



ADVENT

a devotional guide from **The Heights Church**

“A prison cell, in which one waits, hopes — and is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened from the outside, is not a bad picture of Advent.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

About this Guide

At The Heights, one of our values is going to the Word every day for a Word from God. The Scriptures in the following devotionals are taken from the church's daily Bible reading plan. If you'd like to read the full reading plan each day, you can see the plan here: www.theheightsdenver.com/bible

For each day's reading, we added an Advent-focused devotional, a prayer, and reflection questions. You can go through this guide individually, or with your roommates, friends, or family.

December 1

Water & Light

by Steven Reese

This Psalm is written long before Mary and Joseph make their way to Bethlehem. However, in many ways, this Psalm is all about the child that will be born almost a thousand years later.

This Psalm highlights the contrast between the way of the wicked and the way of God's faithful love. Did you catch the significance there? Unexpectedly, the Psalmist does not contrast the way of the wicked with the way of the good or righteous person. This is what we would expect. Instead, David is going to look at the way of the wicked against the faithfulness of God himself!

In other words – the life of the righteous person is not defined by their deeds being better than the wicked person. Instead, their lives are defined by the faithfulness of God towards them.

God's faithful love is most vividly revealed to us in the life of Jesus. The Psalmist says that God's faithful love is a "refreshing stream" of water (v. 8) and a "light" by which we see everything else (v. 9). The baby that will be born in Bethlehem, the one they will call Jesus, will be compared to water that refreshes (John 4) and a light that illuminates all of reality (John 8).

Are you thirsty? Are you in the dark? This Advent season we celebrate the fact that we have a refreshing stream and a bright light – his name is Jesus.

Read

Psalm 36:7-9

*7 How priceless your faithful love is, God!
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
8 They are filled from the abundance of your house.
You let them drink from your refreshing stream.
9 For the wellspring of life is with you.
By means of your light we see light.*

Pray

Father, your faithful love is what makes me righteous. Thank you for loving me even when I walk in the way of the wicked. I ask that you grant me repentance as I experience the thirst-quenching, illuminating faithfulness of Jesus. Amen.

Reflect

- 1. What is the difference between our righteousness being something that we do versus something that God does?*
- 2. Where else do you see descriptions of Jesus in this Psalm?*

December 2

Secure in His Promise

by Ashleigh Pinkerton

In these verses, we find deep assurance and profound hope for those who walk in righteousness and trust in God. The psalmist makes it clear that our salvation does not come from our own efforts or merits but originates solely from the Lord. He is not only the source of our deliverance but also our steadfast refuge in times of distress and uncertainty.

The imagery of God as a stronghold is powerful and comforting. Just as a fortress provides security and protection from enemies, so does God shield and defend his people from all forms of evil. In moments of trouble, when the forces of wickedness threaten to overwhelm us, God stands as our defender. His strength becomes our strength, and his wisdom guides us through every challenge.

Taking refuge in God goes beyond seeking safety; it signifies a deep, intimate relationship of trust and dependence. It involves surrendering our fears, doubts, and struggles to him, knowing that he cares for us deeply and desires to rescue us. When we actively choose to place our faith in him, he responds with unwavering faithfulness and grace.

In anticipation of Jesus' coming, let Psalm 37:39-40 inspire us to live with unwavering faith and trust in God's provision. As we await Jesus' return, may we continue to seek his kingdom and righteousness, knowing that he will ultimately deliver us from all evil and usher us into his eternal presence. Our refuge in God today is a foretaste of the complete security and joy we will experience when Christ returns to fully establish his reign of peace and justice.

Therefore, let us anchor our hearts in the hope of his coming, finding strength in his promises and courage in his unfailing love. As we journey through life, let us proclaim with confidence, "The Lord helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him" (Psalm 37:40).

Read

Psalm 37:39-40

*39 The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord,
their refuge in a time of distress.*

*40 The Lord helps and delivers them;
he will deliver them from the wicked and will save them
because they take refuge in him.*

Pray

Heavenly Father, thank you for being our refuge and stronghold in times of trouble. Your Word assures us that our salvation comes from you alone, and you are faithful to deliver us from all evil. Help us to trust in your promises and to find security in your unfailing love.

Guide us in deepening our faith and reliance on you, Lord. May your presence be a constant source of peace and assurance in our lives. Help us to daily take refuge in your Word and to walk in your righteousness. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Reflect

1. How does the concept of God being our stronghold provide comfort and strength in your own life during times of trouble or uncertainty? How can you cultivate a deeper sense of hope and expectancy in His promised coming?

2. Reflecting on the assurance of God's deliverance and protection, how can you practically apply this truth to strengthen your faith and trust in him amidst difficult circumstances? What steps can you take to more fully take refuge in God on a daily basis?

December 3

The Sign of Jonah

by Jack Lopez

It is fitting for those of us living in the northern hemisphere that Advent comes during the darkest time of the year. As the days grow shorter and the nights grow longer, as the sun's journey across the sky gets lower and lower, our yearning for the days of spring seems to grow.

Today's passage comes from the prayer that Jonah prayed from the belly of the fish. Imagine the darkness of those three days! Imagine the longing for the light of day that Jonah experienced. In his desperate longing, "as [his] life was fading away, [he] remembered the Lord." Calling out to the Lord for help in the darkness, God hears and answers his prayer. Recalling the words of Psalm 18: "He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he pulled me out of deep water." After three days in the depths, Jonah is (quite literally) raised to walk in new life.

