

# ADVENT



*Christmas 2020*

# And He shall reign for ever and ever.

I have had the good fortune in my life of being able to sing in five performances of Handel's Messiah as a member of the choir. Each piece of Messiah resounds with beauty as the gospel story is told in pure Baroque magnificence, but without question, the most hair-raising moment of Messiah for me comes in the Hallelujah Chorus. The orchestra plays the opening chords, the audience stands in unison, and the choir belts the words:

"Hallelujah!

For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!

The kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

And He shall reign for ever and ever!

King of kings and Lord of lords!

Hallelujah!"

As I reflect on these words on a rainy November day (and lament the loss of choirs singing this year due to a certain virus), I can't help but wonder, "Do we believe these words to be true?" I mean really believe them? Not just give them lip service but "go all in" on following Jesus because we know that in the end, He shall reign forever and ever?

Enter Advent. Some of us grew up with Advent; others did not (I am one of the latter). Advent (which means "coming") is a season of the year leading up to Christmas where followers of Jesus look back to Christ's first coming and ahead to His second coming. It's a time to focus on waiting expectantly for Christ's return and renewing our faith in Christ's once, present, and future Lordship—that in the end, all things will be made right in His reign.

I have come to love Advent—the prayerful expectation leading up to celebrating Christ's birth; the themes of hope, peace, joy, and love; the symbolism of candles shining light into the darkness. Whether Advent is new to you, something you left in the past, or something you practice annually, I encourage you to lean into the season of Advent this year. This daily devotional is designed to help you do just that—consider buying your own Advent candle to light when you do each day's readings. Perhaps if we do, we can come to believe more than ever that despite appearances, this truth will prevail: "And He shall reign for ever and ever. Hallelujah!"

*Adam Grant, Discipleship Minister @ FCC*

# Week 1: Hope

## Sunday, November 29

*“So the Lord God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, ‘Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.’”*

*Genesis 3:14-15*

These verses come from one of the most fateful passages in all of Scripture: the curse over creation that resulted from Adam and Eve’s “fall” in the garden. Yet in spite of the bleakness of this passage, God kindles hope: “he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” Theologians point to this as the first foreshadowing of Christ’s coming in Scripture—God declares that an offspring of Adam and Eve will crush the head of the serpent, sowing hope in an otherwise ruinous event.

Reflect & pray: How have you seen God work over the course of your life to bring good out of otherwise adverse times? How does this give you hope today?

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# Week 1: Hope

## Monday, November 30

*"When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom...Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."*

*2 Samuel 7:12, 16*

God makes an amazing promise to King David: He will establish a descendant of David on the throne forever! While David likely thought of this in terms of the earthly kingdom of Israel, God had bigger plans in view. Jesus, the Son of David, would show the world how God's kingship would be established: through willingly laying down his life and rising from the grave. God, as always, was true to His word: He would establish a descendant of David on the throne, but in a way no one expected!

Reflect & pray: What does it mean to you today that God is always true to His Word? That He often works in ways we don't expect? How does this give you hope?

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# Week 1: Hope

## Tuesday, December 1

*“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”*

*Isaiah 42:1-4*

Everyone can agree that we want justice to be established in the world; the disagreement comes in how to achieve it. Does the red vision or the blue vision better achieve justice? Does it happen through individual heart change or systemic reformation? Whatever your leanings, the message of Scripture is clear in its claim: true justice can be achieved only through Jesus. If this is true, the world’s best hope for justice is followers of Jesus striving for justice in the ways of our Lord.

Reflect & pray: Where have you placed your hope in justice being established on earth? What do you notice in today’s verses about how Jesus goes about establishing justice?

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# Week 1: Hope

## Wednesday, December 2

*“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

*John 1:14*

“Incarnation” is a big theological word that simply means this: God became man. The infinite became finite. The Creator became the created. And not only that—while God became 100% human, He remained 100% God. Is your brain hurting a little? Good. Some parts of our faith can’t be, nor are they meant to be, fully grasped. They’re meant to be believed and marveled at over a lifetime. And what a hopeful truth to believe—that “the Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.” (The Message)

Reflect & pray: How does it give you hope today that God became a person just like you as part of his mission to rescue humanity?

