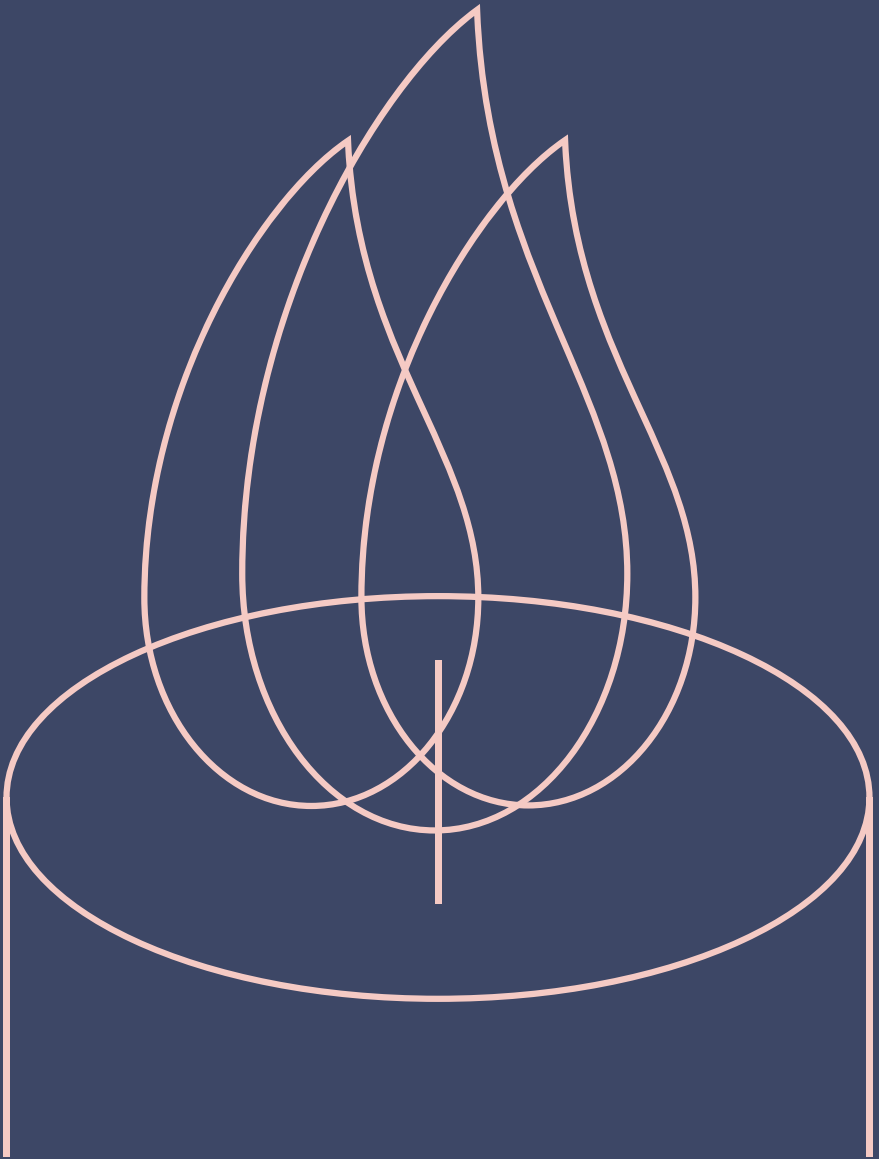


PARK HILL CHURCH

Advent Guide



WRITTEN AND EDITED BY
PARK HILL LEADERSHIP TEAM

BOOK DESIGNED BY
UNTO DUST

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USING THIS ADVENT GUIDE

If the idea of celebrating Advent is new to you, you're in good hands. This book is designed to provide guidance in two layers: weekly gatherings and daily practices.

WEEKLY GATHERINGS - directions for meaningful gatherings with brief candle-lighting liturgies (liturgy is just a word for a thoughtful order of worship) to do together with your community, family, and/or friends each of the four weeks of Advent.

