

Advent

DEVOTIONAL



WHY ADVENT MATTERS

A Letter From A Pastor

“Advent” means arrival or coming, and it’s a season of the year that Christians have observed for centuries as a time of anticipating the birth of Jesus. For many of us, however, this season flies by with a flurry of activities that can leave us worn out and feeling just glad that it’s over at the end of the month. It can be the most stressful time of the year—and, as we’ve experienced, this year has been particularly challenging. But what if “the Christmas season” actually brought us closer to Christ? What if we were able to create some space to really feel the longing for Jesus to arrive, to be born anew in our lives? What if there was time for reflection and refocusing, such that we could truly receive and experience the gifts that Jesus brings—love, peace, joy, and hope?

This collection of daily reflections is offered as one simple tool to help each of us connect with Christ more deeply in the days leading up to Christmas. Daily reflections will be centered on the core themes of the Christmas story—LOVE, HOPE, PEACE, and JOY. May these reflections help make you ready to receive all that God wants to give you this Christmas.

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DAY 1

SCRIPTURE

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

JOHN 3:16 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

Take a moment to reread John 3:16 and let these words sink in.

The Creator, God, who spoke the world into being and whose voice brings forth life is the same all-powerful God who is ultimately full of love. This love, which has been there since the beginning, compelled God to become flesh. Jesus came as a vulnerable infant, grew alongside his fellow image bearers, and made a way for God's love to reconcile us all back to the Father through his life, teachings, death, and resurrection.

For God loved the world – that's you and me. All humanity and creation in all of our brokenness – that he gave his one and only beloved Son, Jesus the Christ, so that whoever believes will not perish, but have eternal life. What beautiful, unconditional, and holy love God shares with us through Jesus!

Do you know and truly believe how deeply you're loved by Jesus? May we all give thanks to God for his perfect love that heals, restores, and transforms us to be people who love to the fullest.

DAY 2

SCRIPTURE

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

1 JOHN 4:7 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

Let me state the obvious: All of us were born. From the passing of DNA, we share qualities of our biological parents, whether that be the same color eyes or a personality trait, like a quiet demeanor.

Furthermore, we all are born from God and are of God. That means in the same way that we share DNA with our biological parents, we share the same DNA with God. We were created in the image of God and have a genetic and spiritual predisposition to act and look like God here on earth.

If we have any capacity to love, which we all do, then we have been born of God. And the more time we spend with God, the greater our love grows and God pours more love in us. Be encouraged that you were made on purpose to be good and full of love. As we prepare for the coming of our Savior, rest in the presence of God and let his Spirit fill you with his goodness and his love.

DAY 3

SCRIPTURE

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.

ZEPHANIAH 3:17 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

We know that it was God's great love for us that compelled him to send his one and only son, Jesus, to earth as a baby at Christmas. This passage references God as a "Mighty Warrior," and in other translations we see "a mighty one who will save" (ESV) and "a mighty savior" (NLT). In all of those, we see the common theme of Jesus, being the strong one who will save. But we also see Jesus fulfilling the name the angel gives in the book of Matthew, "Immanuel," which means "God with us," just as Zephaniah reminds us in the beginning of this passage.

In order to save us all, God chose to show his vast love for us, by sending his own Son to be "God with us," not a far off God, but a mighty one who is coming to save his people. It's moments like these where we draw back to the Gospel and remember that Christmas is all about the good news, friends. How might you remember that God is not a far off God today?

DAY 4

SCRIPTURE

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

ROMANS 5:8 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

God's love for us through Jesus is not conditioned on our performance. We don't earn it. It's a love completely unattached to anything we can do or offer in return. While we were sinners, enemies of God, spiritual failures, Jesus loved us so much that he sacrificed his life to save us.

Jesus says, "Now love each other like this."

Let's be people that truly reflect Christ and are known by our love for one another. A church that loves one another well is a sign and testimony to the world of the reality of Jesus. This is the kind of church we are called to be.

But we can only love as we have been loved. In order to become more loving toward one another, we must completely allow ourselves to be loved by God. We may not feel worthy of his love, but that is the whole point. We're not. His love is ours if we receive it by faith. Let God love you completely, graciously, incomprehensibly, undeservedly and unconditionally today. And show that same love to those around you.