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# Week 1: Hope

## Thursday, December 3

*“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they replied, ‘for this is what the prophet has written: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”*

*Matthew 2:1-6*

Israel was all too used to the Herods of the world. Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and now Rome had all held Israel under their thumbs for centuries, and Herod would soon display his despotism by ordering the killing of all boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under. With the rising of the star over Bethlehem, however, hope of a different kind of leader, a shepherd leader, arose.

Reflect & pray: Pray for the world’s leaders—that they would display the shepherding ways of Jesus, not the tyrannical ways of Herod. Pray that Christ’s ways would reign on earth as in heaven.

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# Week 1: Hope

## Friday, December 4

*"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."*

*Romans 8:22-25*

Do you feel dissatisfied with this world? Is your body failing you? Do you have the sense that the world's greatest wonders are pointing to something even greater? This is the "groaning" Paul mentions in today's verses, and in our longing for the creation to be redeemed, we have hope. Not hope like, "I hope the Titans win today," but hope like, "I believe God's reign will come to pass so much that I'm willing to stake my life on it." No, God hasn't fully established His reign yet, but we can take it to the bank. So we wait for it patiently. We live in hope.

Reflect & pray: In what ways do you feel dissatisfied with the world today? Share those with God. Pray for the patience to wait in hope.

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# Week 1: Hope

## Saturday, December 5

*“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”*

*Revelation 21:3-4*

The glimmer of hope born in Genesis 3:15 has now come to pass: the serpent’s head has been crushed, and God now dwells with His people in perfect shalom. If this were not the end of the Story, would we have reason for hope? Indeed, no. But this is the end of the Story. Evil will be defeated. God’s purposes will prevail. Death will be no more. And He shall reign for ever and ever!

Reflect & pray: How does it impact you today that we know the end of the Story and that in the end God wins?

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# Week 2: Peace

## Sunday, December 6

*“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.”*

*Isaiah 9:6-7*

“Government,” “Prince,” “reign,” “throne,” “kingdom.” Is there any question about the subject matter of these verses? The kingship and reign of the prophesied child take center stage here, and reading from a Christian perspective, there is no doubt the prophesied child is Jesus. What, then, will the kingship and reign of Jesus bring about? Peace. Shalom. Justice. Righteousness. And while Isaiah’s original audience likely envisioned this king establishing peace through defeating his enemies, Jesus would establish peace through loving his enemies. Peace through sacrificial love.

Reflect & pray: Is there anyone in your life you consider to be your enemy today? Someone you are at odds with? What steps can you take to make peace with this person in the ways of Jesus?

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# **Week 2: Peace**

## **Monday, December 7**

*“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”*

*Isaiah 53:5*

Isaiah 53 is known as the “Suffering Servant” passage where a prophesied servant brings peace to the people by willingly taking a punishment the people deserved. Yet again, reading from a Christian perspective, this Suffering Servant clearly points to Jesus. According to this verse, Jesus’ wounds bring us healing; Jesus heals our sin-sick souls by meeting us at our worst with grace, forgiveness, and freedom from bondage to sin. He makes a way for us to leave the past behind and be at peace with God.

Reflect & pray: Do you feel at peace with God today? Is there anything in your life you need to let go of or confess to God? If so, do that now. And give thanks that God meets us in these moments as a loving father.

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# Week 2: Peace

## Tuesday, December 8

*“And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”*

*Luke 1:76-79*

“The path of peace.” These verses, from the “Song of Zechariah” foretell the ministry of Zechariah’s son, John the Baptist. Zechariah, a Jewish priest, would have had the Hebrew word shalom in mind as he prophesied about this “path of peace.” Shalom is much more than a Hebrew greeting word, and it means much more than peace as “the absence of conflict.” More than that, it means “wholeness.” It means taking something that was broken and making it whole again.

Reflect & pray: In order for us to experience peace with God and peace within, we must allow God to take what is broken in us and make it whole. What part of your story do you need to allow God to heal and redeem?

