't go the way you want or think that they should.

Sports are not everyone's passion, so it may be something else that consumes your attention, but everyone can relate to getting caught up in the affairs of life - big or small. It's easy to fixate on things we think are unfair; letting our frustrations affect our outlook on life.

How we react to challenges can be an indicator of our need for purification.

We need to remember that our ultimate goal does not involve winning a championship, getting a promotion, being famous/popular or getting an award or recognition. As Christians, we seek to honour Jesus and point others to Him. Jesus was the one to clarify the greatest commandment that encompasses all of the law - *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.... and love your neighbour as yourself."* Matthew 22:37,39

We need to stop and let Jesus purify us, which involves taking our eyes off of self and worldly fixations and turning our eyes to the Author and Perfecter of our faith. Jesus died so that we could be cleansed of our sin - and this includes the sin of being caught up in the world and in self.

When Jesus purifies us, what does that look like?

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Galatians 5:22

When we are purified, we look more like Jesus.

-Wendy Schultz

Prayer:

Jesus, You are the grace of God revealed to all mankind. We ask You to teach us how to follow Your example of selfless service and mercy. Thank You for transforming us from the inside out and giving us hearts that desire to do good and not evil.

ADVENT WEEK 4 - PRAISE



Praise the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does such wonderful things. Praise his glorious name forever! Let the whole earth be filled with his glory.

Amen and amen!

Psalm 72:18-19 NLT

WEEK 4 DAY 1

JESUS IS RIGHTEOUS

Read: Psalm 145:14-21

The idea of Jesus as our Righteous King fills me with hope by remembering how His righteousness isn't a distant standard but a living, sustaining presence in my life. Just recently, I experienced God's provision in an unexpected way that reminded me of His care. I was overwhelmed by the unknown of what was coming in life, and unsure of what to do next. I prayed, letting go of the decision and entrusting it to God, asking for help.

Then, in a way I hadn't anticipated, an option appeared: a friend reached out to me, offering exactly what I needed without me having to ask. Through this God provided me a place to go and helped me to find my place in His world. Reading Psalm 145, it was nice to be reminded of this truth - that God opens His hand to satisfy our needs. This wasn't just a coincidence; it was a glimpse of His righteousness in action. It reminded me that even when I feel overwhelmed by life, He is my support, gently lifting me up and sustaining me.

This Advent season, as we reflect on Jesus' coming, I'm renewed in my confidence that God's promises to us are sure. He is faithful, meeting us in our moments of need and filling us with hope that He is, indeed, near. When we wait on Him, He is always working, His goodness and grace are poured out just as He promised.

-Emma Berg

Prayer:

Father God, draw near to us today. Help us when we fall, meet our needs in Your perfect timing, satisfy our hearts with Your goodness and grace all the days of our lives. We praise Your Holy name forever.

WEEK 4 DAY 2

JESUS IS THE ANOINTED ONE

Read: Psalm 2:1-9

You will break them with an iron sceptre, you will shatter them like pottery. (ps. 2:9)

I believe this psalm is the meeting point of two trains of thought. First I think the psalmist is marvelling over the audacity of the opposing kings and rulers. The God of Israel has not been hidden or kept silent. His power and might are well known amongst many nations. Many kings before now have revered Him, even if they did not honour Him as He deserved. And yet here they are, conspiring and plotting. Their hearts and minds are consumed with plans to free themselves of God's dominion. It is not uncommon to see men of the world gain power, and then do everything it takes to maintain that power. Serving a God who calls us to humility and gentleness and service is in direct opposition to this worldly dream. All the same, it doesn't take much foresight and wisdom to know that the God of Israel, He who splits seas and consumes with fire, is not a God to trifle with. The presumption of one's own capabilities! The Audacity! But for the one who knows, and rightly fears God Almighty, knows that no scheme of man can keep God from accomplishing precisely what He intends. *"My Anointed One... will break them with an iron sceptre; [He] will shatter them like pottery."* A clay vessel, common and fragile. The destruction of his enemy will be effortless and complete, without a hope of rebuilding.

The earth belongs to the LORD by every measurement, and to those who oppose him, their annihilation will be effortless and complete.

This "brook no nonsense" attitude of Gods that the Psalmist is revealing stretches far beyond the ancient rulers of the far past. God is not placed on the throne, nor does He fight for it. It is His by rights, and there is no effort or struggle on His part to maintain Sovereignty. The effort is on us, will we honour God on his throne and worship Him as the only one deserving of His lofty position? Or will we join the ancient kings who begrudged the Lord of his inheritance and dominion, who plotted against Him in vain? To challenge or disregard God of his deity is effectively to make oneself an enemy of God. And I have no desire to enter into a battle I cannot have a hope of winning. It may be challenging at times to fight against the idolatry of pride and greed in my life, but I believe it is worth fighting to keep God enthroned on my heart, and to remove myself from the temptation of believing I could have or be anything apart from the overwhelming grace of God.

-Leigha McDonald

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we are surrounded by people who ridicule Your Son and rebel against Your ways. Show us how to live for You in this present age; give us eyes to see Your workings among our people. We praise You for sending Your Son to secure our eternal inheritance.