DAY 5

SCRIPTURE

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-5 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

We often hear these words spoken as a bride and groom stand before their family on their wedding day. But what on earth does a scripture infamously associated with weddings have to do with Christmas? Well, scripture isn't intended to be "boxed in" by one occasion. It's meant to be something that brings meaning to every season of our lives.

If advent really is a time to prepare our hearts for the coming Savior who, by definition, is love, shouldn't we know what love is? Luckily this scripture tells us what love is and reminds us how we can put love into action. There is no greater way to learn how to love than to look to Jesus.

You see, love was patient when Jesus was interrupted by a woman desperate for his healing touch. It was kind when he invited a social outcast named Zacchaeus to share the afternoon with him. Love did not boast when Jesus fed 5,000 people in one afternoon. So, how can we look to Jesus this season as we find ways to put love into action?

DAY 6

SCRIPTURE

A new command I give you:
Love one another. As I have
loved you, so you must love
one another.

JOHN 13:34 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

Love is a characteristic of a disciple; one who follows Jesus, loves!

In fact, Jesus says in the next verse, “everyone will know that you are my disciple, if you love one another.” Jesus said this right after having washed the disciples’ feet to illustrate the humble nature of the love we are to show to one another.

It was also after Judas decided to betray Jesus and set in motion events that were ripe for rebellion. This is why his words about loving one another are so important at that moment, since the disciples would soon be tempted to rise up in anger to fight back. It is a “new commandment” because the “old commandment” was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, to live defensively and look out for one’s own interests.

Jesus tells us to love without condition or pretense and shows us this by coming into the world in the most humble and vulnerable of ways... as a baby. It is love on display that sets the pace for us to go and love likewise.

DAY 7

SCRIPTURE

“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

ISAIAH 54:10 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

The imagery of mountains shaking is a powerful one. Something that seems so mighty and immovable shouldn't be trembling and swaying. But we can all relate to the tremors of fear, like the ground beneath our feet is unsteady, or that peace is far removed.

Maybe some mountains have been shaken in your life this year. When that happens, it's easy to feel like anxiety or pain are too overwhelming for God's love to break through. Sometimes it seems impossible to truly know God's love when it feels like the mountains are shaking around us.

But Isaiah reminds us that God's love is steadfast. In fact, God promises love and peace. A love that is constant. A love that is not contingent on what's happening in our lives or in the world around us. A love that breaks through our fears and our pain to reach us. For that reason, we can be confident in the unshakable love of Jesus. May we make space to receive that love and let it wash over us so that we can bring that love to others this season.

DAY 8

SCRIPTURE

That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.

1 TIMOTHY 4:10 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

I recently tried to explain what hope meant to a child, and it was more challenging than I imagined. We throw around the word “hope” so carelessly, when in reality, hope is no trivial thing.

Hope is being confident in what has not yet come. It is more than a longing or desire, but an active posture of waiting with assurance and trust that Jesus is who he says he is and he keeps all of his promises.

1 Timothy 4:10 reminds us that our hope is in the living God, who is Savior of all people. Perhaps you’re hoping for a lot of things this Christmas: to see family and friends; to continue traditions and find normalcy; for bills to get paid and for Santa to leave a little something under the tree. But I challenge you to really examine where you’ve placed your hope. Maybe you’re in need of hope this season. May you find that hope in the arrival of Jesus. And in the waiting, you can rest peacefully, knowing Jesus is the Savior of the world.

Day 9

SCRIPTURE

Be strong and take heart,
all you who hope in the Lord.

PSALM 31:24 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

What troubles do you face in this moment? What worries, fears, or doubts are weighing on your mind or heart today? In Psalm 31, the author writes of being in 'distress,' 'strength failing,' and 'bones growing weak.' Can you relate to those descriptions and feelings? Look at the world around us, our community, our relationships, and our own personal lives. We live in a broken world. It may seem as though there is no hope.

In your struggles, fears, or challenges where is your hope found? The author indicates that our hope needs to be placed in God. In our time of struggle and brokenness, we are to place our hope in God. We can be confident in our hope in God by looking back at all that God's done. Once we look back, we can hope for a better future found through Christ. Psalm 31:24 calls us to "be strong and take heart" particularly during difficult times.