DAILY PRACTICES - guidance for personal, spiritual practices to help orient you away from cultural patterns that might disrupt God's work in you and instead point you toward the life-giving Spirit of Jesus this Advent. At the end of each week's guide you will find one spiritual practice for the week. This is intended to be something you practice all week leading up to your next night with community.

ABOUT THE WEEKLY GATHERINGS / CANDLE LIGHTING LITURGIES:

This Advent guide follows the popular tradition of gradually lighting five candles over the four weeks leading up to Christmas Eve, marking the progression of Advent. Beginning on the fourth Sunday before Christmas, each week will focus on a different theme: **hope, joy, peace, and love** - in that order. During each weekly gathering, a new candle is lit in anticipation of Christmas. Then on Christmas Eve, the last candle, called the Christ Candle, is lit to represent Jesus' first

advent. This comes from the scriptural imagery of Jesus as the true Light that has come into the world. Through this picture of ever-growing light in the darkness, we encounter afresh the good news of the kingdom.

This guide will walk you through how to prepare for your weekly Advent candle lighting, and it will give you step-by-step directions for how to participate in each candle lighting liturgy in your home. The candle lighting liturgy itself will take 10-15 minutes. The duration of the rest of the gathering is up to you.

There's a pattern we tend to fall into during the Christmas season - we spend more, consume more, eat more, and do more in December than any other month. For this reason, Christmas can be one of the least emotionally healthy seasons of the year. We believe it doesn't have to be this way. In fact, we're inviting you to resist that pattern. As the famous carol proclaims, "Let every heart prepare him room." Make room for these Advent Gatherings. You won't regret it.

THE STORY OF ADVENT

Formed from a Latin word meaning “coming” or “arrival,” Advent is the traditional celebration of the first advent of Jesus in humility and the eager expectation of his second advent in glory. But to many of us who grew up in Western evangelicalism, Advent season feels unfamiliar. We are much more accustomed to Christmas in its modern, commercialized form. As soon as Thanksgiving is over (and sometimes even before), we start putting up decorations and listening to our favorite Christmas music. Of course, there’s nothing wrong with that. But this modern way of doing Christmas is a very new phenomenon (about 100 years old). For much longer - close to 1,500 years - Jesus followers of every tradition across the world have set aside the four weeks leading up to Christmas Day as a meaningful season of **hope-filled anticipation** known as Advent. It’s about stepping into the shoes of the Israelites, longing for Messiah to come. It’s about reflecting on our own sin and our need for a Savior. It’s about looking at the injustice of our world and crying out for Jesus to make everything right at his second coming. And then, once we get to Christmas Day, the celebration of Jesus’ birth becomes that much more breathtaking and meaningful.

As we intentionally enter the story of Jesus’ arrival, we deconstruct the self-oriented narratives that drive our culture’s concept of Christmas - individualism and consumerism. We reconstruct the cross-shaped narrative of the self-giving King Jesus. We grieve the effects of sin’s gravity - in ourselves, in our community, and across

the world. We recognize why we need Jesus Christ, Immanuel, to dwell among us and restore creation back to the Father through the Spirit.

At Advent, we celebrate the Son of God arriving as a gift, not to be served but to serve. We respond with praise and gratitude, using this season to freely serve and give to others.

At Park Hill, our desire is not to be people shaped by consumer culture, but by the still invitation to be with Jesus, and one another. That's why we've put this book together - to encourage space and moments for communities, families, and friends to gather with scriptures, songs, candle-lightings, and practices to unite us around Advent.

HOW TO PREPARE

COMMUNITY, FAMILY, AND/OR FRIENDS

Advent is something we encourage you to celebrate with community and consistency, if possible. Gather with your Park Hill Community, family, roommates, and/or friends. Try to be consistently present for all four candle lightings (plus Christmas Eve of course!). We believe the result will be a powerful season of encountering God together.