In Luke 11, Jesus makes a direct reference to the account of Jonah in the belly of the fish, saying: "This generation is an evil generation. It demands a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." What Jesus is referring to, and what the story of Jonah ultimately points to, is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Out of the darkness of the tomb, the light of Christ shines bright. Into the darkness of our fallen world, the light of the living God has come. Because Jesus, the Son of God, came as a man, died for our sins, and was raised to new life, we too can have hope during these dark days.

Read

Jonah 2:7-10

*7 As my life was fading away,
I remembered the Lord,
and my prayer came to you,
to your holy temple.*

*8 Those who cherish worthless idols
abandon their faithful love,
9 but as for me, I will sacrifice to you
with a voice of thanksgiving.
I will fulfill what I have vowed.
Salvation belongs to the Lord.*

10 Then the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Pray

Father, I thank you that this world is not all there is. When my days are dark and I find myself longing for the light, the resurrection of your Son shows me that I have a hope for the future, the hope of eternal life with You. Come, Lord Jesus.

Reflect

1. How can Jonah's story help you find hope in moments of darkness or uncertainty?

2. In what ways does Jesus' death and resurrection, the "sign of Jonah," impact your understanding of Advent and its promise of new life?

December 4

Hope Through Repentance

by Meredith Sell

The king of Nineveh hopes in the goodness of God. While Jonah comes to the city against his will and proclaims God's judgment over the Ninevites (v. 4), the king of Nineveh responds by declaring a fast. He commands his people to fast and mourn and leave their sin and violence behind, in the desperate hope that God will see their change of heart and similarly alter course.

Did Nineveh know before this that it was in sin? We don't know, and it doesn't matter. What matters is what Nineveh does when it's confronted with the promise of God's judgment. The king, the people, the city put their hope in God.

Their hope is well-placed. As we see in Ezekiel 33:11, God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather he wants the wicked to "turn from his way and live." The world is in desperate need of God's grace, and God is hungry to grant it.

In Advent, as we look ahead to the second coming of Christ, it can be chilling to think of the judgment that will accompany Christ's return. But the invitation and hope from this passage is that God is eager to respond to our repentance, and we know from 2 Peter 3:4-9 that he's putting off his return because he is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." In our waiting, his kindness holds steady. In our repentance, his grace overflows.

Read

Jonah 3:9-10

9 Who knows? God may turn and relent; he may turn from his burning anger so that we will not perish.

10 God saw their actions—that they had turned from their evil ways—so God relented from the disaster he had threatened them with. And he did not do it.

Pray

Heavenly Father, thank you for your incredible mercy and grace. As we reflect on the story of Nineveh, help us to understand the depth of your love and desire for all to turn to you. In this season of Advent, teach us to live with repentant hearts, placing our hope in your goodness and eagerly awaiting Christ's return. Thank you for your patience and kindness that invite us into new life. In Jesus' name, amen.

Reflect

1. How does the king of Nineveh's response to God's judgment inspire you to seek repentance in your own life?

2. In what ways does God's patience, as described in 2 Peter 3:9, shape your understanding of his grace and kindness?

December 5

Desperate for Deliverance

by Meredith Sell

David, the writer of this Psalm, is overwhelmed by evils from out there and sins from within himself. Verse 12 speaks of “innumerable evils” that surround him and his own iniquities that “have taken hold” of him. He’s so overwhelmed by these things that it is a struggle for him to look up and hope in God.

Perhaps that’s why so much of this Psalm recounts God’s faithfulness to him: how God heard David’s cries (v. 1), delivered him and set him on a steady path (v. 2), gave him a new song of praise to sing (v. 3). David spends the previous verses reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God — as well as his own integrity about his relationship with God, which he describes not as moral perfection, but as an openness to others about God’s righteousness, faithfulness, salvation, lovingkindness, and truth (v. 10).

After recounting all of these things, preaching to his heart, David calls on God to do what he has done before: “Don’t withhold your tender mercies from me, O Lord: let your lovingkindness and your truth continually preserve me” (v. 11). He’s honest with God about how overwhelmed he is by evil within and evil without, and he begs God to deliver him quickly. He does this while recognizing his neediness — in fact, his awareness of his neediness is why he cries out at all. He’s helpless on his own. As much as verses 8-10 can be read as David’s own spiritual bravado, this Psalm comes from a deep awareness of his desperate need for God to intervene in his life.

We are just as needy, and whether we realize it or not, we are just as desperate. Yet, like David, we can say, “The Lord thinks upon me” (v. 17).

Read

Psalm 40:12-13

*12 For troubles without number have surrounded me;
my iniquities have overtaken me; I am unable to see.*

*They are more than the hairs of my head,
and my courage leaves me.*

*13 Lord, be pleased to rescue me;
hurry to help me, Lord.*

Pray

Heavenly Father, like David, we are overwhelmed by the struggles of life—by evils around us and the sins within us. Help us to remember your faithfulness and tender mercies, and remind our hearts that you think upon us. In our neediness, may we turn to you with trust and humility, knowing that you are always ready to deliver us. Preserve us in your lovingkindness and truth, and help us to walk faithfully in your ways. Amen.

Reflect

1. How can recalling God's past faithfulness in your life help you navigate overwhelming situations or personal struggles?

2. In what areas of your life do you need to cry out to God for help, acknowledging your neediness and his power to deliver?

December 6

Assurance of God's Delight

by Ashleigh Pinkerton

Psalm 41:11 reflects a profound assurance of God's favor and protection. In the context of Advent, this assurance takes on even greater significance as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus and anticipate his return.

God *delights* in David, and God *delights* in you! As a verb, "delight" means to please (someone) greatly. God is greatly pleased by you, and you have assurance that your enemy will not triumph over you because of that. Sit with that truth for a moment.