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# Week 2: Peace

## Wednesday, December 9

*"In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety."*

*Psalms 4:8*

Millions of people across the world lie down to sleep at night in non-peaceful circumstances. Wars raging, relationships fracturing, and thoughts racing can make a peaceful night's sleep seem impossible. Likewise, King David was no stranger to restless nights. Pursuit from enemies, family drama, and his own mistakes were near constant realities for him. In the midst of all this, however, he learns and affirms that it is the Lord, and the Lord alone, who makes him dwell in peace and safety.

Reflect & pray: Practice a form of prayer called "breath prayer." Begin by taking slow deep breaths; as you inhale, silently pray the words "In peace I will lie down and sleep;" as you exhale, "for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety." Let God's peace dwell in your heart as you pray in this way.

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## **Week 2: Peace**

### **Thursday, December 10**

*“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.’”*

*Luke 2:13-14*

The angelic pronouncement to the shepherds brings hope that peace on earth will be made possible through Christ, but it also raises a question: who is included in those who receive God’s favor (v. 14)? Kings and queens? The most talented and best-looking? The most successful? These are the ones who most often receive the world’s favor. But what about Jesus? The fact that the angels appear to lowly shepherds announcing the birth of God in a manger signals a shift: God’s Kingdom will not run on the same values as the kingdoms of the world.

Reflect & pray: If God used shepherds to be the first ones to spread the news of Christ’s birth, how can He use you to share the gospel with those around you?

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# Week 2: Peace

## Friday, December 11

*“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”*

*Luke 2:29-32*

Luke tells us that Simeon was a righteous and devout man and that the Lord had revealed to him that before his death, he would see the Messiah (Luke 2:25-26). When Simeon sees Jesus in the temple, he takes him into his arms and praises God. What brought Simeon peace in beholding the Messiah was his knowledge of the arrival of God’s salvation, not only for his fellow Jews, but also for all nations!

Reflect & pray: God’s salvation is for all nations and all people, even those who are far from God. Pray for someone(s) in your life who doesn’t yet know God’s salvation—that they would come to know the peace of knowing God.

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## Week 2: Peace

### Saturday, December 12

*“In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.’ The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”*

*Isaiah 2:2-4*

Some depictions and interpretations of “the last days” are, in a word, grim. To some extent this is understandable. The Bible teaches that, in the end, God will make all things right, which necessarily includes meting out justice on those who opposed him (Matt. 25:31-46). But the whole of the Bible’s teaching on the last days is not all bleak—far from it! Isaiah’s vision of the last days is nothing short of magnificent. All nations stream to the Lord, disputes are settled, weapons of war are transformed into garden tools. Christ’s reign will be a reign of peace.

Reflect & pray: Pray for the Lord’s return, for the hastening of Christ’s reign, and that you would be sensitive to how God would use you until the day of His return.

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# Week 3: Joy

## Sunday, December 13

*“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.”*

*Isaiah 9:2-3*

Fear of the dark is a near universal human reflex. From monsters hiding under the bed to “bad guys” lurking in the shadows, our fear of the dark spans from the imaginary to the all-too-real. While night lights scatter monsters and security lights dissuade potential perpetrators, the coming of the Lord is the great light that drives away the darkness of sin and despair. Christ lights the way forward for us in an otherwise murky world, and in His light, we find joy!

Reflect & pray: What parts of your life feel murky, uncertain, or filled with darkness right now? Pray to find joy as you follow Christ’s guiding light in these areas.

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# Week 3: Joy

## Monday, December 14

*“Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.”*

*Psalms 30:4-5*

Joy seems elusive—like something we all want to possess but which feels out of reach because of life’s hardships. Yet Scripture is clear that a joy-filled life is attainable. How? Quite simply, in the Lord. While we ride the waves of life, the Lord acts as a constant anchor in the ups and downs. In His constancy, sovereignty, and goodness we rejoice because as the psalmist reminds us, “weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.”