Identifying the troubles you face today, give those troubles over to God as you hope and wait for a better future found in Christ.

Day 10

SCRIPTURE

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

ROMANS 15:13 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

In Luke's Gospel, Mary sings a song of joy (Luke 1:46-55) after learning she will give birth to Jesus. Her song declares hopeful expectations for Jesus to lift up those who are often without hope. This has a long-term aspect, anticipating the day when God will restore all brokenness in the world; but also anticipates that the restoring work will begin in the present.

This is the same hope Paul points to in Romans 15:13. A hope that overflows, even when things look most hopeless. In hope, we challenge the reality of brokenness through the power of the Holy Spirit, experience joyful flourishing as God intended, and peacefully rest in the knowledge that it is not all up to us. We actively partner with God now, while also trusting God to complete the restorative work in ways we cannot.

This is a hope that doesn't always make sense, but that we trust God to fulfill. Is it easy or difficult to believe in this hope right now? How might God be inviting you to respond?

Day 11

SCRIPTURE

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

JEREMIAH 29:11 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

We refer to today as "Blue Christmas," in our worship services. We pause from our celebration and expectancy to remember many loved ones that we have lost this past year. 2020 has brought so much grieving and sadness to all of us. Ongoing pain feels difficult to hold during this season. Sometimes the weight is almost too much to bear and we feel alone.

We need the comfort of our God: one who knows each of us, who promises to always be with us, and who understands the pain of suffering and sadness. We cry out to our God because he will walk into our darkness and shine his light to help us find our way.

Have you lost your way? Our strong and powerful Lord has plans for us, he knows our future and he is the reason that we can have HOPE. Be challenged today to step toward and TRUST this God of hope. Allow him to help you find a path forward in the dark and invite him to bring light into your heavy heart today.

Day 12

SCRIPTURE

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

HEBREWS 10:23 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

I remember tubing years ago. Without warning, my tube flipped into the air as it crossed over a wave caused from a passing boat. Holding onto the handles of that tube as if my life depended on it, thoughts flashed in my mind of what could be in that water (like a big hungry fish thinking it was dinner time).

Just as tight as I held onto those handles, I want to hold onto God's promises without wavering (no pun intended). Think about it- Jonah was eaten by a big fish, but didn't God provide a way out?

I'm constantly reminded of all the ways that God provides for me. His past faithfulness gives me hope for the future. Sure, there are days when I am discouraged and fearful, but am reminded that Biblical hope is when there is no evidence that things will get better, but we choose hope anyway! And when I choose hope, I am filled with peace.

Friends, let us keep a firm grip on God's promises. He always keeps his word.

DAY 13

SCRIPTURE

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.

EPHESIANS 1:18 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

Did you know that Advent so perfectly sets us up for Easter? We're sitting and waiting and preparing our hearts for the Christmas that we know is coming in just a few short weeks. In the Bible, there's a period of time between the end of the Old Testament and the New Testament, where 400 years of silence had passed between God and His people. But the Old Testament is filled with promise after promise, prophecy after prophecy that a savior would come.

God's people have always been created to be an Easter people. A hopeful people. We have always been meant to be a people full of hope. Even when we are waiting, we know that God will show up on the other side. Whether in the short term or the long term, we know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that God will show up, because that is who God is. And we will continue to hope because that is who we are.

How might you step into hope today?

DAY 14

SCRIPTURE

But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love.

PSALM 33:18 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

December is a dark month in Maryland. The sun sets early. The bitter wind gains strength. The darkness of December provides a fitting backdrop for the waiting of Advent. Humanity waits in the dark, wind howling, searching for light. How often do you find yourself wrestling in the dark waiting, grasping for hope?

Hope differs from optimism. The optimist focuses on circumstances, on what. Biblical hope focuses on who. Biblical hope focuses on the God who is with us in the dark. Hope trusts in the God whose presence brings light to even the darkest of places.

Immanuel, "God with us," meets us in our darkness and gently lifts our chin to view the light of God's beauty. It is in this space that we are able to raise a hallelujah and worship despite the deep gloom. We trust God's heart, strain no more, and rest in Hope while waiting for the light to break.