When Jesus came to earth, he brought with him the promise of salvation and the assurance of God's delight in his people. His life, death, and resurrection defeated the greatest enemy—sin and death—ensuring that no enemy can triumph over those who are in Christ. This victory is the foundation of our hope.

As we journey through Advent, we remember that Jesus is alive. His resurrection is the ultimate proof that God delights in us and that our enemies will not triumph. This gives us a steadfast hope, not just in the present, but for the future. We know that Jesus will return to complete the work he began, to establish his kingdom fully, and to wipe away every tear from our eyes.

In this season of waiting and expectation, let Psalm 41:11 remind you of the deep delight God has in you through Jesus. Let it fill you with hope as you reflect on the reality that Jesus is alive and that he will come back someday. This hope sustains us, giving us strength to endure and rejoice, knowing that our Savior's return is certain and his victory is assured.

As you light the Advent candles and meditate on the promises of God, let your heart be filled with the joy and peace that comes from knowing that Jesus, our victorious King, will soon return to make all things new.

Read

Psalm 41:11

*11 By this I know that you delight in me:
my enemy does not shout in triumph over me.*

Pray

Heavenly Father, thank you for the assurance of your delight in us through Jesus Christ. As we journey through this season of Advent, fill our hearts with hope and expectation. Remind us daily of the victory we have in Jesus and the promise of his return. Strengthen our faith, and help us to live in the joy and peace that come from knowing our Savior is alive and will come again to make all things new. In Jesus' name, amen.

Reflect

- 1. What do you delight in? How does that shift your perspective about God delighting in you?*

- 2. In what ways can you actively live out the hope of Christ's return in your daily life, especially during the Advent season?*

December 7

Streams of Hope

by Taylor McCallum

Distraught and searching for God, the psalmist opens Psalm 42 by pleading, “when can I come and appear before God?” (v. 2). In a season of despair, he recognizes that his soul is parched, longing for the streaming water of life. He needs a different lifeforce, and he knows the source - God. So what does he do? He does not stay in the spiral of his thoughts. He starts to preach the truth to himself.

Starting in verse five, he turns inward and asks, “Why, my soul, are you so dejected?” going on to tell himself to, “Put your hope in God. [...] I am deeply depressed; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan.” What comes from the placement of his hope in the only real source of life? He receives not just the streams of water his soul had been longing for, but instead is flooded by waterfalls and billowing waves of God’s presence. He is overwhelmed by the reality of God’s love and nearness to him, as he receives the answer that he does not have to wait to appear before God, but can count on God to be near in his time of trial.

In this Advent season, we can all resonate with the psalmist as he longs for presence with the Lord. There are seasons where God may appear far off or absent, and we, too, have the ability to preach even greater news to ourselves. Not only is God listening and near, but he came to dwell with us in the flesh as the person of Jesus! He has taken up residence in us through the Holy Spirit, and we have his waterfalls of life flowing through us at all times.

Read

Psalm 42:7-8

*7 Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your breakers and your billows have swept over me.*

*8 The Lord will send his faithful love by day;
his song will be with me in the night—
a prayer to the God of my life.*

Pray

Father, you are the giver of life. You make broken things whole and breathe life into dead places. You are the living water that my soul is constantly thirsty for. Flood me with your presence today, God, so that I may see the world clearly and live securely in relationship with you. Amen.

Reflect

1. Have you been in a season where God has felt distant? How were you able to reorient to the reality of His presence with you?

2. What is God's presence able to offer you today? How can he provide what you need?

December 8

From Darkness to Light

by Jack Lopez

The connection between Psalm 43 and the prophecy of Isaiah 9 is unmistakable. Compare these verses from Isaiah to the ones in our passage today:

*2 The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
a light has dawned
on those living in the land of darkness.
3 You have enlarged the nation
and increased its joy.*

The psalmist prays that God would send his light and truth; the prophet assures that He will. The psalmist looks ahead to the day when God's people can praise Him in his dwelling place; the prophet speaks to how He will bring them there: by the child who will be born for us.

*6 For a child will be born for us,
a son will be given to us,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
He will be named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.*

The prayer of the psalmist is answered, and the prophecy fulfilled, in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In John 8, Jesus reveals himself to be "the light of the world." In John 14, He identifies himself as "the way, the truth, and the life." He leads the way to the place of power, God's dwelling place, where those who have put their faith in Jesus have access to praise Him with joy. Joy has been made available to us through Jesus, our Emmanuel. God with us.

Read

Psalm 43:3-4

3 Send your light and your truth; let them lead me.

*Let them bring me to your holy mountain,
to your dwelling place.*

*4 Then I will come to the altar of God,
to God, my greatest joy.*

*I will praise you with the lyre,
God, my God.*

Pray

Father, thank you for sending your light and your truth by your Son Jesus Christ. Thank you that through Him, You have made a way to draw near to You. Grant me deep and lasting joy, in this Advent season and beyond. Amen.

Reflect

- 1. What is a circumstance or situation that you need God's light to shine brightly into?*
- 2. What are some moments when you experienced deep joy this year? How do those moments shape how you think about the joy that the Lord offers us?*

December 9

A Gracious Judge

by Steven Reese

Micah chapter 2 is grim. In it, God pronounces judgment on Israel – the people that he loves. The violent and terrifying imagery is meant to jar us. What Israel has done is almost unthinkable treachery, and God is not neutral towards their disobedience.