Reflect & pray: Reflect on the attributes of God. For example, God’s faithfulness, grace, sovereignty, goodness, and love. Give God praise for who He is and rejoice in His constant character today.

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## Week 3: Joy

### Tuesday, December 15

*“And Mary said: ‘My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.’”*

*Luke 1:46-55*

These verses are known as “Mary’s Song” or “The Magnificat.” Mary’s joyful response to the angel telling her she would give birth to the Son of God. As she praises God for all He has done, notice this reason she gives for rejoicing: “he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant” (v. 48). Time and again in Scripture, God sees, redeems, and uses the humblest of people to do great things. A joy-filled life has a God-given purpose, and Mary would attest that God gives the greatest purpose to the least and smallest of us!

Reflect & pray: God’s reign operates through small, everyday people being faithful to what He calls them to do. Ask God to reveal to you a specific way you can be faithful to Him in this season of your life .

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## Week 3: Joy

### Wednesday, December 16

*“After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”*

*Matthew 2:9-12*

Gentile wisemen from the east set out on a quest to find and worship a newly-born Jewish king (Matt. 2:1-2). Their navigation system? A star they perceived in the night sky. Sounds harebrained, no? It is not uncommon for God to call us to tasks that seem crazy at the time—that require risk and leaving comfort and security for an unknown end. Yet, when we obey God’s call like the wisemen, we open the door for joy to flood into our lives when we reach the destination, no matter how unexpected it is.

Reflect & pray: Is there something God is calling you to do in your life right now? Are you resisting this call? If so, why? How does reflecting on the story of the wisemen speak to what God is calling you to do?

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## Week 3: Joy

### Thursday, December 17

*“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.”*

*Habakkuk 3:17-19*

“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, 18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. 19 The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.”

Reflect & pray: How does Habakkuk’s conscious decision to choose joy in spite of hardship speak to you today?

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## Week 3: Joy

### Friday, December 18

*“Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”*

*John 16:20-22*

Soon after Jesus says these words to his disciples, they would experience the grief of Jesus’ death followed by the joy of His resurrection. Out of a devastating defeat, God brought unparalleled victory. Jesus’ assurance of turning His followers’ grief into joy continues to apply today as we await His second coming—as we wait, we know our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. We have the assurance that the perfect peace, justice, and joy of Christ will ultimately reign.

Reflect & pray: Meditate on these words of Jesus in light of whatever is going on in your life right now: “Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”

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## Week 3: Joy

### Saturday, December 19

*“See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.”*

*Isaiah 65:17-19*

The major traumatizing event looming over Isaiah’s original readers was exile: the people of Judah were conquered and taken against their will to a foreign land. No comforts of home or familiar places. No temple where they could worship and sacrifice to God. The main question of those living in exile was, “Who are we now?” Yet Isaiah has the hopeful, courageous audacity to prophesy, “the former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.” In other words, the redemption that God has in store for your future will make it as though exile never even happened! Joy will reign in God’s new creation.

Reflect & pray: How does it bring you joy to know that God’s sure, redemptive plans for the future will make your worst days a distant memory?

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# Week 4: Love

## Sunday, December 20

*"The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments."*

*Deuteronomy 7:7-9*

Why did God create humankind in His image with the freedom to accept or reject Him? Why would God go to such great lengths in order to save humanity from the consequences of sin that we brought on ourselves? Why did God choose a small, unimpressive nation to be His covenant people in this mission? Why would God willingly become a man and give up His own life to save us? Why does God continue to call us and use us for His purposes today in spite of our countless flaws? There is one answer, and only one answer, that makes sense of all these questions in the Christian story: Because He loves us.

Reflect & pray: Spend some time reflecting on this statement: There is nothing you could do or not do that would make you earn or lose one ounce of God's love because He already loves you fully and unwaveringly.

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## Week 4: Love

### Monday, December 21

*“As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children.”*

*Psalm 103:13-17*

Over 7.5 billion people live on planet Earth today. Some estimate that since the first humans, over 100 billion people have called this world their home. In thinking about our lives as individuals against numbers like this, it’s easy to feel small (we probably should feel small in this respect!). However, we should never mistake our smallness for small worth. Our lives are formed by a God who knows and loves us so much that He became one of us in order to save and offer us—each and every one of us—full, abundant life. We are no small matter to God!