Oh come Immanuel, abide with us. You alone offer Hope in the darkness. We worship you and wait with the expectancy Hope brings.

DAY 15

SCRIPTURE

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

JOHN 14:27 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

For many of us, peace has been elusive this year. It's tempting to read Jesus' words and dismiss them as unrealistic for our current reality. After all, peace can't be found amidst pandemics, political elections, racial injustices, wildfires, and countless other tragedies. Can it?

When Jesus spoke these words to his disciples, it seemed unrealistic for them as well. Following Jesus had meant persecution and fear of death on a daily basis. They lived under the rule of an oppressive Roman government and their Messiah was informing them that he was going to be leaving. And yet, he promises peace.

The peace that Jesus gives isn't threatened by our ever-changing outward experiences. He gives an inner peace that we receive when we trust Jesus and allow his Spirit to have his way in our lives. Worldly peace is defined by lack of conflict but peace in Christ is a confident assurance in all circumstances.

Where are you looking for peace? May you merely glance at the world and gaze upon the One who promises real and everlasting peace!

DAY 16

SCRIPTURE

The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.

NUMBERS 6:26 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

Face to face. You know this year we have been so separated, isolated in many ways. We have relied on technology like Zoom, Facetime, and Skype to keep us connected to the people we care about, so we can see them face to face.

It's important and comforting to look into the face of someone you love. It's better than just hearing a voice or reading words on paper. This verse of blessing shows us that God's face, the face of the one that loves you more than you know, the face of the one who created you, his face can bring peace to your life. In fact, it's the only face that can bring real and lasting peace.

Here are some encouraging words: God's face is always turned toward you, always available, full of love, forgiveness, grace, peace. So when you feel like you need some peace in your life, maybe you need a little facetime with the Father who loves you deeply, who loves you so much that he sent his son to a little town called Bethlehem. For you.

DAY 17

SCRIPTURE

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

COLOSSIANS 3:15 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

In baseball, the umpire is the referee of the game and the ultimate authority on the field. The umpire makes decisions like whether a pitch is a strike or a ball, or whether a player is safe or out. If there is ever a disagreement between the teams about a play, the umpire makes the final ruling.

The Greek word for rule used in Colossians 3:15 means to make a call as an umpire. This verse tells us that God wants the peace of Christ to be the umpire in our hearts and lives.

When life throws you a curve ball or you are facing a difficult situation, who calls the shots? Is it the peace that comes through Jesus or is it the voice of the world that brings worry, fear, and anxiety?

Jesus wants his peace to get the final say in how our hearts respond to every life circumstance.

As we reflect on peace this Christmas, what is one area in your life where you need Jesus' peace to be the umpire in your life?

DAY 18

SCRIPTURE

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.

ISAIAH 9:6 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

In Jesus' day, as well as our own, there was a hope that the governing bodies would be the force to change the world and bring the hope and peace that was and is so desperately needed.

Jesus came onto the scene, born in humble surroundings, turning on its head the picture of what the world had been waiting for. This verse points us to a better vision and promise—to the redeeming work that God has in store for all of creation when we place our trust in Jesus.

We place our faith in institutions, money, power, jobs, security, people, when God longs for that trust to be placed in him—the Everlasting Father... the Wonderful Counselor... our Mighty God... our Prince of Peace.

In this crazy year, where are you placing your trust? For many of us this year has brought us to our knees both figuratively and literally—who or what are you kneeling before? That will make all the difference in the peace you will find.

How are you sharing the peace you find with others?

Day 19

SCRIPTURE

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.

LUKE 2:14 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

Peace on earth. Most of the time it feels elusive; improbable. And yet when the angels appeared to the shepherds, announcing Jesus' birth and giving honor to God, they also declared peace to those of us here on earth.

Note that this announcement was made not to key religious leaders, not to prominent members of the community, but to shepherds, who did not hold a respected position in the social hierarchy. Even before his ministry on earth began, the announcement of Jesus' birth, and the accompanying promise of peace to those who believe in him, came first to those who were marginalized in their community. In purposefully revealing his birth to the shepherds, Jesus was already modeling what his ministry would go on to demonstrate: that his peace is available to everyone.