You see, if you've ever loved someone – a close friend, a child, a spouse – you know that their destructive behavior makes you angry. Why? Because we get angry when people we love are destroying themselves. This is how God feels about Israel. His wrath and his judgment are aroused because they are destroying themselves and the good plan that he has for them.

However, God's anger and love converge in verses 12 and 13. We see that even though Israel will be judged, he will not judge them forever. He will bring them back into his fold and make them his sheep once more.

Though Micah does not know it, Jesus – the baby born to Mary and Joseph – will be the shepherd that gathers the people back to God. This is why Jesus is called "The Good Shepherd" in the Gospels.

We live on the other side of the life of Jesus. The invitation is open to us to enter into the rest of the good shepherd; to be gathered back to him *despite* our wickedness. Jesus has done what God promised to Micah long ago – and you can get in on it.

Read

Micah 2:12-13

*12 I will indeed gather all of you, Jacob;
I will collect the remnant of Israel.
I will bring them together like sheep in a pen,
like a flock in the middle of its pasture.
It will be noisy with people.
13 One who breaks open the way
will advance before them;
they will break out, pass through the city gate,
and leave by it.
Their King will pass through before them,
the Lord as their leader.*

Pray

Father, Jesus said that his sheep will know his voice and follow it. Help me to hear his voice and obey it. We confess that we are sinful, rebellious, and wicked. Thank you for loving sinners and welcoming us into your arms. Amen.

Reflect

- 1. How do you feel about the fact that God gets angry?*
- 2. How does God's anger towards us prove that he loves us?*

December 10

The True & Better Prophet

by Steven Reese

Let's face it – the prophets in the Old Testament can be really depressing! The prophet Micah is delivering judgment to God's people for their rebellion. He says it plainly in verse 8 that he has come to “proclaim to Jacob his rebellion and to Israel his sin.” What a sad job! The prophets would shine a bright light on all of the horrible things that the people were doing – exposing them for who they really were.

Did you know Jesus was a prophet too? While we often think of his messages of hope, love, and forgiveness – he also exposed the sin of the people like the Old Testament prophets did. Through his parables and teachings, he exposed sin in every single person. No one was exempt – not even the super religious people!

But there's a big difference between Jesus and the prophets of the Old Testament.

You see, the only thing the Old Testament prophets could do was *show* the people their sin. They couldn't do anything *about* their sin.

Jesus came to show us our sin and then do something about it. Instead of pronouncing judgment on us like the former prophets, he came to take all the judgment on himself through his death on the cross. Jesus himself says this perfectly:

“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:17)

So yes, Jesus is a prophet – but he's the better prophet. He is the only one who can simultaneously show us our sin and then do something about it.

Read

Micah 3:8

*8 As for me, however, I am filled with power
by the Spirit of the Lord,
with justice and courage,
to proclaim to Jacob his rebellion
and to Israel his sin.*

Pray

Father, thank you that you care enough about us to show us our sin. We confess that we often do what is wrong, and need you to show us a better way. We repent of our sins and commit to walk with you – doing everything you have taught us. Thank you for taking on the judgment that was meant for us. Amen.

Reflect

- 1. In what ways is Jesus like a prophet? In what ways is he better?*
- 2. Do you allow Jesus to point out your sin to you? When was the last time you allowed yourself to be corrected by Jesus?*

December 11

God's Vision for Restoration

by Meredith Sell

After three chapters of Micah pronouncing God's judgment over the people of Samaria and Jerusalem, Micah 4 gives a stunning picture of hope. With certainty, Micah shares God's promise that there will be a time when "the house of the Lord shall be established" and "people will flow unto it" (v. 1). This is the same moment we read of in Revelation 21, where the heavenly city descends to earth and the "tabernacle of God is with men" (Rev. 21:3). One day, God will join heaven and earth together and the nations will "go up to the mountain of the Lord" so they can learn the ways of God and "walk in his paths" (v. 2).

This new reality comes with God's judgment and rebuke of the nations, but verse three shows us that this justice benefits us. It's because he confronts the nations that they convert their weapons to productive agricultural tools and no longer "learn war." To show that Micah isn't just ad-libbing pseudo-prophecy here, this promise has the stamp of God's signet ring on it: "for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken it" (v. 4).

Perhaps the greatest bit of hope in this passage is the fact that all of this is God's idea, and he's going to do it no matter what. Nothing in this passage is dependent on God's chosen people or the church or you and me getting our acts together or mustering up immense faith. God is going to renew the earth, bring heaven and earth together, judge the nations, bring about peace like we've never known, answer the groans of creation — and he's going to do these things because he wants to. He's already decided. The question is, will we join him?

Read

Micah 4:3b-4

1 In the last days the mountain of the Lord's house will be established at the top of the mountains and will be raised above the hills. Peoples will stream to it, 2 and many nations will come and say, "Come, let's go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us about his ways so we may walk in his paths." For instruction will go out of Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 3 He will settle disputes among many peoples and provide arbitration for strong nations that are far away. They will beat their swords into plows and their spears into pruning knives. Nation will not take up the sword against nation, and they will never again train for war. 4 But each person will sit under his grapevine and under his fig tree with no one to frighten him. For the mouth of the Lord of Armies has spoken.

Pray

Heavenly Father, thank you for the hope you provide through your promises. As we reflect on Micah's vision of peace and restoration, help us to trust in your perfect plan. Open our hearts to join you in your work, transforming our lives and the world around us. May we be instruments of your peace, eager to learn your ways and walk in your paths. Strengthen our faith as we await the fulfillment of your kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.