SHARE MEALS

Plan to have meals together at each of your four Advent gatherings. Make them as simple or extravagant as you like. The point is to be together in celebration and anticipation of Jesus.

PREPARE HIM ROOM

Set aside 10-15 minutes at a particular time during the evening for the candle lighting liturgy. Let each person participate (read a Scripture, start a carol, light one of the candles, etc.) Have fun with it!

GET THE ADVENT CANDLES READY

This can be a traditional Advent wreath, complete with your choice of greenery, candle holders, three purple candles (Hope, Joy, and Peace - weeks 1-3), one pink candle (Love - week 4), and one larger white "Christ candle" at the center (Christmas Eve/Morning). Or if you decide to go the non-traditional route - any candles will do!

Four outer candles and one larger center candle.

DO THE DAILY PRACTICES

We've also included guidance for a spiritual practice each person can bring with them into each week of Advent. If you've been around Park Hill for any length of time, none of these practices will feel new (i.e. scripture meditation, silence and solitude, fasting, generosity, etc). These things flow from the life and teachings of Jesus. As we practice them by the power of the Holy Spirit, they orient us away from the dehumanizing patterns of culture and toward the flourishing Way of Jesus.

May the Holy Spirit empower you and your community as you gather to pray, eat, sing, and walk through the candle lighting liturgies.

1.

THE
THRILL OF

HOPE

CANDLE-LIGHTING LITURGY

Enjoy yourselves when you gather. Eat. Talk. Laugh. Play.

Just be sure to set a time before everyone leaves to take 10-15 minutes to walk through this Advent Candle-Lighting Liturgy together.

You'll read a Psalm together, have a couple of people read scriptures for the group, light a candle, sing a song, and pray together.

This guide will walk you through each step.

01 READ OVERVIEW

HOST :

“If you wanted to describe a feeling of anticipation of a future that is better than the present, what are some words you would use to explain it?”

(Pause for answers.)

“Hope is not optional for healthy humans. We need hope to survive. Without hope, we’re stuck in our circumstances and can’t see our way out of the darkness.

“Tonight, each of us are putting hope in something. It could be a new relationship status, something we want to purchase, or someplace we want to be. But true hope is different than this. Biblical hope is not about getting new things. Biblical hope is about a Person (Jesus) who makes us new. Real hope is a new heart with Jesus at the center bringing us new wisdom, a new community, and new life.

“Tonight, we’re going to explore that kind of hope together in Scripture, prayer, and worship. Let’s begin.”

02 READ A PSALM TOGETHER

HOST :

“We’ll start by reading the following selections from Psalm 42 aloud together. Let’s read slowly, and let these ancient words be the prayer of our hearts tonight.”

PARTICIPANTS :

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, “Where is your God?” These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng. Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”

03 CREATE SILENCE

HOST :

“Now let’s create a few moments of silence. Palms up. Eyes closed. Breathe deeply. Exhale. For the next few moments, see yourself offering anything that’s troubling you up to God. Be being filled with the Spirit of God. Let Him fill your imagination with hope of a better future with Jesus.”

(Take 1-3 minutes. Break the silence with a short prayer about hope to conclude this section.)

04 READ SCRIPTURE

Choose a child (if available) and another reader for this section.

HOST :

“----- & ----- will be reading our next passages of Scripture tonight.”

CHILD (IF AVAILABLE) :

“But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love” (Psalm 33:18)

READER :

“This beautiful prophecy from Isaiah reminds us of the hope given to the people of God as they learned about who the messiah would be: ‘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.’

This is the Word of the Lord.”

PARTICIPANTS :

“Thanks be to God!”

05 LIGHT THE CANDLE

Choose one person (a child if available) to light the first candle (purple) and someone to read.

