

ADVENT DEVOTIONS:

WORKING WELL IN A SEASON OF WAITING

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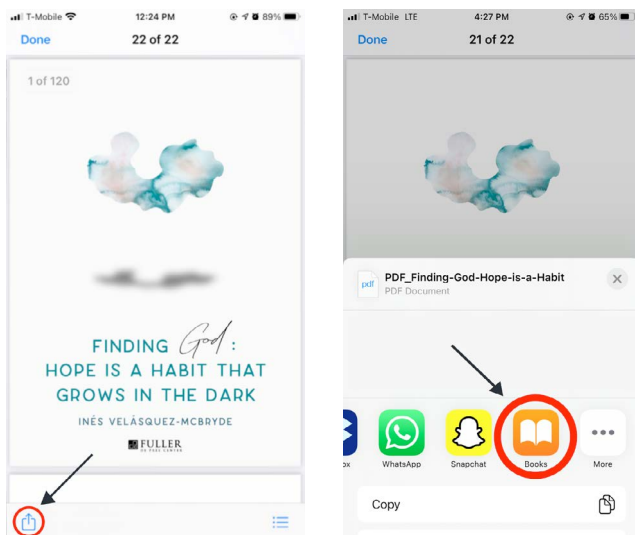
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INTRODUCTION

Advent. It's the first season of the Christian year, an orientation to time that keeps our attention fixed on the saving acts of God in Christ. Christians around the world celebrate Advent every year. Beginning on the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day, many will light special candles in their worship services or around their dinner tables. They will read Scripture and pray. They will remember the first coming of Christ and look forward to his return, all the while longing for his coming into their lives.

The word "Advent" comes from the Latin *adventus* which means "coming." The irony is that, while we celebrate and anticipate the coming of Christ into the world, we simultaneously look forward to our retreat from it—a few days off from work, a winter break away from school, a Christmas vacation far, far away. Our focus shifts toward getting *away from* our everyday work precisely when the church calendar invites us to focus on Christ's *coming to us* in the midst of it.

These meditations invite us to focus anew on what it



means to live faithfully in the time between Christ's first and second comings and to consider how Christ's first and second comings make a difference in our work.

FORMAT

Each week has four meditations on Scripture and a prayer. The Scripture readings come from the [Revised Common Lectionary](#). The lectionary is a three-year cycle of Scripture readings that can be used in gathered worship and personal study. The readings follow the Christian year, and each week contains a reading from the Old Testament, a Psalm, an Epistle, and a Gospel. I chose to follow the lectionary because of its potential to unite believers around common readings. On occasion, I have extended the lectionary passage by a few verses. Because I originally wrote these meditations for Advent 2019, the Scripture readings are from Year A of the three-year lectionary cycle.

A NOTE ABOUT THE BIBLE VERSES

All Bible verses are taken from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise indicated.



The First Week of Advent:

Peace, Right, Love, Preparation, A Prayer

In light of the coming of Christ, we are encouraged to pray for and partner with God in pursuing the peace and prosperity of our places and spheres of influence.

And, on days when everything goes wrong, we can look forward in hope to a day when God will make everything right.

PEACE

● SCRIPTURE

*"For the sake of my family and friends,
I will say, 'Peace be within you.'
For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek your prosperity."*

Psalm 122:8-9

● SCRIPTURE READING

Read [Psalm 122](#).

● DEVOTION

When I stepped out of the car, the brisk wind coming off the lake stole my breath. As soon as I recovered it, I inhaled deeply. And then I inhaled again. Crisp freshwater and fir trees. How could I capture that scent to carry it with me always?



When we step into a new place for the first time, our eyes and hearts open wide as our feet touch the ground. We exhale from the weariness of travel, but then we inhale with expectation—breathing in possibility, filling our lungs and our souls.

The psalmist had anticipated such a day in such a place. With joy, he made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. With anticipation, he entered her gates. With awe, he beheld the house of the Lord. He arrived in the center of Israel's cultural and spiritual life. He entered the “city of peace” and beheld the walls, the houses, and the temple.

He took it all in—surely the sights and the smells but also the historical and spiritual significance of this city in which God chose to dwell among his people. And then he exhorted those who would read his psalm to pray for the city, to seek its peace and prosperity.

When God sent his people into exile in Babylon, he urged them through the prophet Jeremiah, “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jer 29:7).



We hear echoes of this counsel in the psalmist's words. But, this time, the psalmist prays for the flourishing of a city to which he is a mere pilgrim. He links the peace and prosperity of the city to the wellbeing of his family and friends and the spiritual wellbeing of his people.

God no longer dwells in a temple in a city. Instead, he dwells in many people in many cities, in small towns, in remote villages. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth: "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" (1 Cor 3:16).

This psalm, in light of the coming of Christ, encourages us to pray for the peace and prosperity of our places—our cities, neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, and homes. And the psalmist's commitment, "I will seek your prosperity" invites us to partner with God in pursuing justice, peace, mercy, goodness, truth, and beauty in our spheres of influence.





QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What are the places to which God has called you?

In what ways do you see God bringing about the peace and prosperity of those places?



How can you participate in God's work in your places?

PRAYER

God, you are the author of peace. Through Christ's work on the cross, you have made possible peace possible for us, and you have made a way for me to be an agent of peace.

The Psalmist reminds us that you seek to bring about the peace and prosperity of the places to which you have called me. Open my eyes to see how I can partner with you in that work. *Amen.*



● NOTES



RIGHT

● SCRIPTURE

*"Come, descendants of Jacob,
let us walk in the light of the Lord."*

Isaiah 2:5

● SCRIPTURE READING

Read [Isaiah 2:1-5](#).

● DEVOTION

Sometimes everything goes wrong.

During college, I spent two summers working for an organization that facilitates short-term mission trips for middle and high school students. The first summer was a dream. Our four-person staff established a new site, built deep relationships with members of the



community, and helped hundreds of students explore what it means to serve Jesus. Sign me up for another summer of that.

The first week of the second summer almost broke me. It almost broke my spirit that is. I had already broken my leg during training—at least that's when the stress fracture decided to show up. And then the students came.

I looked forward to pointing them to Jesus through my morning devotions and nightly talks. I hoped to connect them to members of the local community so that they could learn about the culture. But I watched my hopes evaporate.

One group of students complained that my talks were too religious, too focused on the Bible. They were also more interested in watching bears at the local dump than meeting members of the local community. And some of them broke into their church van to do drugs in the middle of the night.

That same week, we had to abandon our housing in a local school because the water had been shut off. When we arrived at a church that agreed to take us in, we had



to shelter from tornados. At the end of that first week, I wanted to pack my bags and go home.