Reflect

- 1. How can you actively participate in God's vision for peace and restoration in your community today?*
- 2. In what areas of your life do you need to trust more fully in God's promises, especially during times of uncertainty or struggle?*

December 12

Saved & Unified

by Taylor McCallum

In Micah 5 we read a prophecy about the coming of a king who would finally save and unify the people of God. This moment did not come without great periods of waiting, silence, and exploitation by their enemies. Throughout every day of longing, there was hope for a perfect king.

Micah states that this future king will be an active ruler. He will stand, rather than sit, as he actively protects and provides for his people. How will he accomplish this? He will do it through the strength of the Lord. God will be the one to sustain both his kingdom and its leader.

We have seen the fulfillment of this king, and not only does he act out of the strength of the Lord, he is the Lord God! When Jesus states in John 10:11 that he is the Good Shepherd, he is taking ownership of this role and letting everyone know that the promised king has finally come. They would have been familiar with this passage and known the gravity of his claims. Naturally, there is shock and push back, but his true followers find comfort when he conveys how he will secure his flock (the people of God) and be their peace.

While the Israelites were expecting peace enforced by perfect militaristic rule, we now know the even greater peace that Jesus has provided for us. He has made a way for restored relationship with God by providing forgiveness for our sins. This peace is not a one time only event, but is actively available for you today.

Read

Micah 5:4-5

*4 He will stand and shepherd them
in the strength of the Lord,
in the majestic name of the Lord his God.
They will live securely,
for then his greatness will extend
to the ends of the earth.
5 He will be their peace.
When Assyria invades our land,
when it marches against our fortresses,
we will raise against it seven shepherds,
even eight leaders of men.*

Pray

God, you are the Good Shepherd who leads me into green pastures and gives me what I need (Psalm 23:1). Thank you for allowing me a way to have a restored relationship with you. Help me to recognize your presence with me in new ways today. Amen.

Reflect

- 1. How does knowing you have security with God give you peace?*
- 2. How do you need God to lead and care for you today as your shepherd?*

December 13

Perfect Obedience

by Jack Lopez

The late author and theologian Frederick Beuchner has said that “the Gospel is bad news before it is good news. It is the news that man is a sinner, to use the old word, that he is evil in the imagination of his heart, that when he looks in the mirror ... what he sees is at least eight parts chicken, phony, slob.”

When we read passages like Micah 6:8, it is easy to linger on the bad news of the Gospel: that, on our own, we are utterly incapable of doing “what it is the Lord requires of you.” We are cowards when it comes to doing what is right and boldly rejecting what is wrong. We give in to faithlessness and unbelief at the first sign of trouble. We proudly and blindly choose our own path rather than humbly submitting to a walk at the Lord’s side.

The bad news of the Gospel is what makes the good news of Jesus’ incarnation so sweet. In spite of the fact that we don’t love God as we ought to—indeed, in spite of our outright rejection of Him—we are so loved by God that he took on flesh to perfectly act justly, to perfectly love faithfulness, and to perfectly walk humbly with God *on our behalf*. Philippians 2:7-8 tells the rest: “And when he had come as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death — even to death on a cross.”

Today, reflect on the perfect obedience of Jesus in your place. By your faith, Jesus’ perfectly righteous life has been credited to your account—God is delighted with you because he is delighted with his Son, and *that is great news*.

Read

Micah 6:8

*8 Mankind, he has told each of you what is good
and what it is the Lord requires of you:
to act justly,
to love faithfulness,
and to walk humbly with your God.*

Pray

God, I thank you for the perfect obedience of Jesus. This Advent, renew my experience of what it means that you became man and lived the life that I couldn't, so that I could fully know your delight and your approval. In response to your unsurpassing love, help me to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly at your side, day-by-day and moment-by-moment. Amen.

Reflect

- 1. What is an area of your life that you have not fully surrendered to God, or where you are currently resisting obedience to Him?*
- 2. How does the obedience of Jesus in your place give you hope for the future?*

December 14

The Cost of Freedom

by Anna Hathaway

If someone were to ask you what you place your hope and trust in on a daily basis, what would you say? If you are a Jesus follower, you likely would say something like "I place my trust in God." But the truth is that every day we face this choice - do we fully trust God with our lives, our futures, our hopes, our disappointments? Or do we really trust in ourselves, our plans for our lives, our bank accounts, our relationships to save us?

The reality of our sin that it is extremely costly. It has cost us everything - life and relationship with God. Ephesians 2:1 says that "you were dead in your trespasses and sins." Dead. Unable to do anything to please God or save ourselves. In Psalm 49 we get the picture of the psalmist, surrounded by his enemies, who "trust in their wealth and the abundance of their riches" and yet he knows that "these cannot redeem a person or pay a ransom to God." The debt that we owe to God for our sin is far too great. No amount of wealth and no person can save us from the wrath of God toward sin. The price of redeeming a person is too costly. This is where the hope of the Advent season intersects the reality of our lives. God knew that we would be unable to pay the debt for our sin, so He sent His only Son into the world to pay the ransom for us.

For the Jesus follower, the invitation for us this Advent season is to remember that Jesus has already paid the price for your sin and invites you to rest daily in your salvation. Do you trust that what Jesus did was enough for you? He invites you into rest and peace, not into striving to save yourself. Where is your hope and trust today? Return to the Savior who came to set you free. For the person who has not yet trusted Jesus, the invitation is to come to Him with your sin and failures and place your hope in Jesus alone to save you.

Read

Psalm 49:7-8

*7 Yet these cannot redeem a person
or pay his ransom to God—
8 since the price of redeeming him is too costly,
one should forever stop trying..*

Pray

God, thank you that in your abundant mercy you entered into our brokenness, took it on yourself, and paid the debt for sin that we could never pay. Thank you that if our hope is in you, we are freed from the pressure to try to save ourselves. Help me today to walk in the freedom of my salvation and rest in the fact that Jesus has already paid my debt in full. Amen.