WEEK 4 DAY 3

JESUS IS A PRIESTLY KING

Read: Psalm 110

In the Old Testament, the offices of prophet, priest and king were totally separate. No one was allowed to fill more than one of these roles without facing God's judgement. But now, Christ fills all three of these roles. In Matthew 22, Mark 12 and Luke 20 Christ explains what Psalm 110 / 1 and 4 mean.

From Psalm 110 / 1 He says that while the Messiah is King David's son, He is God in human form. But not only is He my king, He is also my eternal High Priest, after the order of Melchisedek, without father, mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life (Heb. 7 / 1 – 3).

What significance does this have for me, a Christ follower? At least two things come to mind: First, from Phil. 2 / 9 – 11: As my King, He rules over all. That includes Godless nations and tyrannical leaders. Christ the King is on my side. I need not fear. He will provide all I need (Rom. 8 / 32). Second, from 1 John 2 / 1 & 2, I know that not only is Christ my eternal King, but He is also my priestly advocate, pleading my case against God's righteous wrath, having offered Himself as the perfect payment for my sin (Heb. 7 / 26 & 27).

Proverbs 18 / 10: The Name of the LORD is a strong tower. I can run inside and be safe. When He miraculously became human, the first people to hear the news were shepherds just outside Bethlehem. I have been pondering their response in Luke 2 / 17, and the implications for me: *"When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child."*

These were not ordinary shepherds. Alfred Edersheim in his book "The Life and Times of Jesus, the Messiah" quotes a passage in the Rabbinic writings of the Mishnah, which expressly forbids the keeping of sheep near any town. They were to be raised only in the wilderness (Baba K. vii. 7). The only exception was that the Messiah was expected to be revealed from Migdal Eder, "the tower of the flock." This Migdal Eder was NOT the tower for ordinary flocks beyond Bethlehem, but was close to the town, on the road to Jerusalem.

These shepherds must have had daily contact with the religious leaders at the temple. They probably told their story to them. Yet, we find no Biblical evidence that the leaders bothered to go to Bethlehem to see Him themselves.

-Gary Williams

Prayer:

LORD, deliver me from becoming so familiar with this story that I don't bother to seek after You, and allow You to open my eyes to see You in a new way. I volunteer to serve You as a warrior in the great spiritual battle that is raging for the souls of mankind. I invite You to rule over my life with Your mighty sceptre, and I worship You as my priestly King forever. I praise You for the many ways You provide for and guide me, one of Your people.

WEEK 4 DAY 4

JESUS IS OUR CORNERSTONE

Read: Psalm 118:19-26

Success is a tricky word. It is often attached to fame or wealth or status. But on a more basic level it is simply the achievement of an aim or purpose. We might successfully open a jar of pickles or make it to work on time, although often achieving success is not always so simple. Often our purpose is not so small.

So what does success look like when the aim is much bigger than fulfilling a craving for a salty, crunchy snack? What does success look like for a student or for a parent? (Please don't ask my kids if I've achieved success with that!!) What does success look like for a husband or wife? And what does success mean as a follower of Christ? I suppose we have to take a step back and look at our purpose.

As Christians, our aim is to glorify God in everything that we do. As humans, it's pretty easy to miss this target daily. But it's important to remember that success is not the same as perfection. It's also important to remember that God is not loving and accepting us based on our successes and failures. I need these reminders daily. God is greater, SO much greater, than my failures. How great is the grace of God!

So how do we even attempt to achieve success as a Christ follower? It is certainly not by our own strength that this will happen. But by setting Jesus as our true and right foundation, our cornerstone, whatever we built in alignment with Him will also be right and true. Successful.

-Melissa Wuschke

Prayer:

Lord, You are the cornerstone upon which we build our lives. We have not rejected You because You are the source of our hope and salvation. Open the gates of righteousness for all who bear Your name, that we may enter and give thanks.

WEEK 4 DAY 5

JESUS IS PRAISEWORTHY

Read: Psalm 22:14-16

A number of years ago a set of Mary, Joseph and a manger figurines went missing from an end table in our living room. We thought one of the grandkids took them home. It turned out we were wrong. We later found them neatly placed in our dishwasher, along with a plastic t-rex. Oh, how cultures collide!

Today's final passage of scripture is a jarring reminder that the joyful celebration of Jesus' birth would someday collide with the suffering of His crucifixion. It's difficult to comprehend what He went through on the cross as He bore the penalty of our sin. It's hard to read but it reminds us that Jesus knew the purpose of His whole journey, from the cradle to the cross.

After finding the figurines we set them back up with all the other Nativity sets on display on the main level of our home. Each one, though unique, reminds us of the holiness, humility, and beauty of Jesus' birth. But in the midst of these displays we have recently placed a single cross, to remind us of the reason Jesus came and what He endured to defeat sin and death.

At the end of this prophetic description of His suffering we read in verses 22, 25 and 26 a resounding response of praise by all whose lives are impacted by the suffering He endured on our behalf. By the time Christmas Day is over, we're tired and ready to move on from celebrating Advent. But I say, "Let the Praises Begin!"

*What gift of grace is Jesus my redeemer
There is no more for heaven now to give
He is my joy, my righteousness, and freedom
My steadfast love, my deep and boundless peace (City Alight)*

-Dennis Friesen

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank You for piercing Your Son for our transgressions. Because of the mercy and grace revealed through Jesus Christ, we will praise You all the days of our lives. Humble our hearts and show us how to find satisfaction in You alone.