We may feel like a failure when everything goes wrong. We want to share our faith with our coworkers and our neighbors, but they're not interested or we fumble our words. We feel alone in our pursuit of peace and justice while the world focuses on competition, bottom lines, and return on investment.

Isaiah 2:1-5 speaks to those of us sitting in the middle of everything-gone-wrong. The people living in Jerusalem, the city where God chose to dwell among his people, were living in a city of anything but peace. It was a city filled with injustice and oppression. The people failed to be faithful. Consequently, they failed to be a light to the nations.

To these people, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah of a new time and a new place when everything will go right. God will be at the center. He will be the focus. The nations will stream to him, and his people will go to him so that he can teach them his ways and they can walk in his paths. God will turn the weapons of war into tools for thriving. Justice and peace will reign.



Until that day, Isaiah invites us to “walk in the light of the LORD” (Is 2:5). We can pursue him, seek to know his truth. We can ask him to show us how to be agents of mercy and peace, how to work for flourishing and prosperity for all, how to turn away from animosity and greed. And, on days when everything goes wrong, we can look forward in hope to a day when God will make everything right.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What do you think it means to “walk in the light of the Lord”?



What practices, habits, or disciplines help you walk in God's light?

What people or places help you walk in God's light?



 PRAYER

God, you are light and in you there is no darkness. I confess that am easily distracted and disturbed by the darkness around me and within me. Some days, I struggle to hope when everything seems to be going wrong. Give me strength to walk in your light that I might bring glory to your name. *Amen.*



NOTES



LOVE

● SCRIPTURE

*"Love does no harm to a neighbor.
Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."*

Romans 13:10

● SCRIPTURE READING

Read [Romans 13:8-14](#).

● DEVOTION

I meant it as a joke, telling Robert that Gina, our District Manager had called. For the first twenty minutes of his shift, he scrambled from the backroom to the bar to the registers, attempting to control the chaos of a midday coffee rush all the while attempting to suppress his anxiety. What could Gina want?

Robert had every right to be nervous. He had recently



become the manager of one of the busiest coffee shops in our area. To make matters worse, Gina had fired his predecessor.

It didn't take me long to realize that what I meant as a joke was quite cruel. Not only had I lied to Robert, but I also caused him emotional distress. And I had invited my coworkers to join me in my plot. On an already chaotic shift that demanded "I don't want to see a bubble in it, half a Sweet-n-low, put in two ice cubes to cool it down, 1 pump vanilla, no foam, soy lattes," I had created more turmoil. I felt ashamed.

Sometimes, our seemingly innocent interactions at work or home can be cruel. Under the guise of building relationships, we injure others with our words and our piercing glances. We pretend to serve the interests of others, but, instead, we pursue selfish gain—up-selling a client to ensure more income for ourselves, maligning a coworker to make ourselves look better. What may look like love is anything but.

The Apostle Paul told believers, "Give to everyone what you owe them"—whether it be taxes, revenue, respect, or honor (Rom 13:7). And don't forget love. Paul continued,



“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law” (Rom 8:13).

Mortgage, student loans—those are debts, debts we may spend the majority of our adult lives paying off. But the amortization schedule for those debts has an end date. At some point, in fifteen or twenty years, the debts will be paid.

Not so with love. We will always owe love.

And the Advent message is that there is no time to waste. We live between Jesus’ first and second coming. Paul points out, “our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed” (Rom 13:11). We have only so many days left to love others in the way that Christ would love them, with the unconditional mercy and grace that he has shown us.

So, enough gossip about our bosses. Enough jokes played on our coworkers. More sacrificial giving to our clients. More generosity toward our employees. Let’s seek their good, their flourishing for the sake of Christ.





QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

To whom have you neglected to show love?

What might it look like to show them love today?



PRAYER

God, in the person of Jesus Christ you have shown what it means to love lavishly. I confess that I sometimes fail to love others well. I pursue self-interest instead of being generous with kindness and compassion. Change my heart and help me demonstrate your love to others. *Amen.*



● NOTES



PREPARATION

● SCRIPTURE

"Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.

Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left."

Matthew 24:40-41

● SCRIPTURE READING

Read [Matthew 24:36-44](#).

● DEVOTION

Confession: Doomsday preppers fascinate me. They scare me a little bit, too. Let's call me cautiously curious.

These individuals diligently prepare for the end—nuclear fallout or the Great Tribulation. They build



fallout shelters, fill storerooms with nonperishables, and arm themselves to protect them and theirs in the case of Armageddon. Some local doomsday preppers even asked if they could store some of their supplies in two of our church's "safe rooms."

Doomsday preppers anticipate the apocalypse. As Christians, we believe that the Lord will return. But does Jesus call us to steward our time, talent, and treasures for the sake of our survival?

At the heart of the Advent message is a plea for Christians to ready themselves for the imminent return of the Lord. The day and the hour are unknown (Matt 24:36). Only the Father knows the time. So, in the time between the coming of Christ and his return, we wait expectantly. We wait actively.

Jesus told his followers, "Keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come" (Matt 24:42). He told us to be ready. But the picture he paints of his return speaks nothing of doomsday prepping. Instead, Jesus describes his return against the backdrop of productive work.



"Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left" (Matt 24:40-41). A modern rendition of the passage might have two men behind a deli counter or two women at a Bloomberg Terminal. Two surgeons at an operating table. Two moms at a playdate. Two students in a library.

The call to keep watch, the call to be ready, is not a call to step away from work in order to wait for the Lord. Rather it's a call to lean into work and to be found faithful when the Lord returns.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

If the Lord returned today, what would he find you doing?



Why do you think Jesus described his return against the backdrop of productive work?

● PRAYER

God, I know that one day you will return in glory to set the world to rights. But I don't know when that day will be. As I wait, help me to be a faithful worker—whether in my home or at a job. Use my gifts to further your Kingdom until Christ returns or you call me home.
Amen.



● NOTES



A PRAYER

● DEVOTION

God in Heaven,

Some days I look at my life, my workplace, my
community, my world,
and I am overcome with sadness.

Brokenness surrounds me:
sickness and death,
dishonesty and corruption,
poverty and injustice,
hate and discord.

Yet you have called me to pray for the peace and
prosperity
of the places to which you have called me:
my home
my friendships
my workplace
my neighborhood
my world.



Instill within me the hope that, one day, you will make everything right.