Reflect & pray: How do you reconcile the brevity of your life with the magnitude of God’s love for you?

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# Week 4: Love

## Tuesday, December 22

*“How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboyim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I devastate Ephraim again. For I am God, and not a man—the Holy One among you. I will not come against their cities.”*

*Hosea 11:8-9*

Some of us carry an image of God that He is like a frowning chaperone: always looming, waiting for us to mess up, primed to scold and dole out punishment. Hosea, however, (and the rest of Scripture for that matter!) paint quite a different picture of God. Instead of a petty, vindictive God, Hosea portrays a God whose love for us far outweighs his righteous anger toward our unfaithfulness and transgression. According to Hosea, God’s decisive motive behind how He acts toward us is clear: the decisive motive is love.

Reflect & pray: Do you tend to slip into viewing God as the frowning chaperone? Where does that tendency come from? Rethink that view in light of the truth about God in today’s verses.

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# Week 4: Love

## Wednesday, December 23

*“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us... For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

*Romans 5:8, 8:38-39*

Have you ever considered yourself unlovable to God? As though you are too far gone—too grievous a sinner to warrant God’s love, grace, and forgiveness? Is it something about your upbringing that makes you feel this way? A sin you once committed or a sinful habit you can’t seem to kick? Consider this scandalous truth of the gospel: every human being, from Hitler to Mother Teresa, is in the same quandary of sin. Yet the truth of these verses from Romans applies to every human being on our very worst days. Stop giving sin so much credit—God’s love is greater!

Reflect & pray: What obstacle in your life is preventing you from accepting the fact that, no matter what, you are fully known and fully loved by God? Pray to God that He would help you overcome that obstacle.

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## Week 4: Love

### Christmas Eve, Thursday, December 24

*“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*

Have you ever asked for God to show you a sign that He exists? That He is with you and loves you? Most all of us have—this is a near natural human inclination. But consider this: the greatest sign God has ever given that He exists, is with us, and loves us, came in the form of Jesus Christ. God lowered Himself to the point of becoming a fetus, who grew in the womb of a young virgin, and was born into the humblest of families. God became Immanuel—God with us—and He continues to be with us to this day. What more of a sign do we need?

Reflect & pray: Meditate on this phrase for a few moments: “God is with us.” Repeat it in your mind. Think of it in light of your life’s circumstances and the happenings of the world. Carry it with you throughout your day.

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## **Week 4: Love**

### **Christmas Day, Friday, December 25**

*“So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.”*

*Luke 2:4-7*

“Who is God?” Is God somewhere “out there,” elusive and impossible for us to know? Is God one and the same as the universe all around us? Does God come from within us? The Christmas Story gives a unique answer to this question: God is Jesus—both above and below, within and without, supernatural and ordinary, beyond grasp and intimately near. Born of a virgin, wrapped in cloths, placed in a manger. Humble and mighty. All to demonstrate His great love for us. Thanks be to God for this greatest of gifts!

Reflect & pray: Spend a few moments praising and thanking God for the lengths He went to in order to show His love for us—to come near in the person of Jesus and overcome the powers of death.

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## **Week 4: Love**

### **Saturday, December 26**

*“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.”*

*Revelation 22:1-5*

Most of us don't like “spoilers:” knowing how a book, TV show, or movie ends before having the chance to experience the unfolding of the story. Spoilers are no fun when it comes to entertainment, but knowing the end of life's story, if that were possible, is a different matter entirely. Knowing the end of life's story would give us an idea of what ultimately matters. Remarkably, the Story of God according to Scripture does tell us the end of life's story. Abundant life, healed nations, no more sin, the very presence of God, radiant light. At the end of life's story we have this assurance: And He shall reign for ever and ever. Amen.

Reflect & pray: How does knowing the end of life's story affect the way you live your life today? Pray for the Lord to hasten the coming of this good end.

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