Right now, we may find ourselves feeling like peace on earth is a dream that is especially out of reach. But what might it look like for each of us to follow the example Jesus' birth sets for us, and reach out in peace to someone today?

Day 20

SCRIPTURE

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness... he humbled himself by becoming obedient to... death on a cross!

PHILIPPIANS 2:6-7 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

We deck the halls with decorations for Christmas, but the real Christmas story focuses on a God who gave up his decorated home for a world much less glamorous. Jesus possessed all the power of Almighty God, yet gave it up and became human. Watching Jesus is witnessing a descent—down to the straw bed of an animal feeding trough where he was placed at birth, down further to a cross, then a grave where he was laid at death. Jesus chose not to leverage his privileged status for his own advantage, but rather for our advantage.

Jesus was obedient to death, and he boldly asks for our obedience. "I have set you an example," Jesus said, "that you should do as I have done for you." Scripture encourages us to be "like-minded," have the SAME kind of love as Jesus, value others above yourselves.

This Christmas, let's make Jesus more than a decoration on our mantle. Let him occupy our hearts and motivate our actions—let us show the same kind of humble love to others that he did for us.

Day 21

SCRIPTURE

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

JOHN 16:33 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

We're almost done with this devotional and we've been on quite a journey during this season of Advent preparing our hearts for Jesus this Christmas. We've walked through love, hope and now peace. It's been apparent this year, this month, this week, and probably even today that, yes, in this world we will have trouble. But as we've been experiencing these past few weeks, Jesus did not leave us without a source of peace in turbulent times. Every time we draw near to God, we are able to experience his peace. As Philippians 4:7 tells us, "[it's] the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, [that] will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

It's how we keep the faith, friends. Because we remember that God has not left us without peace and that peace will guard our hearts and minds. Whatever may come our way, we take heart. How will you draw near to God and his promises today?

DAY 22

SCRIPTURE

The Lord has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.

PSALM 118:24 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

Today we begin the dive into the theme of joy in the Advent Season. What do you think of when you hear the word joy? Happiness, excitement, good feelings? While all of these things can fall under the category of joy we are going to look at the Biblical definition of joy:

Joy is an attitude God's people adopt, not because of their circumstances, but because of their hope in God's love and his Promise. (The Bible Project)

We have joy not because of what's happening in our finances, our country, our health, or anything else. We have joy because God in His great love sent his son to earth to reconcile people to himself and provide everlasting life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on the cross!

Let us wait with great expectancy and excitement this Christmas season as the Lord has sent Christ to the world, providing us with an everlasting source of true, meaningful joy.

"The Lord has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad."

DAY 23

SCRIPTURE

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

JAMES 1:2-3 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

There is no denying that this year has held tremendous trials for people all across the globe. The command to “consider it pure joy” is one many of us may have a hard time wrapping our heads around. How do we choose joy when trials of health, relationships, and finances are plaguing us and those we love?

When the Bible refers to “joy,” it is not the same as the emotion of happiness, which is influenced by circumstances and can change at a moments notice. The Bible refers to joy as contentment in Christ above all else. God doesn’t ask us to deny the reality of our trials, but to view them through eyes of our faith.

We can be confident in our joy because our faith is rooted in Christ. There is no trial on earth we can face that will separate us from the love of God.

In whatever trials you are facing today, may you confidently REJOICE in the steadfast love of the Father, knowing that he works all things together for the good of us who love him.

DAY 24

SCRIPTURE

You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

PSALM 16:11 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

Many of us are still so unsure what the next day, week or month will bring after a year full of uncertainties. This may bring stress and anxiety to you, even as you read these words. We want to be in full control of our lives and understand, maybe even shape for ourselves, our path forward. This year is shaping up to be different in so many ways, experiencing so many unknowns.

Rest assured, our all knowing God goes before you in every season of life. In fact, he has laid out the perfect path and knows every twist and turn along the way. It is when we walk fully with Christ in our everyday lives; in body, mind and spirit, to be with him, that we experience the pure delight, the JOY, and peace that only he can give.

Be near to him today. Delight in knowing he was with you then, he is with you now, and he will be with you in the future. He is the giver of all good things and the bringer of our true joy.