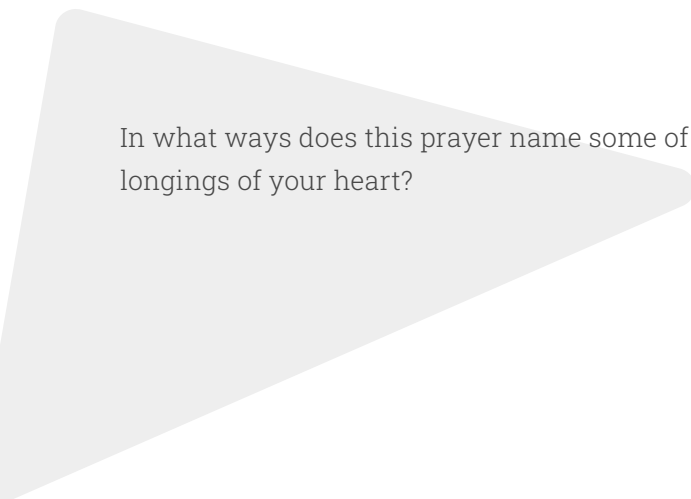
And, until then, show me how you would like me to partner with you
in your redemptive work to bring
justice, truth, beauty, and goodness to the world.

By your Spirit, help me to love others well
and to be faithful in my work
until you call me home
or return in glory. *Amen.*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

As you read the prayer before, what words or phrases resonate most with you? Why?





In what ways does this prayer name some of the specific longings of your heart?

What might you add to make this prayer fit you and your circumstances?



 PRAYER

Jesus Christ, you came to us once, and you will come again. Hear my prayer, and be near me today. *Amen.*

 NOTES

The Second Week of Advent: Justice, Hope, Faithfulness, Repentance, A Prayer

The message of Advent is that when Jesus returns, he will usher in days of refreshment and prosperity....He will end the oppression, the violence, the bloodshed.

The hope of Jesus' coming gave God's people hope in the midst of their bleak, seemingly eternal winter of waiting for redemption.

JUSTICE

● SCRIPTURE

*"Endow the king with your justice, O God,,
the royal son with your righteousness."*

Psalm 72:1

● SCRIPTURE READING

Read [Psalm 72](#).

● DEVOTION

Perhaps you have seen the commercial. Claire stands with her coworkers around a boardroom table while their boss announces that someone else got the promotion. Claire fights back tears as she claps. This isn't the first time she's been passed over, the narrator tells us.



Then her phone buzzes. She picks it up to see a notification—an interview request. Her face breaks out into a huge smile as she continues to clap. But it's not a smile that says, "Congratulations, I'm so happy for you." It's a smile that says, "Ha! Take that! Vindicated at last!" She may have been looked over in this company, but others have noticed her. She will have her day. Justice will be done. The employment gods are surely smiling on her.

In a given workweek, we may utter a dozen cries for justice or vindication. "It's not right that I work for such low pay." "Why doesn't she receive a reprimand for being dishonest on her expense reports?" "Why does management allow him to treat women that way?" "I think we're scamming our customers, and no one cares. Who will make it right?"

We long for leaders who will act righteously and administer justice. Though the best of them try to imitate Jesus and seek the welfare of those they serve, none can compare to the leader endowed with the justice and righteousness of God.

Our earthly leaders will fail us. The message of Advent



is that Jesus won't.

When he returns, Jesus will usher in days of refreshment and prosperity. And he will deliver, take pity on, save, and rescue the needy, the afflicted, the weak. He will end the oppression, the violence, and the bloodshed. Every leader will bow to him. And all nations will bless his name.

Today, if you feel passed over or ignored, if you feel alone in your quest for justice, in your stand for righteousness, let this psalm remind you that there is a king who is on the side of the weak and the powerless. He will come again. Then, together all those who have cried out for justice, we will rejoice in our vindication.





QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What sorts of situations have you crying out for justice or vindication in your work?

What would it look like to see God's justice administered in your workplace?



How does knowing that Jesus is king shape your perceptions of your work?

PRAYER

Jesus, your eye is on the weak and the powerless. You see both the victims and the perpetrators of injustice. Show mercy and compassion to the victims. Vindicate the oppressed. Judge those who do wrong. Rise up, O King. *Amen.*



● NOTES



HOPE

● SCRIPTURE

*"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit."*

Isaiah 11:1

● SCRIPTURE READING

Read [Isaiah 11:1-10](#).

● DEVOTION

Layoffs can be devastating. People lose their jobs often without warning and sometimes without severance. The sudden job loss can be so destructive—not only to those who no longer have a job but also to the workplaces that must carry on after downsizing.

I vividly remember the day I lost a job due to budget



cuts. I remember what the carpet in our hallway felt like against my face—cool and scratchy, wet with my tears. I had collapsed there after calling my husband to tell him the news. My boss's words had blind-sided me, especially since he had called the day before to tell me how pleased he was with my work.

The grief nearly overwhelmed me not only because I lost my job but also because I thought I had lost my chance to go back to school. The very next day, I was scheduled to drive up to Chicago for new student orientation for my doctoral program. The money I was going to earn from that job would cover my tuition. The situation looked grim. All hope seemed lost.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God spoke of a time that would look bleak for his people. Only a remnant, a few, of God's people would return from Exile. And they would return to a land that had been destroyed by the Assyrians. They would return to live in a different geopolitical climate. God would level the once-great nations: "The lofty trees will be felled, the tall ones will be brought low. He will cut down the forest thickets with an ax; Lebanon will fall before the Mighty One" (Isaiah 10:33b-34).



Yet, in the midst of utter devastation, hope: “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit” (Isaiah 11:1). It’s the flower that springs up from the crack in the sidewalk, proving that life can come in the midst of darkest death.

The hope of Jesus’ coming gave God’s people hope in the midst of their bleak, seemingly eternal winter of waiting for redemption. And, in the midst of our winter—whether it be caused by a job loss, a challenging relationship, or a troubled soul—this Advent message reminds us of the hope that Jesus’ second coming gives us.

We wait for Jesus to come and judge the world with righteousness. We wait for Jesus to come and dispense justice. We wait for Jesus to bring a peace so radical that wolf and lamb will dwell together, that harm and destruction will disappear from his presence. And we wait for this son of Jesse, son of David, son of God to return and make everything right.





QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

When was the last time that you felt like a situation was bleak and hopeless?

In what ways did you notice God at work in you or in that situation?



How does the image of a shoot coming out of a stump bring you hope?

PRAYER

God, you are the author of hope. You are redeeming, reconciling, and restoring even when I cannot see it. When the world seems bleak, when I can't fathom a way forward, remind me that you are at work to call forth light in darkness and life from death. *Amen.*



● NOTES



FAITHFULNESS

● SCRIPTURE

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"

Psalm 122:8-9

● SCRIPTURE READING

Read [Romans 15:4-13](#).

● DEVOTION

I had felt so alone when I looked around my classroom to see every other person besides myself with their hands in their lap or on their desk.



I had known that not everyone at my private secular university shared my way of looking at the world, but I thought I would have had one like-minded person in my class.