Reflect

- 1. What are you tempted to trust in for your salvation?*
- 2. If your hope is in Jesus, you no longer owe God anything. Where in your life do you need to apply the truth that Jesus has paid your debt for sin in full?*

December 15

Seeing God This Christmas

by Steven Reese

In Matthew's gospel, the disciple records Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. This sermon begins with what is perhaps the most quoted part of the entire sermon – the beatitudes. The sixth beatitude (Matthew 5:8) says "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." This promise assures us that when we obey God, we are able to see and experience more of him.

Psalm 50 makes a similar promise: *Whoever offers a thanksgiving sacrifice honors me, and whoever orders his conduct, I will show him the salvation of God.*

This sounds like Jesus, right? What is true through all of scripture is that those who order their lives around the things of God have a vibrant, real relationship with him. Those who ignore him and instead choose to go their own way do not experience God, and instead set themselves on a path to a sad, unfulfilled life.

All of us want a good life. All of us want to know and experience more of God. What if the path to that is easier than we think? What if God isn't trying to make it hard to know him and see him? What if it is as simple as obedience?

This Christmas, what is something that God has been poking your heart about doing that you haven't done? What is something that God is trying to get you to stop doing that you are still doing? The key to the good life is to cooperate with that voice. To, as the psalmist says, "order your conduct" so that you can see God.

God doesn't ask us to say a magic prayer or do a list of religious things in order to see him – he simply requires that we listen and obey his voice. It's not always easy, but it is simple.

Read

Psalm 50:23

*23 “Whoever offers a thanksgiving sacrifice honors me,
and whoever orders his conduct,
I will show him the salvation of God.”*

Pray

Father, I am done with trying to do things my way in (insert area of your life here). I want to submit to you and do what you say. Help me see your way as good, so that I can walk in it. As I obey, show me more of who you are. Amen.

Reflect

- 1. What is one time where you obeyed God and experienced more of him as a result?*
- 2. What is one area of life where you can go from disobedience to obedience?*

December 16

From Hiding to Healing

by Cody Wolf

What do you do when you find yourself giving into sin? When you give into that temptation again, after saying you wouldn't ever go back to it; when you say that thing in anger and hurt the person you care about? Do you ignore it; do you run and hide from the people around you?

Our vision of God directly impacts our response to our sin. After denying Jesus, Peter thought Jesus would deny him back, so he ran away from everyone and went back to his former life as a fisherman.

We find ourselves centuries after the events of the New Testament, where we've been told that God is forgiving because of Jesus, but we often think that's just God in the New Testament – in the Old Testament, he's wrathful and angry and punishes everyone all the time. And if God changes between the different parts of the Bible, how can we truly be sure of his response to us in our sin? Will it be Old Testament, or New?

But what we find in Micah (and all over the Old Testament!) is that God is the same God; that the New Testament doesn't have God 2.0, but the same perfect, loving, forgiving, kind God that we see in Jesus. The God who gently calls to a hiding Adam and Eve and pulls them out of shame is the same God who returns to Peter on the shore after dusting the stench of the tomb off of himself and calls Peter his friend.

God has always been forgiving and loving. That's who he is at his core. His anger doesn't compare to the love he has for us. Instead of fleeing from an angry God, we are invited to bring our sins to him, who casts them into the sea. And after our sins have been drowned in the ocean of his love, all that remains is his delight in us.

Read

Micah 7:18-19

*18 Who is a God like you,
forgiving iniquity and passing over rebellion
for the remnant of his inheritance?*

*He does not hold on to his anger forever
because he delights in faithful love.*

*19 He will again have compassion on us;
he will vanquish our iniquities.*

*You will cast all our sins
into the depths of the sea.*

Pray

God, thank you that you are abounding in steadfast love and that you delight in faithful love towards me. Thank you for your compassion towards me. Help me to walk in the warmth of your kindness, drawing me ever closer to you today. Amen.

Reflect

1. What is your default understanding of God's response to your sin? How does this passage shape or change that?

2. What does repentance look like in light of God's response to our sin in this passage?

December 17

Accepting Liberation Through Christ

by Ashleigh Pinkerton

This verse, spoken by God through the prophet Nahum, promises liberation from oppression and bondage. Our God is a God of liberation! In the context of Advent, this promise takes on profound significance as we celebrate the coming of Jesus, the one who sets us free.

When Jesus came to earth, he fulfilled this promise of freedom. His life, death, and resurrection broke the power of sin and death, freeing us from the chains that bound us. This freedom is not just a distant hope but a present reality for those who are in Christ. In him, we find release from our burdens and the assurance that we are no longer defined by our past mistakes or failures. Instead, we are invited to walk in newness of life, experiencing the transformative power of his grace.

Take some time to consider: What chains are holding you back from experiencing the fullness of God's freedom? What sin, guilt, or shame continues to oppress you? What questions or worries are stopping you from walking in freedom?

God has set you free, but yet some choose to continue holding onto the chains that once bound them. Today is the day to set the chains down, and walk in the freedom that you have in Christ. Just as God delivered his people in the past, he will deliver us today. This gives us hope and strength to endure, knowing that Jesus has come to set us free and will come again to complete his work.

As you meditate on the promises of God, remember that Jesus is our Liberator. Let your heart be filled with hope and joy, knowing that the One who broke the yoke of sin will return to make all things new. Embrace the freedom he offers and live in the light of that hope, confident that his love and grace are sufficient for every moment of your journey.