DAY 25

SCRIPTURE

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

JOHN 15:11 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

Today we celebrate the Lord's Day. The time regularly set aside to reflect on our Lord, share in communion and fellowship with one another. Before the week is over we will have had a special time to celebrate the coming of the Messiah, the coming of Heaven to Earth for the fulfillment of the Promise (John 6:38).

As Jesus speaks to us here, he draws a direct line between his obedience to the Father and our obedience in Him. This line affirms our faith and hope that the Lord of the universe came to Earth, and he will come again.

Jesus desires us to be in him so that by following his commands we might have joy, and it will be complete. To remain in his love and to obey his commandment is the core promise for a joyous Spirit. And what is his commandment? "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

There is time remaining in this season for you to find those in need of his love and to serve them well.

DAY 26

SCRIPTURE

Rejoice in the Lord always.
I will say it again: Rejoice!

PHILIPPIANS 4:4 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

For all the good it represents, Christmas often seems to remind us how off the world is from what we know it should be. The presents, parties, and partridges in a pear tree only distract us for so long before our hearts and minds are drawn to seeing the eggnog glass half-empty.

It's easy to look at all that is wrong with the world (and in our own world), isn't it? It's increasingly difficult to keep a spirit of gratitude as the worries and cares of the world cause it to so effortlessly wither. Recognizing how easily our heads drop in anxiety and worry, Paul places his finger under our lowered chin and lifts it to offer us the loving double encouragement to "rejoice in the Lord always."

Rejoicing takes intention; it takes work to keep our eyes firmly fixed on holy light amidst the dimming influence of holiday hurry and worry. Allow Paul's words to lift your chin and compel you to offer a word of adoration to Christ, helping sustain in you the joy of the Lord.

DAY 27

SCRIPTURE

Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.

1 PETER 4:13 NLT

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

This has been a year of trials. It seems that every time things begin to settle, we find ourselves facing yet another test of our strength and perseverance. While our trials cannot compare to those Christ endured, these challenges require us to draw near to him.

His spirit provides the sustenance we need to persist. And through all the struggle, suffering, and tension God makes his glorious presence known. We see his abundant presence even in the small moments.

It is in the helpers who buy groceries for a neighbor uncomfortable going to the store. It is in the extra time families have together at home. It is in the extra quiet time in the morning to pause. In what small ways has God made his presence known to you in these past few months? When we rejoice in these small moments, we share the joy of the Lord with the world—a joy that only comes from knowing that God is faithful in all circumstances.

DAY 28

SCRIPTURE

Those who have been ransomed by the Lord will return. They will enter Jerusalem singing, crowned with everlasting joy. Sorrow and mourning will disappear, and they will be filled with joy and gladness.

ISAIAH 35:10 NLT

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

Today's verse uses the word joy twice as a central theme. It says that the followers of God will be "crowned with everlasting joy!" Our mourning and sorrow will disappear and it will be replaced with joy and gladness. We know for many of us it is way easier to talk about joy than to actually live it. However, when we are with Christ, we are to be crowned with it!

For example, when a King or Queen wears a crown our eyes are drawn to the piece of hardware on their head and rightfully so! It defines who they are. Isaiah is saying the same about someone who follows God. Our crown of joy should radiate and draw others eyes towards it! People should know we are followers of God because of our joy! So for today, have you turned your sorrow and mourning over to God? Have you given God a chance to crown you with joy? Spend some time in silence and rest. Then ask God today to give you the crown of joy that only comes from him!

DAY 29

SCRIPTURE

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 NIV

NOTES

DEVOTIONAL

Rejoice! Rejoice! A Savior has come! O come Emmanuel! Isaiah 7 tells the followers of God that a virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. In Hebrew, "Immanuel" means God with us! These words would have been such a relief to Isaiah's listeners. Shouts of joy, clamors of hope would have filled the community as God had finally come to be among them.

This same love, hope, peace and joy that we have been following in this devotional flow from this climatic event of God coming to be with us through Christ Jesus. Therefore, let the love of God engulf you today, while his peace transcends all understanding.

Let the hope of the Lord forever live in our hearts while his joy crowns our heads! Rejoice! Rejoice! A Savior has come my friend! Bask in the glory of the Lord. He has changed the world forever! Amen.