It turns out that I did. When classes resumed after 9/11, my Advanced Calculus professor concluded his lesson by asking if anyone in our class believed in an evil force at work in the world. Most of us were math and engineering majors. We talked of forces often, but only in terms of mass and acceleration. Our domain was physics, not metaphysics. Still, I raised my hand signaling that I believed an evil force to be at work in the world. My professor said nothing more. He neither justified his question nor asked me to justify my belief.

A few days later, at the conclusion of office hours, my professor said to me, "You were the only one who raised their hand." We both knew what he meant. Then he told me, "Me, too." He, too, was a Christian. He, too, believed that an evil force was at work in the world. He, too, believed it would not have the final answer.

My friends often asked me how my faith had survived four years in the math department at a secular school.



How had his? Perhaps our faith survived because we knew—at least on that day—that we were not alone.

Many of us have probably felt alone in our faith at one time or another. Perhaps others in our workplace, our classes, or in our mom's group have taunted us for stances we have taken because of our beliefs. We could hide or deny our faith, seek to accommodate to the majority view, and attempt to save ourselves from scorn. In the words of Romans 15, that would be the way to pleasing ourselves.

But the Apostle Paul reminds us that Christians should not live to please themselves but rather to please God and their neighbors. After all, that's what Jesus did. He experienced mocking and scorn precisely because he sought to love God and love others above himself. He lived counter-culturally even when it meant he would feel rejected and alone.

God gives encouragement and endurance for people in precisely those circumstances. Sometimes, that encouragement and endurance grow as we experience solidarity with other Christians, whom we love and accept based on our shared faith in Jesus.



And Advent reminds us that, as we seek to live like Jesus, as we seek to prioritize love of God and love of neighbor over love of self, God accomplishes much more than we can see or dream. Paul wrote, "Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy" (Rom 15:8-9). Through Jesus' obedience, God made hope available for Jew and Gentile alike. Perhaps God will likewise put his hope on display through our faithfulness.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

When have you felt alone in your faith?



What's your tendency when you feel alone in your faith? Do you hide your faith? Do you try to fit in with the culture around you? Do you try to be a light for Christ?

How might the endurance and encouragement from God described in Romans 15 shape how you respond when you feel alone in your faith?





PRAYER

God, you have promised to be with me until the end of the age. Indeed, you are with me—in me by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Still, sometimes I feel alone in my faith. I confess that I have been tempted to hide my faith and to fit in with the culture around me, but you have called me to be a light. Grant me endurance. Encourage my soul. Help me to be a witness to your love. *Amen.*



● NOTES



REPENTANCE

● SCRIPTURE

"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance."

Matthew 3:8

● SCRIPTURE READING

Read [Mathew 3:1-12](#).

● DEVOTION

While we journey through Advent, many of us prepare for Christmas. We trim the trees, hang the stockings, and wrap the gifts as we hum the carols. We buy the groceries for our family feasts—hams and turkeys, sweet potatoes and stuffing, green beans and cream of mushroom soup. We make the fruit cake.

Well, my grandmother made the fruit cake. And the fruit



cake cookies. Honestly, aside from the cranberry sauce and the occasional maraschino cherry or mandarin orange, fruit was never really part of our Christmas dinner. It wasn't part of our Christmas-consciousness.

But today's Scripture invites us to bring fruit to the table, even to make it a centerpiece of our celebration. John the Baptist told the religious leaders who came to see him baptizing in the Jordan, "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matt 3:8).

In the days and weeks before Jesus came to the Jordan, John baptized people who confessed their sins and turned to God. In doing so, these people were preparing the way for God to do a new work before their eyes and in their lives. But John wanted everyone in his hearing to know that repentance is not a once-and-done activity.

Rather, John emphasized that repentance should be a regular occurrence in our lives. And through this regular turning away from sin and toward the living God, our lives will bear good fruit. The alternative is not so glamorous: "every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matt 3:10).



While we may want to reserve confession and repentance for Sundays when our pastors guide those in the pews through prayers of penitence and assurance of pardon, this Advent message invites us to embed confession and repentance in our everyday lives and to yield to the transformation that God wants to bring about in and through us.

So, when that moment of conviction comes after realizing you just participated in gossip while refilling your coffee mug, confess and repent. Ask God for the grace to walk away next time. When you calm down and realize you just belittled your sales manager when his team's quarterly results were less than projected, apologize to her, confess your sin to God, and ask him to help you lead out of mercy and love.





QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What have you done so far to prepare for Christmas?

In what ways is repentance a work of preparation?



Can you think of any recent actions or attitudes for which you should repent?

PRAYER

God, the Scriptures tell us that your kindness leads us to repentance. I pray that you will search my heart and give me a spirit of repentance for the wrongs I have committed. As I turn away from sin and turn toward you, would you bear fruit in my life so that others may see how wonderful you are? *Amen.*





NOTES



A PRAYER

King Jesus,

I await the day when you will return in glory
to bring justice for the oppressed
and vindication for the righteous.

When the burdens and sorrows of the world make my
soul downcast within me,
give me hope;
help me to wait well.

And, if you see fit, let my life point others to you.
Show me my faults and my errors.
Give me a spirit of contrition over my sins.
Lead me to repent of my wrongdoing.
And help me yield to the transforming work that you
want to do in my life.

By your Spirit, help me to love you and love neighbor.
Let me be an agent of mercy, peace, and hope in this
world
in your name
and for your glory. *Amen.*





QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

As you read the prayer above, what words or phrases resonate most with you? Why?

In what ways does this prayer name some of the specific longings of your heart?



What might you add to make this prayer fit you and your circumstances?

PRAYER

Jesus Christ, you came to us once, and you will come again. Hear my prayer, and be near to me today. *Amen.*





NOTES



The Third Week of Advent: Trust, Gladness, Patience, Expectations, A Prayer

The psalmist warns us not to put our trust in governments or their leaders, but instead, to put our trust in God.

For the Advent message tells us that a cool drink is coming: "The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs" (Is 35:7). And we will no longer feel so alone.

TRUST

● SCRIPTURE

"Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save."

Psalm 146:3

● SCRIPTURE READING

Read [Psalm 146](#).

● DEVOTION

As I write this, those of us living in the United States are nearing an election year. Political ads and campaign promises will likely interrupt our around-the-clock Christmas music. As we flip channels from one Christmas movie to the next, we're likely to come across a clip from a debate or a media frenzy around an unfortunate sound bite or two.



It's hard enough to fight the pull of consumerism at Christmas. Now, as we "deck the halls," we have to guard against rhetoric that invites us to place our hope in the government, its leaders, and its policies. As this year ends, we look ahead and see next year's tax burden, next year's deductible, and we're tempted to trust those who claim they can make our paths smooth and our pockets full.