HOST :

“Tonight _____ is going to light our first Advent candle. This is the hope candle. The light of this fire represents the spark of hope. What does this hope represent for you tonight?”

(Pause for responses.)

READER :

“These verses tell us what happened when the light of hope invaded our world through Jesus.

One of Jesus’ closest friends poetically described it like this in John 1:9-14.

‘The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. 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.’

05 LIGHT THE CANDLE

READER :

This is the Word of God.”

PARTICIPANTS :

“Thanks be to God!”

06 SING A SONG

HOST :

“Let’s sing an old, beautiful Christmas carol. Sing badly if you must, but sing you must! This is a safe space for loud singing, so sing

OH HOLY NIGHT

PARTICIPANTS :

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining;
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth;
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary soul rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn;
Fall on your knees, O hear the angel voices!
O night divine! O night when Christ was born.
O night, O holy night, O night divine.
A thrill of hope the weary soul rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn;
Fall on your knees, O hear the angel voices!
O night divine! O night when Christ was born!
O night, O holy night, O night divine.

07 PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

HOST :

“Let’s take a moment to pray for one another. These don’t need to be long, eloquent prayers. But let’s lift one another up by name before God in prayer.”

(Ask for prayer requests, and allow time for everyone to pray who wants to pray.)

08 CONSIDER THE FUTURE

Choose one person from your gathering for the final reading.

HOST :

“_____ will be doing our final Scripture reading tonight. This one comes to us from the book of Revelation.”

READER :

“The purpose of this reading is to turn our hearts from what has happened in the coming of Jesus and awaken our hearts to the hope of what will happen at Jesus’ return.

Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

‘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.’

“This is the Word of the Lord.”

08 CONSIDER THE FUTURE

PARTICIPANTS :

“Thanks be to God forever.”

09 PRAY A FINAL PRAYER

HOST :

“Let’s pray.” (Pray a closing prayer.)

10 PRONOUNCE A FINAL BLESSING

HOST :

“We like to dismiss our gatherings by pronouncing a blessing on all who attend. This priestly blessing is found in Numbers 6, and it has been spoken over the people of God for the last 3500 years.”

HOST (OR A CHILD) :

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

HOST :

“Thanks for worshipping with us tonight. We’ll see you next week.”

DAILY PRACTICES

PERSONAL PRACTICE

This week, as you reflect on the hope we have in Jesus, practice Lectio Divina (Devotional Reading). Create space every day this week to spend time with the Lord, giving special attention to the hope we find in the Scriptures.

LECTIO DIVINA WAS TRADITIONALLY MADE UP OF FIVE STEPS:

- 1.) **Silence** - Come into God's presence, slow down, relax, and intentionally release all of the chaos and noise in your mind to him.
- 2.) **Reading** - Read a Scripture passage slowly out loud. Focus on the words, and allow them to resonate with your heart. When something you read impacts you, don't move past it, slow down and listen to the Spirit.
- 3.) **Meditation** - Read the Scripture again out loud, and meditate on the words, acknowledging the moment the Lord has invited you into .
- 4.) **Prayer** - Spend this time to communicate with our Father in prayer. Think about the verses you read, and how they relate to your life and your relationship with God.
- 5.) **Contemplation** - Wait upon the Lord. Be still. Spend this time in his presence, and allow his word to sink deeply into your soul.

2.

THE

PROMISE OF

PEACE

CANDLE - LIGHTING LITURGY

Enjoy one another's company, but set a time before everyone leaves to walk through this Advent Candle-Lighting Liturgy together. Before you get started, light the Hope candle (first purple candle).

Take 10-15 minutes, and walk through this Advent home worship service together.

01 READ OVERVIEW

HOST :

“Last week we started our Advent season talking about the theme of hope. This week we’re talking about another big idea connected to the Christmas story, and that’s the idea of peace.

“Does anyone remember what the angels sang when they appeared to the shepherd boys after Jesus was born? (Pause for responses.) That’s right. They said, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.’