Read

Nahum 1:13

13 For I will now break off his yoke from you and tear off your shackles.

Pray

Heavenly Father, thank you for the promise of liberation found in your Word. Remind us of the freedom we have in Jesus Christ. Show us what chains we are still carrying so that we can surrender them to you. Strengthen our faith and help us live in the joy and peace that come from knowing our Savior has set us free. Amen.

Reflect

- 1. What do you need to be set free from today? Are you ready to give it to God and walk in freedom?*
- 2. How would your daily life shift if you fully embraced the liberation available to you through Jesus?*

December 18

Restoration with God: When, Not If

by Jack Lopez

One of the most fundamental questions that every person must answer is this: What is your ultimate hope for the future?

Ask a secular friend and he or she might say something like, “My ultimate hope is to be happy” or “My hope is to be a good person and have a good life.” For those in other faith traditions, it might be to earn a better reward in the afterlife or to live more in line with whichever belief system they subscribe to.

For followers of Jesus, Advent is a reminder of the hope that we have for the future that is certain and secure. We have hope for the future because we have a Father who wasn’t content to let us languish in our sin forever. We have hope for the future because he chose to come for us. We have hope for the future because when God speaks of restoring his people, He says “When” not “If”.

Ultimately, our hope for the future is to be with God forever. That hope is utterly secure because he chose to be Emmanuel—God With Us.

Read

Psalm 53:6

*6 Oh, that Israel's deliverance would come from Zion!
When God restores the fortunes of his people,
let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.*

Pray

Father, I thank you that even when I couldn't choose you, you chose to be with us. Today, I pray that you would give me a profound sense of hope that is rooted in the Gospel for the people, places, and circumstances in my life that seem hopeless. Restore the fortunes of your people—let us rejoice and be glad. Amen.

Reflect

- 1. What circumstance do you need hope for today?*
- 2. How does the incarnation of Jesus give you hope for the future?*

December 19

Jesus, The Scary Monster Slayer

by Steven Reese

When I was 5 or 6 years old, I remember watching a Scooby-Doo episode with one of my friends. In the episode, a couple of scary green ghosts with chains around their wrists terrified the group of teenagers (that oddly look like 35 year old adults) for a whole 20 minutes.

It didn't make me feel better that the ghost turned out to be some rich guy in a mask scaring people away from his property – the image of the ghosts scared me. For weeks I thought I could hear them walking down the hall outside my room!

As I grew older, animated monsters stopped occupying my mind – but fear of the unknown never went away. Fast-forward 20 years from watching Scooby-Doo, and I was sitting in a psychiatrist's office in tears over the crippling anxiety that I had developed over life, relationships, and what would happen in the future. The little boy who was scared of ghosts and I still had so much in common.

In Psalm 54 we get a picture of God that, if we really read it right, can give us an immense amount of comfort. God is not just someone who loves us and cares for us in a passive sense, he is also the defeater of our enemies. A blunt way of saying this is that he does violence to that which does us violence. Those things that torment and terrify us, he goes after – like a protective dad who sees something threatening his child!

The end of Psalm 54 says “and my eye has looked down on my enemies.” How many of us walk around being looked down on by our enemies – feeling hopeless that we can ever get victory over what is troubling us. Jesus goes to the grave and comes back out on the other side, defeating all that would try and terrify us. It is because of his victory that you can stand over your enemies and say “you might make my life miserable, but you're finished. Your story has already been written. I'm going to be more than okay.”

What a comforting truth to celebrate this Advent!

Read

Psalm 54:6-7

6 I will sacrifice a freewill offering to you.

*I will praise your name, Lord,
because it is good.*

*7 For he has rescued me from every trouble,
and my eye has looked down on my enemies.*

Pray

Father, thank you for going to battle for me. Thank you for defeating the enemies that so often surround me. I ask that you help me realize the victory you have won over (insert area of your life that is causing you fear). Replace my fear with confidence in you. And in the meantime, comfort me in my anxiety. Amen.

Reflect

- 1. What is one example from the past year where you have been afraid?*
- 2. What "enemy" in your life do you need to picture as under the feet of Jesus, defeated and powerless?*

December 20

God With Us: Finding Hope in Our Pain

by Cody Wolf

Have you ever thought to yourself the words in this passage? Have you ever felt like God was distant, or that he wasn't listening? Everything around us can be so dark sometimes. Even during the holiday season, the sky is dark for half the day, and all the talk of family and celebrations can also tend to highlight pains for people around these very areas.

Life is hard. Really hard. And it's easy to feel like God is distant. The darkness around us can bring this feeling that darkness and hopelessness is our reality. But we often believe that to voice such a thought would put us on God's naughty list – as if he was an old man with a white beard and red suit.

But in this passage, we see that it's okay to ask God these questions; to bring our pains, our hurts, our despair, before the living God. Not only is it good, but it's the only way we can get an answer, because we can't get answers to the questions we don't ask. Rather than hiding from God because of the things that genuinely make our hearts break, you can bring them before the Lord and lay them in his hands.

God wants you to bring them to him, because if you can give them to him, you're with him. And the Lord desires your presence with him so that he can tend to the wounds that brought you there in the first place. The answer to the troubles that plague you, that plague each of us, can only be found in the hands of the God who steps into the very world that breaks us.

Advent is our way of mourning the pains of this life, but not as those without hope; we mourn as those whose hope is the God who moves towards the pain, taking on flesh and walking beside us in the pain. He is not distant in our pain; he is with us. God with us. Immanuel.