But the psalmist warns us not to put our trust in governments or their leaders. Even though they may promise to protect our freedoms, help the poor, and administer justice, they are limited in what they can do. They cannot save. As we see every four-to-eight years, when one leader leaves office, their plans and policies often go with them.

Instead, the psalmist suggests, we should put our trust in God. Unlike mere mortal princes, he is Creator and King. He consistently works on behalf of the oppressed, the imprisoned, the poor, and the hungry. He cares for the foreigner, the fatherless, the widow. And "he frustrates the ways of the wicked" (Ps 146:9).

God is the one who merits our trust. He demonstrated



this sort of love and care in the person and work of Christ. And he continues this work of justice, peace, and shalom through his people by his Spirit until Christ returns in glory.

God alone is the one who can save. He does not side with a political party. His plans do not rise and fall based on election outcomes. He is not limited by a two-party system. Instead, he is Lord over it and works through it according to his purposes. He is faithful forever. Let us put our trust in him.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

In whom are you tempted to place your trust?





As you look toward next year, what are some of your hopes?

How might your outlook change if you shifted more trust and more hope to King Jesus?



PRAYER

God, it's easy to put our trust in our leaders and their promises even when we know that they will disappoint us. Help us to look, instead, to King Jesus. Help us to place our hope in him as we look forward to the coming year. *Amen.*



● NOTES



GLADNESS

● SCRIPTURE

*"Gladness and joy will overtake them,
and sorrow and sighing will flee away."*

Isaiah 35:10

● SCRIPTURE READING

Read [Isaiah 35:1-10](#).

● DEVOTION

Sitting at your desk, staring at a spreadsheet, it can be difficult to discern the presence of God. You may work among managers more concerned about shareholder profits than adequate compensation for employees. You might be silently groaning every time you cushion a box of organic food products with non-recyclable materials.



Your coworkers' default mode of conversation is gossip and slander while you try diligently to keep your tongue from evil and long to speak words of truth, life, and hope.

The workplace can feel like a parched land from time to time. It can seem downright devoid of all that is good and holy. And that sort of environment can take its toll emotionally and physically.

God's people, at times, felt like their hard days would never come to an end. No wonder Isaiah told the people of God, "Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come...'" (Is 35:3).

The Advent message is that those hard days are numbered. For there will come a day when the desert, the parched land, will drink deeply. "The desert in the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom," Isaiah prophesied (Is 35:1).

We seek Jesus and ask him to form our loves around his loves. We want to be agents of mercy, peace, justice, beauty, and goodness in the world.



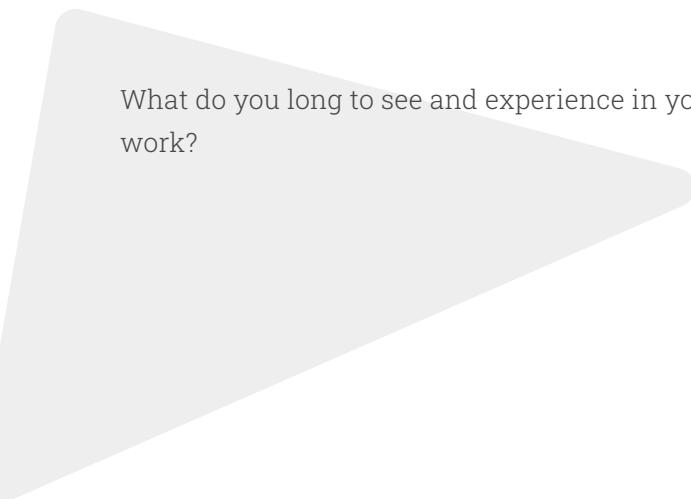
But, in this time between his first and second coming, we may grow weary. We may feel alone. We may hunger. We may thirst.

A cool drink is coming: "The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs" (Is 35:7). And we will no longer feel so alone. For we will journey together on a highway called "the Way of Holiness." And we will enter the presence of God with songs of joy and gladness, leaving sorrow and sighing behind.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What about your daily work makes you groan inwardly?





What do you long to see and experience in your daily work?

How might the hope of Jesus' coming help you experience gladness instead of despair?



PRAYER

God, you are a fountain of life. Sometimes this world feels like a parched land. Will you pour out your mercy and grace around me? Will you cause joy and gladness to bubble up in my soul? Help me to overflow with thanksgiving and give glory to your name. *Amen.*





NOTES



PATIENCE

● SCRIPTURE

"Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming."

James 5:7

● SCRIPTURE READING

Read [James 5:7-11](#).

● DEVOTION

How long, O Lord? How long must I see patients waste away as cancer ravages their bodies? How long must foster children experience neglect in others' homes? How long until management takes my complaints of sexual harassment seriously?

How long will I have to work second shift? I barely



see my husband and kids. How long will my clients continue to choose destructive behaviors?

How long, O Lord? How long will our company ignore its environmental impact? How long will my coworkers ignore me? How long will it take until I find a job? How long will it be until we can make ends meet again?

The trials we face in our work and our homes are myriad. We can experience suffering from within and without. James tells us to “consider it pure joy” (James 1:2), but that seems impossible apart from God’s help. God is at work, maturing our faith amidst these difficult circumstances, James tells us. But it can be hard to have hope, hard to keep going when we have no answer to “How long?” or no concrete answer to “Why?”

Still, James exhorts us, “Be patient.” Be patient like the farmer. Be patient like the prophets. Be patient like Job.

Do what you can like the farmer. Be faithful to God’s word like the prophets. Refuse to give up like Job. Because God is at work.

God brings the sun and the rain to the farmer. He



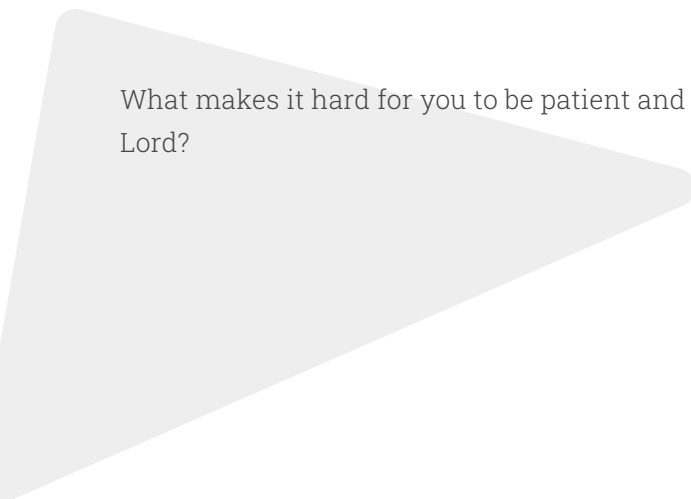
fulfilled the words of the prophets in Christ. And he restored the fortunes of Job. Even though we suffer, James reminds us, “The Lord is full of compassion and mercy” (James 5:11).