“At beauty pageants, sometimes contestants are asked, ‘If you had one wish, what would you wish for?’ What do they always answer? ‘World peace’, of course! Yes, that’s a good answer, but what is peace exactly? In the Bible, it’s the word shalom, and it does mean an end to war and conflict, but it also means ‘complete’ or ‘whole’— maybe another way to say it is ‘not broken.’

“Our world is broken. It’s interesting that the angels said that Jesus, the Messiah, would come to bring peace. But how does Jesus un-break our world? How does He bring wholeness and completeness to God’s good world? Tonight, we’re going to explore that kind of peace together in Scripture, prayer, and worship.”

02 READ A PSALM TOGETHER

HOST :

“Let’s begin by reading the following selections from Psalm 23 aloud. Make these ancient words the prayer of your heart tonight.”

PARTICIPANTS :

“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

03 CREATE SILENCE

HOST :

“Now let’s create a few moments of silence. Palms up. Eyes closed. Deep breath. Exhale. See yourself offering anything that’s troubling you to God.”

(Take 1-3 minutes. Break the silence with a short prayer about joy to end this section.)

04 READ SCRIPTURE

Choose a child (if available) and another reader for this section.

HOST :

“----- & ----- will be reading our next passages of Scripture tonight.”

CHILD (IF AVAILABLE) :

“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!”

(from Isaiah 52:7)

READER :

“Tonight’s reading comes to us from Psalm 16:1-11.

“These verses from Isaiah 53 tell us the ways in which God promises to give us peace through Jesus. Listen closely as I read:

‘He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. 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.’

04 READ SCRIPTURE

READER :

This is the Word of the Lord.”

PARTICIPANTS :

“Thanks be to God!”

05 LIGHT THE CANDLE

Choose one person (a child if available) to light the second candle (purple) and someone to read.

HOST :

"Tonight _____ is going to light our second Advent candle. Last week we lit the Hope candle. Tonight we light the Peace candle (second purple candle). What would peace look like for you right now?" (Pause for responses.)

READER :

"This passage also comes from Isaiah. Listen for the promise of peace as I read:

"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."

06 SING A SONG

HOST :

“Okay, we’re going to sing “Joy to the World” together. You know the rules: sing badly if you must, but sing you must! This is a safe space for loud singing, so don’t hold back. Let’s sing.”

HARK! THE HAROLD ANGELS SING

PARTICIPANTS :

Participants:

Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King; peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!" Joyful, all ye nations, rise, join the triumph of the skies; with the angelic hosts proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!" Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!" Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Son of Righteousness! Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings. Mild he lays his glory by, born that man no more may die, born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth. Hark! the herald angels sing "Glory to the newborn King!"

07 PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

HOST :

“Let’s take a moment to pray for one another. These don’t need to be long, eloquent prayers. But let’s lift one another up by name before God in prayer.”

(Ask for prayer requests, and allow time for everyone to pray who wants to pray.)

08 CONSIDER THE FUTURE

Choose one person from your gathering for the final reading.

HOST :

“_____ will be doing our final Scripture reading tonight. This one comes to us from the book of Revelation.”

READER :

“The purpose of this reading is to turn our hearts from what has happened and awaken our hopes for what is to come.

“These are the words of Jesus found in John 14:

‘All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. 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. “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.’

08 CONSIDER THE FUTURE

PARTICIPANTS :

“Thanks be to God forever.”

09 PRAY A FINAL PRAYER

HOST :

“Let’s pray.” (Pray a closing prayer.)

10 PRONOUNCE A FINAL BLESSING

HOST :

“We like to dismiss our gatherings by pronouncing a blessing on all who attend. This priestly blessing is found in Numbers 6, and it has been spoken over the people of God for the last 3500 years.”

HOST (OR A CHILD) :

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

HOST :

“Thanks for worshipping with us tonight. We’ll see you next week.”

