

Learning to wait well is a life skill, and a *faith* skill.

For centuries, Christians have practiced waiting during Advent. But we aren't just waiting for the yearly celebration of the birth of Jesus. We also wait for the time when God's promises of restoration, peace, and justice for the world will come into being. To wait for these promises means looking at the world with aching hearts, even as we put our hope and trust in the promises of God. To wait *on purpose* reminds us that all is not yet as it should be. As we prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus, we remember that the Spirit can most easily enter quiet hearts, searching hearts, and hearts that are a little bit broken.

It is easier to *not* wait. A thousand distractions invite us to the screens we find everywhere. It is easier to fast-forward to the celebration of Christmas, to extend Christmas backwards into the whole month of December. I hope these daily devotions will inspire you take a few moments each day to reflect about how to wait well for Jesus, so that when we celebrate his birth, God has the opportunity to transform us. These devotions are designed to help you connect with the themes of Advent (Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love) in different ways each week, and to encourage you to reflect with your youth group and/or your family.

For Christians, to wait is to expect.

We do not sit passively. We gaze out upon the horizon, looking for God, dreaming of ways to make God's presence known in our communities, and seeking God's spirit in our hearts. You'll notice that the cover of this booklet might not be what you expect from a set of devotions about Advent. Truly embracing the opportunity to wait and wonder may feel "less Christmasy" to you, but this journey of sitting in God's presence while we pay attention to ourselves and the world around us is what truly can prepare us for the joy of celebrating Jesus. May you gain more clarity this season about what it is you are expecting when Jesus comes to us anew.

1st Sunday (weekly theme)

Hope

Each week in Advent, Christians light a candle in church to remind us about the things that Jesus brings to the world. Your church or tradition might use different themes for each candle, but the four in this devotion are very common, though are sometimes in different orders. The first week is hope. Use a pencil or a pen to doodle the word "hope" below. While you draw, think about what hope means to you. Is hope easy or difficult for you? Why do you think that is? What are some of the symbols or people you think of when you think of hope? If it helps you, write down some of these thoughts under your doodle.

1st Monday (Scripture)

Isaiah 2:2-5

In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.

Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

God shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

Read over this passage, focusing on the bolded words. This passage is part of a prophecy about the Kingdom of God. The prophet Isaiah is explaining what the Kingdom will be like when God is able to bring peace to "the nations." Plowshares and pruning hooks are tools that are used in farming. Isaiah is saying that the weapons of war will be turned into the tools of prosperity that will sustain the community. What does this promise mean to you today? We don't always fight battles with traditional weapons anymore. What weapons do we use (for example, the Internet)? How can we work to help make this prophecy come true?

1st Tuesday (Songs)

These are the lyrics to a song called "Some Children See Him Lily White" by A. Burt and W. Hutson. When I hear this song, I'm reminded that Jesus didn't have white skin or speak my language. Jesus' culture and heritage matter. But Jesus is also universal; he loves all and welcomes all. How does that make you feel? Use youtube to listen to a recording of the song to get the full experience of the words.

Some children see Him lily white,
The baby Jesus born this night.
Some children see Him lily white,
With tresses soft and fair.

Some children see Him bronzed and brown,
The Lord of heav'n to earth come down.
Some children see Him bronzed and brown,
With dark and heavy hair.

Some children see Him almond-eyed,
This Savior whom we kneel beside.
Some children see Him almond-eyed,
With skin of yellow hue.

Some children see Him dark as they,
Sweet Mary's Son to whom we pray.
Some children see him dark as they,
And, ah! they love Him, too!

The children in each different place
Will see the baby Jesus' face
Like theirs, but bright with heavenly grace,
And filled with holy light.

O lay aside each earthly thing
And with thy heart as offering,
Come worship now the infant King.
'Tis love that's born tonight!

1st Wednesday (Drawing)

What is it that you hope for? Draw it! If it's hard to think of something, think about the promise that God makes to "make all things new." What might that look like for you?

Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness – Desmond Tutu

1st Thursday (Acts of Gratitude)

Mr. Rogers once said that when tragedy strikes, his advice is to "look for the helpers." That means that it's important to focus less on a bad event when it happens, and more on what people are doing to help each other get through it. This approach doesn't minimize or deny that bad things happen. Real hope is found in the midst of tragedy, and it looks like the people who refuse to let the tragedy define them. We can all be "the helpers," and that is a hopeful vision. Jot down a couple of ideas you have for ways you can be a helper today. Maybe a friend or a family member is going through a hard time, or maybe you can do something to show solidarity or support to a group that is being targeted. Whatever it is, do the hopeful thing and help out!

1st Friday (Photography)

Take a picture today that embodies "hope" for you. If you don't have a phone or a camera, get online and search for photos that other people think are hopeful, and pick your favorite. If you have a social media account, post it with #hope and tag your youth group's social media. If not, share it with your family or make a note about it here so you can remember why the image was hopeful to you.

1st Saturday (Prayer)

Some of the poetry in the Bible is called "acrostic." That means that each line of the poem begins with the next letter of the alphabet. You might remember writing these poems in elementary school. This form can actually be very helpful when you are trying to express big ideas. Sometimes big ideas are almost too big to pray about or write about, so you need a structure to help express your thoughts. Today, use the letters in the word "hope" to write a short prayer to God about what you hope for yourself, your family, and the world this Advent.

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