Advent invites us to endure in the midst of a hundred “How long, O Lord?’s.” We endure because we know the Lord will return. His coming, James says, is near (James 5:8). On that day, we will see clearly what he was bringing about as we waited patiently, waited actively for him to return.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What is causing you to ask, “How long, O Lord?” these days?





What makes it hard for you to be patient and wait on the Lord?

How do James's examples of the farmer, the prophets, and Job inspire hope in you?



PRAYER

How long, O Lord? I plead for your mercy. I long for you to intervene. Arise, O Lord, and be my help.

As I wait for you, give me patience, O God. Help me to endure in the midst of pain and suffering. Help me to remember that you have come to us once and that you will come again. *Amen.*



● NOTES



EXPECTATIONS

● SCRIPTURE

"The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor."

Matthew 11:5

● SCRIPTURE READING

Read [Matthew 11:2-11](#).

● DEVOTION

"That ain't what I ordered." I will never forget that line from a sermon my friend Charlie preached on the story of Jacob and Rebecca.

Jacob loved Rebecca and had worked for her father, Laban, for seven years in order to marry her. But Laban



gave his daughter Leah to Jacob in marriage instead. In a dramatic first-person rendering, Charlie helped us imagine Jacob's response when he rolled over in bed the next morning to find Leah beside him instead of Rebecca. Leah did not meet his expectations.

Today's Scripture reading makes us wonder if Jesus didn't meet John the Baptist's expectations for what the Messiah would be. John had baptized Jesus, and at that point, he acknowledged that Jesus was greater than he (Matt 3:14). Since then, Jesus had been preaching, teaching, and healing throughout Galilee (Matt 4:23). And yet, from prison, John had sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else" (Matt 11:3)?

Jesus did not give a simple "yes" or "no" as a response. Instead, he told them, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor" (Matt 11:5).

The student of the prophets would have seen the consistency between Jesus' ministry and what was



foretold of him in Isaiah 35 and 61.

Jesus was, indeed, the long-awaited one. John had prepared the way for him, just as the prophets said he would do. And yet John's expectations of Jesus did not match reality. Was John expecting a more charismatic teacher? more of a well-respected celebrity? a conquering king who would overthrow Roman rule?

John's question challenges us to analyze our expectations of Jesus. When we go to work each day, when we begin a new project, when we hire a new employee or take on a new client, what do we expect Jesus to do in and through us? Do we assume that, because our motives are pure and our project contributes to the common good, Jesus will bless our work and bring it to fruition? Do we expect that Jesus will prevent all conflict and struggle? Do we expect him to right all of the wrongs and restore all that is broken before our eyes instead of in his own time?

Are our expectations of Jesus consistent with what we have read about him in Scripture? Or, have our expectations been shaped by what others want to believe about him? Jesus told John's disciples: "Blessed



is the man who does not fall away on account of me" (Matt 11:6). This Advent text invites us to trust in Jesus as he is and not according to unrealistic expectations.

● QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Can you think of a time when Jesus acted in a way you didn't expect? What happened?

Why do you think we have unrealistic expectations of Jesus?



What steps might we take to make our expectations of Jesus more in line with who he is?

PRAYER

Jesus, you came into the world with words of righteousness and deeds of mercy. I want to know you more so that I don't have unrealistic expectations of you and so that I can give others a clear picture of who you are and the good news of your salvation. Help me for your glory. *Amen.*



● NOTES



A PRAYER

God my Savior,

Somedays weariness feels like my closest companion.

How much suffering can I endure?

When will it end?

How long, O Lord?

I confess that I have been tempted

to escape my trials,

to ease my suffering,

to alleviate my pain

by trusting in people who and policies that

make promises to ease my burdens

and make the rough places smooth.

Help me not to put my hope in them.

Instead, help me to put my hope in you,

not in some product of my imagination,

not in some pseudo-Messiah,

but in God, my Savior,

who exists eternally as Father, Son, and Holy

Spirit.



Help me to be a student of your Word,

and help me to be a student of Jesus,

- for in your Word and through the Incarnate Son,
- you have revealed yourself to us. *Amen.*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

As you read the prayer above, what words or phrases resonate most with you? Why?

In what ways does this prayer name some of the specific longings of your heart?



What might you add to make this prayer fit you and your circumstances?

PRAYER

Jesus Christ, you came to us once, and you will come again. Hear my prayer, and be near to me today. *Amen.*



● NOTES



The Fourth Week of Advent: Ready, Presence, Promises, Obedience, A Prayer

In the season of Advent, may we not forget that we celebrate the birth and return of a king—The King.

We must believe that Jesus is Immanuel and act as if this is as true for us as it was for the people who saw him in the manger, touched the hem of his robe, and looked upon his nail-scarred hands.

READY

 SCRIPTURE

*"Who is he, this King of glory?
The LORD Almighty—
he is the King of glory."*

Psalm 24:10

 SCRIPTURE READING

Read [Psalm 24](#).

 DEVOTION

In a matter of days, Christians around the world will gather in churches to celebrate the birth of Jesus. We will light candles. We will sing, "Away in the Manger." And we will remember the night when God took on flesh to dwell among his people.



For a moment, we may recall why Jesus came—that he came “to seek and save what was lost” (Luke 19:10) and “to save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). But we may consider the cross and fail to look beyond it to Jesus’ victorious resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God.

We forget that this baby was born a king. The Magi called him “king of the Jews.” Herod took this reality seriously because he would not have his throne usurped by another.

In the season of Advent, as we reflect on what it means to follow Christ in between his first and second comings, do we forget that we celebrate the birth and return of a king? The King?

The psalmist reminds us that this King is Creator of heaven and earth. Everything belongs to him. And, when he returns, he will ascend to his throne in glory.

Who may join him in triumph? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, the psalmist tells us. Those who worship God alone and who seek his face (Ps 24:4).

This psalm invites us to examine the attitudes of our



hearts and the works of our hands. In all that we do, think, and say, do we demonstrate that we are children of the King? Or do we compartmentalize our faith—acting like saints at home and church while acting like children of the devil while at work?

As we have seen, the season of Advent exhorts us to ready ourselves for the return of “the LORD Almighty... the King of glory” (Ps 24:10). If the psalmist tells the gates and ancient doors to the city to be prepared for this king’s coming, how much more prepared should we, his people, be?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

How much of your Christmas celebration focuses on Jesus as King?



Psalm 24:4 says that those who can ascend the mountain of the Lord are those with “clean hands and a pure heart” who do “not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.” As you reflect on your thoughts, attitudes, and actions over the last week, do you think that King Jesus would be pleased?