DAILY PRACTICES

PERSONAL PRACTICE

This week, as you reflect on the peace we receive as we follow Jesus, practice silence. Create space every day this week to spend time with the Lord, giving special attention to peace through silence.

MOMENTS OF SILENCE :

1.) **Timed Silence** - If you are new to the practice of silence, start with setting a timer for 10 minutes. In that time, forget about the clock, and settle into the quiet. Be intentionally still in the presence of God. Let the noise of your immediate surroundings diminish enough for you to hear new sounds in the silence. Focus on your breathing. Listen to the birds. If your mind is distracted, pick a word or phrase to bring you back to the moment of silence.

2.) **Be Still** - Think about Psalm 46:10, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." Throughout the day, go into silence, meditate on Psalm 46:10, be still and know he is God. Surrender the moments of your day to him. The worries, the joys, and everything in between. He is God in all of it, so you can be still and trust him.

3.

THE
ANTICIPATION OF

JOY

CANDLE-LIGHTING LITURGY

Enjoy one another's company, but set a time before everyone leaves to walk through this Advent Candle-Lighting Liturgy together. Before you get started, light the Hope and Peace candles (first two purple candles).

Take 10-15 minutes, and walk through this Advent home worship service together.

01 READ OVERVIEW

HOST :

“The Christmas season is generally a happy time, isn’t it? The lights, the colors, the music, the food, the gifts, and the Christmas movies just put us in a good mood. Most of us would say some of our best memories are Christmas memories. Spending time with the people we love and enjoying the good things life has to offer just tend to give us joy.

“But for some, Christmas is not a happy season for everyone. In fact, Christmas can be the loneliest season for some people. All the lights and music and parties remind them of someone they don’t have with them anymore—a spouse, a child, a mother or father, a dear friend. Christmas, for them, may have some good memories, but mostly it makes them sad.

“Joy is a theme that runs through the whole Bible. Sometimes joy is connected to beauty or with kids or to a glass of wine. But the Bible also talks about a kind of joy not based on happy circumstances but based on the anticipation of God’s promises. In tonight’s Candle-Lighting Liturgy, together we’re going to consider the anticipation of joy in God’s promises.

“In the Bible, often the first move toward joy is repentance. Repentance is simply giving up on trying to find joy our own way, and trusting that the life God wants for us is so much better than we want for ourselves. Let’s start there.”

02 READ A PSALM TOGETHER

HOST :

“Let’s all read the following prayer of repentance and joy from Psalm 51 together. Make these ancient words the prayer of your heart tonight.”

PARTICIPANTS :

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”

03 CREATE SILENCE

HOST :

“Now let’s create a few moments of silence. Palms up. Eyes closed. Deep breath. Exhale. See yourself offering anything that’s troubling you to God.”

(Take 1-3 minutes. Break the silence with a short prayer about joy to end this section.)

04 READ SCRIPTURE

Choose a child (if available) and another reader for this section.

HOST :

“----- & ----- will be reading our next passages of Scripture tonight.”

CHILD (IF AVAILABLE) :

“Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”
(from Nehemiah 8:10)

READER :

“Tonight’s reading comes to us from Psalm 16:1-11.

‘Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge. say to the Lord, “You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.” I say of the holy people who are in the land, “They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight.” Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more. I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods or take up their names on my lips. Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm

04 READ SCRIPTURE

of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay. 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!

This is the Word of the Lord.”

PARTICIPANTS :

“Thanks be to God!”

05 LIGHT THE CANDLE

Choose one person (a child if available) to light the third candle (purple) and someone to read.

HOST :

“Tonight _____ is going to light our third Advent candle. So far we have lit the Hope and Peace candles. Tonight we light the Joy candle (third purple candle). What does joy look like for you in this season?” (Pause for responses.)

READER :

“This passage also comes from John 15:11-15.

Listen to what Jesus has to say about how joy works...

‘I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.’

