

HOPE

Advent means “the coming,” and is a time of expectant waiting. Christians have been celebrating the Advent season since the 4th and 5th centuries. We celebrate the coming of Jesus’ birth, which has already occurred, and we wait in expectation for Christ’s return which is yet to come. This is not a passive waiting, but an active waiting. The first week we celebrate **HOPE**.

Activity Suggestion:

Create an advent wreath for your journey group and light the first candle symbolizing “hope” when you gather. How to make an advent wreath: <https://growingslower.com/how-to-make-an-advent-wreath>

For more information on the background of an advent wreath: <https://www.crosswalk.com/special-coverage/christmas-and-advent/advent-wreath-candlesunderstanding-the-meaning-history-tradition.html>

Group Experience: Open with prayer. Then read Psalm 130:7-8.

Watch the Bible project video- “*Yakhal / Hope*” <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/the-adventseries/>

- The video explains the difference between Biblical hope and optimism.

“God’s past faithfulness motivates hope for the future.” (2:25 in video)

- What are some ways that we can live into this Biblical hope?

“Christian hope looks back to the risen Jesus in order to look forward, and so we wait.” (3:58 in video)

- In light of this video, how can we share hope with others during the holiday season? With our words? In our actions?

Reflect together on how we can nurture a spirit of anticipation and hope for the arrival of Jesus in ourselves, our homes, and our families. Share ideas with one another

Listen and/or sing together “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”

Pray for one another that you would have a spirit of hope this holiday season.

Other discussion ideas inspired by week 1 devotionals in the Unexpected Christmas booklet

- Where have you experienced, like Simeon (Luke 1) “hope meeting reality” or “expectation meeting truth”?
- What promises are you counting on the Lord fulfilling someday?
- When have you experienced both sweet times of joy alongside the bitterness of suffering (Rom 5)
- What Christmas carols or songs remind you of God’s forgiveness and the hope we have in Jesus?
- What are some of the challenges that threaten to steal your hope? How can we hold onto our hope?

PEACE

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Activity (Optional): • Light the second candle of your advent wreath symbolizing “peace” when you gather. Share the [History/Tradition of Advent Wreaths](#) .

Group Experience: Open with prayer. Then read Isaiah 9:6-7.

Watch the Bible project video- "Shalom / Peace" <https://bibleproject.com/videos/shalom-peace/>

The video emphasizes “peace takes a lot of work” because it isn’t just the absence of conflict but the restoration of wholeness to that which is broken. (3:10 in video)

Read Ephesians 2:11-18 and Colossians 1:19-20. How might the idea of peace as a restoration transform the way we understand these passages?

Read Ephesians 4:1-6. In what ways does this passage teach us to be peacemakers in a broken world? In light of this video, in what ways can we share peace with others during the holiday season? • With our words? • In our actions? In what way can we experience Jesus as the Prince of Peace for ourselves this holiday season?

Listen (Optional): “Silent Night”

Pray for one another that you would have a spirit of peace that brings wholeness to brokenness this holiday season.

Other discussion ideas inspired by week 2 devotionals in the Unexpected Christmas booklet

- In Eph 2:12-18 we learn that Jesus IS our peace, and he breaks down walls of hostility. What walls need to be broken down in your own life?
- Where have you experienced God’s peace, even in the midst of the sorrow in this world? (2 Cor 6:10)
- Read Phil 4:6-7 – God’s peace isn’t fragile; we cannot create it within ourselves. What do you need to entrust to God to experience God’s peace?
- Being a peacemaker usually involves overcoming our natural desire for advantage or retribution. How does this apply in your own life and relationships?

JOY

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Activity (Optional): Light the third candle of your advent wreath symbolizing “joy” when you gather.

Group Experience: Open with prayer. Read Luke 2:1-11.

Watch the Bible project video- “Chara / Joy” <https://bibleproject.com/videos/chara-joy/>

- The video says that joy is a theme that runs through the whole Bible.
- What are some examples of joy that we see in Scripture?

Joy is not dependent on our circumstances but rather is deeply connected to hope.

In Luke 2 the angel says that the coming of Jesus will cause great joy for the people.

- What might the coming of Jesus have meant for the people?
- What do we have to be joyous about?

The video emphasizes that joy is a decision of faith and hope in the power of Jesus.

- What does this decision of joy look like in our everyday lives?
- How can we live in the joy of the Lord?
- In what ways might we share joy with others during this holiday season?

Listen (Optional): “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”

Pray for one another that you would have a spirit of joy this holiday season.

Other discussion ideas inspired by week 3 devotionals in the Unexpected Christmas booklet

- When the angels appear to the shepherds in Luke 2, what is the good news they share? The reality that *God is with us* should give us great joy as well. With whom can we share this great news this week?
- Jesus uses the example of a woman in childbirth to illustrate how even after pain, joy may come. What is giving you the most joy today? How has experiencing pain made your joy sweeter?
- Nehemiah 8:10 reminds us not to grieve, because “the joy of the Lord is your strength.” How is God’s joy giving you strength to persevere?
- Psalm 96 encourages us to keep singing! Don’t stop till you make Jesus’ name famous! (Passion Translation). How can you “make Jesus’ name famous today”? Who needs to hear the good news?
- 1 Thess 5:18 reminds us to “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances.” What are some circumstances in which you find it hard to give thanks? How can remembering our joy in the Lord uplift our perspective?

LOVE

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Activity (Optional): Light the fourth candle of your advent wreath symbolizing “love”

Group Experience: Open with prayer. Read Matthew 22:37-40.

Watch the Bible project video- "Agape / Love" <https://bibleproject.com/videos/agape-love/>

The video says that our love for God is expressed by our love for people; they are inseparable. It also says that love is an action, not a feeling. Jesus lived these things out and we are to follow in his example.

Read Romans 5:8 and 1 John 4:7-12.

- What examples does the video (or the Bible) give to show Jesus’ love for people?
- How do you experience the love of God on a daily basis?
- What does it mean to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind?
- How is Jesus’ example of love similar or different to the world’s understanding of love?
- Why is it important to love our enemies? What did Jesus gain by loving his enemies?
- What might it look like for us to better love others as Jesus did?
- How can we love others better this holiday season?

Listen (Optional): “Oh Holy Night”

Pray for one another that you would love God and others as you have been loved by Jesus. Pray for specific examples brought up in the discussion.

Other discussion ideas inspired by week 4 devotionals in the Unexpected Christmas booklet

- God’s gift to us (John 3:16) is so costly a gift we can never repay it. What does love cost us? What might we sacrifice to show love to others?
- What makes God’s love REAL to us? How can you make God’s love REAL to someone else?
- Read Zeph 3:17 - “The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you but will rejoice over you with singing.” Just like our children bring us great delight, our heavenly father delights in us! Sing or listen to a Christmas carol together, and imagine God singing with delight over you.
- The entire Old Testament law is summed up on one idea, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” How can you show love to a neighbor this week?
- Our hearts are longing for things that this earth cannot fully satisfy because we were created to experience a love that outlasts any gifts we will unwrap. What *intangibles* do you want for Christmas for yourself? For your family?
- Read Rom 8:35. Remind each other that nothing can separate us from God’s love.