In what ways is the good news of Jesus Christ give hope to those who fall short of the requirements for ascending the mountain of the Lord?



PRAYER

Jesus, you are King. As an infant in your mother's arms, you were King. As a child in the temple, you were King. As an adult on the cross, you were King. Now you live and reign eternally with the Father. Help me to worship you rightly as King, for you alone are worthy. *Amen.*



● NOTES



PRESENCE

● SCRIPTURE

*"If you do not stand firm in your faith,
you will not stand at all."*

Isaiah 7:9

● SCRIPTURE READING

Read [Isaiah 7:10-17](#).

● DEVOTION

I would be afraid, too, if I lived in a city that was being attacked by two kings and their armies. If siege works surrounded the office buildings downtown, I might cower under my desk or stay boarded up in my home. Like the people of Jerusalem under Ahaz's reign, I might be "shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind" (Is 7:2).



In the United States, we do not live under the constant threat of being invaded by another king or country. But we live under other sorts of workplace threats. One particularly unnerving threat is that of an active shooter.

I never knew that was a possibility until Columbine, which happened while I was still in high school. Because we lived in a similar community, we had practice drills on what to do if it happened to us. I remember sitting with classmates in the football stadium as the SWAT team rehearsed entering our building.

Now, my children endure periodic “code red” drills in their classrooms. They have to practice how to huddle quietly behind bookshelves and under desks. For work, I’ve had to watch a couple of training videos on how to respond if there’s an active shooter. For teaching in-person classes at a university, I needed to think through how to maneuver tables and chairs to keep my class safe in an emergency. The drills, the videos rattle me.

It’s easy to live in a constant state of fear. But the message God gave to Ahaz was this: “Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid” (Is 7:4). And to confirm his



message, God promised Ahaz a sign: Immanuel, God with us.

Jesus came. He was the presence of God with the people of God in a way they had never experienced before. And he is present with us through the Spirit of God. Before he left this earth, Jesus said, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:20).

The challenge for us is to live as if Jesus is present with us. This is the very essence of faith—of living based on what we cannot see or touch. So, to stand firm in our faith is to be resolved that God is present with us in our workplaces, in offices, airplanes, or classrooms, on assembly lines, roadsides, and cruise ships. We must believe that Jesus is Immanuel and act as if this is as true for us as it was for the people who saw him in the manger, touched the hem of his robe, and looked upon his nail-scarred hands.





QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What sorts of fears linger in the back of your mind during your work?

How do those fears affect you and your work?



What might change if you had a deeper sense of God's presence with you as you carry those fears?

PRAYER

Almighty God, I confess that the world in which I live can be a scary place. You did not design it to be this way. You designed a world in which people can relate to you and one another in perfect peace—where all creatures and this beautiful world you created could flourish.

Thank you for the comfort that you give. Thank you for sending Immanuel, for being present with me. Help me to recognize your presence. Cast out all of my fear so that I can live fully for you. *Amen.*



● NOTES



PROMISES

● SCRIPTURE

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures . . ."

Romans 1:1-2

● SCRIPTURE READING

Read [Romans 1:1-7](#).

● DEVOTION

The zoning commission reneged on their decision to let our company convert that abandoned school into affordable housing. The woman we've been mentoring at the workforce development center quit her new job the first week.



The new cashier got caught pocketing money from her till. Our client has stopped returning our calls and emails.

Our work can be full of disappointment. Even though we try to lead well, to work hard, to inspire others, we can sometimes wonder if God is actually for us when people let us down or thwart our plans.

The good news for us, and the Advent message for today, is that God keeps his promises. The gospel—that God would send his Son to die for us and then raise him from the dead to give us new life—did not come out of thin air. No, Paul reminds us that God had promised it long ago through the prophets. They foretold of this Messiah who was to come.

The fact that God kept all of his promises in Christ gives us hope when we face disappointment in our work. We belong to Christ, and he will achieve his purposes for us and through us by the power of his Spirit. Even when our plans go awry, when we fail, when people fail us, Jesus is at work beyond what we can see, bringing about redemption in ways more wonderful than we dare imagine.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What sorts of disappointments have you experienced in your work recently?

How do you tend to respond in the face of such disappointment?



How might the hope that Jesus is at work beyond what we can see help you think about your disappointments differently?

● PRAYER

God, the Bible tells us that you are near to the brokenhearted. When I face disappointments in my work, sometimes my heart breaks. But I am reassured by the promise that you are at work, beyond what I can see. Give me a sure hope that you will bring redemption for your glory. *Amen.*



 NOTES

OBEDIENCE

● SCRIPTURE

"When Joseph woke up, he did what the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife."

Matthew 1:24

● SCRIPTURE READING

Read [Matthew 1:18-25](#).

● DEVOTION

When I graduated from college, I had not yet decided whether I would pursue a career in professional ministry or education, but I had a sense that my work would involve more sowing than harvesting. Rarely would I see the fruit of my labor.



At times I have struggled to persevere in my work because I cannot see the point. I cannot see what difference it makes. But, now and then God surprises me with the good gift of seeing fruit. It can come in the form of an email from a student or a comment from a reader. In my consulting work, I occasionally see evidence of program development based on work I have done behind-the-scenes for a client.

Many of us go about our days not knowing how God will establish the work of our hearts and our hands. We don't see the sick become healthy, the bricks become a building, the poor become rich. Yet, we continue our work out of faithfulness to God and love of neighbor.

The Christmas story reminds us that God achieves his purposes through people who are obedient to him. The prophets obeyed God when he called them to foretell of a long-awaited Prince of Peace who would rule with justice and righteousness. A young woman obeyed God when he called her to conceive his Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. A young man obeyed God when he called him to take that young woman as his wife and that newborn baby as his own.



These individuals believed that God would bring about his redemptive purposes in the world. They obeyed him and remained faithful to their call even though they could not fully comprehend what God was bringing about. Through their obedience, these individuals got to participate in one of the most miraculous events in human history.

Advent reminds us that God is always at work—very often through our work. We may not be able to see the fruit of our faithfulness to him on a regular basis. However, we can trust that he works, often behind-the-scenes, to achieve far more than we could ever hope or imagine. Never underestimate the power of a life wholly yielded to him.





QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

How often does God allow you to see the fruit of your work?

When is it most challenging for you to be faithful and obedient in your work?



When have you experienced blessing as a result of faithfully doing your work well?

PRAYER

God, you are a God who is always at work. What a comfort to know that you are ever-present, watching and ruling and keeping the world you have made.

I confess that some days it is challenging for me to persevere in my work because I cannot see the fruit of my labor and I wonder if my efforts make a difference. Would you help me to be faithful and obedient? Would you help me to focus on serving you and loving my neighbor for the sake of your Kingdom? And would you please assure me that my work matters? *Amen.*



● NOTES



A PRAYER

King of Glory,

This week I remember the night you were born.
I recall the stories of angels singing to the shepherds,
and I celebrate how you broke into a weary world
not with pomp, nor with parade,
but in humility.