05 LIGHT THE CANDLE

READER :

This is the Word of God.”

PARTICIPANTS :

“Thanks be to God!”

06 SING A SONG

HOST :

“Okay, we’re going to sing “Joy to the World” together. You know the rules: sing badly if you must, but sing you must! This is a safe space for loud singing, so don’t hold back. Let’s sing.”

JOY TO THE WORLD

PARTICIPANTS :

Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.
He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love, And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders of His love.

07 PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

HOST :

“Let’s take a moment to pray for one another. These don’t need to be long, eloquent prayers, but let’s lift one another up to God in prayer now.”

(Ask for prayer requests, and allow time for everyone to pray who wants to pray.)

08 CONSIDER THE FUTURE

Choose one person from your gathering for the final reading.

READER :

“The purpose of this reading is to turn our hearts from what has happened to the hope of what is to come.

These are the words of Jesus in Revelation 21:1-5:

‘Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 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.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”’

“This is the Word of the Lord.”

PARTICIPANTS :

“Thanks be to God forever.”

09 PRAY A FINAL PRAYER

HOST :

“Let’s pray.” (Pray a closing prayer.)

10 PRONOUNCE A FINAL BLESSING

HOST :

“We like to dismiss our gatherings by pronouncing a blessing on all who attend. This priestly blessing is found in Numbers 6, and it has been spoken over the people of God for the last 3500 years.”

HOST (OR A CHILD) :

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

HOST :

“Thanks for worshipping with us tonight. We’ll see you next week.”

DAILY PRACTICES

PERSONAL PRACTICE

This week, as you reflect on the joy we have in Jesus, practice gratitude. Create space every day this week to spend time with the Lord, giving special attention to joy through gratitude.

GRATITUDE PRACTICES :

- 1.) **Journaling** - Read James 1:17 and write out the things our Father has given you. Think about all of the undeserved gifts in your life, and respond to him with prayers of gratitude.

- 2.) **One Thing** - At the end of each day this week, thank the Lord for at least one thing from the day and be specific in how it's blessed your heart.

- 3.) **Difficulties** - Think back to difficult time in your life. Remember the way you felt. Pray honestly, being open with God about how you felt during that time. In retrospect, how was he present to you during that time. Let the memory of that time bring you gratitude as you acknowledge our Father's presence.

- 4.) **Confession** - Be honest with the Lord about the areas you're comparing your life to the life of others. Have you been experienced feelings of dissatisfaction or entitlement at times? Allow for comparison to be turned into gratitude for the things you have in your life.

4.

THE
GIVING OF

LOVE

CANDLE-LIGHTING LITURGY

Enjoy one another's company, but set a time before everyone leaves to walk through this Advent Candle-Lighting Liturgy together. Before you get started, light the Hope, Peace, and Joy candles (the three purple candles).

Take 10-15 minutes, and walk through this Advent home worship service together.

01 READ OVERVIEW

HOST :

“In this Advent season thus far we have considered the Christmas themes of Hope, Peace, and Joy. Tonight we will light the fourth of our Advent candles (pink candle), the Love candle.

“Jesus told us love is the meaning of life. The greatest commandment, He says, is a commandment to love. But there’s a problem. In English, we use the word love for a whole lot of things. It’s not a very precise word. We love our friends. But we might also love a particular sports team. We love our family. But we also love Netflix™. We love God. But we also love ice cream. See the issue? If love is the greatest commandment, what does love actually mean?

“The word love in the Bible is often associated with breathtaking acts of trust and sacrifice. In fact, the first time the word love is used in the Bible, God puts Abraham’s love to the test by asking him to make an unthinkable sacrifice. He says, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love, and offer him as an offering.” Of course, we know Abraham passed the test. But the point is that in the Bible, love is not just a feeling. Love is an act, a sacrifice you make, a gift you give.

“Tonight we’re going to explore the theme of the giving of love.”