I recall how your coming into this world demonstrated
that you keep your promises,
and that you often work through your faithful people
to do so.

But I confess that sometimes fear overshadows my
desire to be faithful to you.

Sometimes I fail to acknowledge your presence with me.

Yet you promised to be with me.

So, help me to know that you are.

Help me to practice your presence daily,
and in so doing direct others to the hope we
have in you. *Amen.*





QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

As you read the prayer before, what words or phrases resonate most with you? Why?

In what ways does this prayer name some of the specific longings of your heart?



What might you add to make this prayer fit you and your circumstances?

PRAYER

Jesus Christ, you came to us once, and you will come again. Hear my prayer, and be near to me today. *Amen.*



● NOTES



Preparing for Christmas

Christmas Eve: Attention, Christmas Day: Good

The glory of the Lord fills the sky, and "a great company of the heavenly host" break out in songs of praise. "A Savior has been born to you." "Glory to God in the highest heaven."

Perhaps this Christmas season, all you have wanted is a quiet moment with Jesus, a chance to see the baby, a spark of amazement and wonder at our God who took on flesh and dwelled among us. Perhaps you long for God to meet you and ignite something in your heart. Perhaps that moment could be now.

ATTENTION

● SCRIPTURE

"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night."

Luke 2:8

● SCRIPTURE READING

Read [Luke 2:1-14](#).

● DEVOTION

Tiny stars prick the dark sky. The gentle bleating of sheep carries on the breeze. Calloused hands keep weathered staffs in reach. Shepherds watch their flocks by night.

Against the backdrop of the heavens, an angel of the Lord appears with good news of great joy for all people.



The glory of the Lord fills the sky, and “a great company of the heavenly host” break out in songs of praise.

“A Savior has been born to you.”

“Glory to God in the highest heaven.”

What a wonderful and slightly unusual way to announce that Jesus, the Messiah, had been born. Why not announce it in Herod's court? Why not proclaim it at the Temple gates? Why reserve the announcement for a group of shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night?

We cannot presume to know why God chose the shepherds, but we can wonder at the fact that he did. We can notice that the good news came to ordinary people against the backdrop of their everyday work. They paid attention to the announcement, and they responded by hurrying off to see the child in Bethlehem.

What good news might God want to bring to us against the backdrop of our everyday work? If we pay attention, where do we see God reminding you that a Savior has been born to us? Where do we find reminders of God's glory and his peace?



Perhaps we see the good news that God is merciful in the way that our boss treats us after we fumble a difficult conversation. Perhaps we see evidence of God's glory when we behold a beautiful installation our company completed. Perhaps we find God's peace in our spirit when we decide to tenure our resignation from a job we've loved for decades.

The story of the shepherds invites us to pay attention when we sense the presence of God in our everyday work. God may not cause the sky to explode in heavenly symphony, but God may bring us good news, messages of hope, and sensations of peace as we watch over our work.





QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What makes it challenging for you to pay attention to God at work?

As you reflect on the last few weeks, where have you experienced good news, hope, or peace at work?



What practices or habits might you adopt in the coming year to help you pay more attention to God while you are at work?

PRAYER

God, glory to you in the highest. I rejoice with the heavenly host that a Savior was born on this night many years ago. Thank you for sending Jesus Messiah.

As I go about my daily work, would you help me to notice you? I know that you are always at work, but I struggle to pay attention. Open my eyes, my ears, and my heart so that I can see you. Help me to notice the good news, the messages of hope, the sensations of peace that come from you so that I might give thanks and bring glory to your name. *Amen.*



● NOTES



GOOD

 SCRIPTURE

"The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."

Isaiah 7:9

 SCRIPTURE READING

Read [Luke 2:15-20](#).

 DEVOTION

Do you own a nativity scene? We have a few. I have a large, Willow Tree nativity scene that I use to decorate the mantel or the top of the piano. The wise men must be kept to the side until after Christmas. I am very particular.

My children have the Fisher Price Little People nativity



scene that plays an annoying version of “Away in the Manger.” One year, they pulled out all of our Little People and their vehicles—the airplane, the fire truck, the school bus, and the zoo train—and brought everyone to the stable to worship Jesus. It was crowded and chaotic and precious.

What a perfect depiction of what Christmastime can feel like: Crowded and chaotic as we wrap up our work for the year and run from party to performance. Precious as we cherish our loved ones or watch children delight in the wonder of the season. And we’re trying to focus on Jesus amidst it all.

Sometimes it’s hard to see the baby. I wonder if the shepherds felt that way. When they hurried off from their fields to Bethlehem to find Mary, Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger, did they have to stand on tip toes or elbow their way forward to see Jesus? I imagine the stable was dirty and smelled terrible, but that probably didn’t matter to the shepherds. Animals were part of their everyday. The birth of their Messiah was not.

That glimpse of Jesus was all they needed to become



heralds of good tidings of great joy. Luke tells us, “When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child” (Luke 2:17). One extraordinary moment with Jesus changed them. They returned to their fields, returned to their very ordinary work, overflowing with praise.

Perhaps this Christmas season has felt busy and rushed. Perhaps all you have wanted is a quiet moment with Jesus, a chance to see the baby, a spark of amazement and wonder at our God who took on flesh and dwelled among us. Perhaps you long for God to meet you and ignite something in your heart. Perhaps that moment could be now.





QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

As you reflect on this Christmas season, what has gotten in the way of being able to see Jesus, to pay attention to him?

What adjustments can you make to today's schedule so that you can have a few minutes alone with Jesus?



PRAYER

Jesus, like a lowly shepherd, I come to you today because I want to see you. I want to pay attention to you, to worship you, to adore you, to listen to you. I may only have a moment to linger here with you, but would you meet me? Would you fill me with wonder and awe at you and your great love for me? Would you cause my life to overflow with praise and thanksgiving so that I may be a messenger of the good news of the gospel today? Jesus, glorify yourself in me. *Amen.*





NOTES



MORE FROM THE DE PREE CENTER



The Road Ahead is a six-week group experience that helps you get unstuck and discern next steps on your road ahead. Our process is designed to give you space to self-reflect, recharge, and explore new possibilities as you consider what and whom God is calling you to in your work.

Visit <https://depre.org/cohorts/> for more information!



LIFE FOR LEADERS DAILY DEVOTIONS

Based on a close reading of the Bible, *Life for Leaders* is a digitally delivered daily devotional that encourages leaders to understand their work and, indeed, their whole life, in light of God's truth and calling.

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