02 READ A PSALM TOGETHER

HOST :

“Let’s all read the following selection from Psalm 116 aloud. Make these ancient words the prayer of your heart tonight.”

PARTICIPANTS :

“I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. For you, Lord, have delivered me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living. What shall I return to the Lord for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people, Praise the Lord.”

03 CREATE SILENCE

HOST :

“Now let’s create a few moments of silence. Palms up. Eyes closed. Deep breath. Exhale. See yourself offering anything that’s troubling you to God.”

(Take 1-3 minutes. Break the silence with a short prayer about joy to end this section.)

04 READ SCRIPTURE

Choose a child (if available) and another reader for this section.

HOST :

“_____ & _____ will be reading our next passages of Scripture tonight.”

CHILD (IF AVAILABLE) :

“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.”

(from John 3:16)

READER :

“Tonight’s Scripture reading comes to us from Psalm 13.

‘How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Look on me and answer, Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death, and my enemy will say, “I have overcome him,” and my foes will rejoice when I fall. But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord’s praise, for he has been good to me.’

04 READ SCRIPTURE

READER :

This is the Word of the Lord.”

PARTICIPANTS :

“Thanks be to God!”

05 LIGHT THE CANDLE

Choose one person (a child if available) to light the fourth candle (pink) and someone to read.

HOST :

"Tonight _____ is going to light our last Advent candle before Christmas Eve. We've already lit the candles for Hope, Peace, and Joy. Tonight we light the Love candle. In what ways has someone shown love to you this week?"

READER :

"This passage comes from 1 John 4:9-12. Listen for the biblical definition of love as I read these verses.

'This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.'

"This is the Word of the Lord."

PARTICIPANTS :

"Thanks be to God!"

06 SING A SONG

HOST :

“It’s time to sing. You know the rules: sing badly if you must, but sing you must! This is a safe space for loud singing, so don’t hold back. Let’s sing.”

O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL

PARTICIPANTS :

O come, all ye faithful, Joyful and triumphant!

O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!

Come and behold Him, born the King of angels;

O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him,

O come, let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels, Sing in exultation,

Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above:

Glory to God, all glory in the highest!

O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him, O come let us
adore Him, Christ, the Lord!

For He alone is worthy, For He alone is worthy,

For He alone is worthy, Christ the Lord.

07 PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

HOST :

“Let’s take a moment to pray for one another. These don’t need to be long, eloquent prayers, but let’s lift one another up to God in prayer now.”

(Ask for prayer requests, and allow time for everyone to pray who wants to pray.)

08 CONSIDER THE FUTURE

Choose one person from your gathering for the final reading.

READER :

“Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.” Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people. And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.” Then I looked and heard the voice of

08 CONSIDER THE FUTURE

many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.”

“This is the Word of the Lord.”

PARTICIPANTS :

“Thanks be to God forever.”

09 PRAY A FINAL PRAYER

HOST :

“Let’s pray.” (Pray a closing prayer.)

10 PRONOUNCE A FINAL BLESSING

HOST :

“We always like to dismiss our worship services by pronouncing a blessing on all who attend. This is an ancient priestly blessing from Numbers 6.”

HOST (OR A CHILD) :

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

HOST :

“Thanks for worshipping with us tonight.”

DAILY PRACTICES

PERSONAL PRACTICE

This week, as you reflect on the love we receive from our Father, practice simplicity and generosity. Create space every day this week to spend time with the Lord, giving special attention to love through simplicity and generosity.

MOMENTS OF SILENCE:

1.) **Simplicity** - Allow for areas of your life to become uncomplicated this week. Maybe take time to clean out your garage, closet, or attic. Perhaps there are things in your schedule or diet that can use simplifying. In the shedding of things, recognize the love of your Father, and experience contentment as a loved child of God.

2.) **Generosity** - As you've practiced simplicity, let it move your heart towards a greater awareness of the needs of those around you.