Read

Habakkuk 1:2-3

*2 How long, Lord, must I call for help
and you do not listen
or cry out to you about violence
and you do not save?*

*3 Why do you force me to look at injustice?
Why do you tolerate[a] wrongdoing?
Oppression and violence are right in front of me.
Strife is ongoing, and conflict escalates.*

Pray

Take some time to tell God the things that are weighing on you. Be honest with Him.

Father, thank you that you don't shy away from hard things. Thank you that you are with me in the middle of these. Help me to trust and to find comfort in your presence. Thank you that you came to suffer alongside us, and that in you I can have hope in the darkest nights, even when it's hard to see. Amen.

Reflect

1. Is it difficult for you to bring difficult things before God? Why or why not?

2. How does the incarnation (Jesus becoming a man and suffering alongside us) change the way you view God in the middle of your own hardships? In what ways can this be a comfort to pain?

December 21

Walking in the Light of Life

by Ashleigh Pinkerton

This verse speaks of God's deliverance and guidance, offering a powerful message of hope and light.

Walking in God's light means embracing the freedom he provides through Jesus. His arrival brought the light of life into a dark world, fulfilling God's promise to deliver humanity from sin and death. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection opened the way for us to walk in the light, free from the chains that bind us.

When we choose to walk in his light, we no longer need to stumble in darkness. Instead, we can move forward with confidence, knowing that God guides our steps and illuminates our path. His light not only reveals the way but also dispels fear and doubt, filling us with hope.

In moments of uncertainty or struggle, we can turn to Psalm 56:13 as a reminder that God has delivered us from death and empowers us to walk in his light. This divine guidance allows us to navigate life's challenges with assurance, knowing we are never alone.

As you reflect on this truth, let it inspire you to live boldly in the light of life. Embrace the freedom that comes from walking with God, knowing that his light shines brightly, leading you toward hope, healing, and joy.

Read

Psalm 56:13

*13 For you rescued me from death,
even my feet from stumbling,
to walk before God in the light of life.*

Pray

Heavenly Father, thank you for delivering us from death and guiding our steps with your light. As we celebrate Advent, fill our hearts with the hope and joy that come from walking in the light of Christ. Help us to reflect his light in our lives and share it with others. In Jesus' name, amen.

Reflect

- 1. What areas of your life need the light of Christ, and how can you invite his guidance and deliverance into those areas?*
- 2. In what ways can you walk in the light of Christ and reflect his light to those around you?*

December 22

A Global Message

by Allie Hobbs

Praise to God often feels private, personal, and at most, kept within an intimate community, but Psalm 57:9 gives a different vision: “I will praise you, Lord among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations.” Praise for the psalmist was global, and for sure not private.

In the same way, the Christmas season can often feel private, personal, held tightly within the bounds of our family, close friends, and loved ones. But the message of Christmas is not meant to be kept private, it is also a global message.

Consider the scene in Luke 2, when the angels appear to the shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus. Verses 10 and 13 say, “But the angel said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for *all the people*’...Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and *peace on earth to people he favors!*” The coming of Jesus is good news for all people; it is not meant to be kept private.

As we wait for Christmas, would we fight the temptation to be insular with our praise and celebrations, and instead look outward to the people who are close to us but far from God so that they might encounter Jesus, who came as good news of great joy for all the people.

Read

Psalm 57:9

*9 I will praise you, Lord, among the peoples;
I will sing praises to you among the nations.*

Pray

Father, thank you that your heart is for all people and all nations. Give us the opportunity to share our praise with people who are close to us but far from you. Amen.

Reflect

1. What can you praise God for today?

2. Who is someone that is close to you, but far from God, that you can be praying for and invite into your Christmas traditions so that they might encounter Jesus?

December 23

Let the Whole Earth be Silent

by Jack Lopez

In 1968, the Apollo 8 mission became the first crewed spacecraft to leave the orbit of earth, traveling around the moon and back. As their ship came around the far side of the moon, they saw—and photographed—something no human had ever seen before: an Earthrise.

The photo evokes a profound sense of smallness and silence. For followers of Jesus, it also tends to evoke feelings of awe and worship. How could a God so big and so powerful as to create such beauty care so much about someone so small and so insignificant as me? The reality of it is mysterious and mind-bending, which is why humans have made physical idols for almost its entire existence: we tend to give our devotion to things we can understand.

In Habakkuk 2, God shows us the futility of this tendency and invites us into a sense of awe and wonder that can only be captured by silence. “Woe to him who says to wood: Wake up! or to mute stone: Come alive! Can it teach? Look! It may be plated with gold and silver, yet there is no breath in it at all” (v. 19). Elsewhere, in Isaiah 46:7, He says, “They cry out to it but it doesn’t answer; it saves no one from his trouble.”

Although we may not have carved or sculpted idols that we worship, our tendency is still to devote our attention and affection to things we can concretely understand, but which cannot save us: relationships, hobbies, pleasure, etc. Advent invites “the whole earth” to pause in wonder and reverence before the God who not only created us, but who also speaks and chooses to be with us.

Read

Habakkuk 2:20

*20 But the Lord is in his holy temple;
let the whole earth
be silent in his presence.*

Pray

Father, I confess that I often give my attention and affection to things that cannot speak and cannot save me. Today I long to hear your voice. Give me a quiet mind as I seek your face. During this Advent season, when life often feels busy and burdensome, would you help me slow down and praise your holy name? Show me again that although I am so small, and my life so fleeting, you love me and you came for me. When my words aren't enough to say how much I love you, let my silence be praise to you. Amen.

Reflect

- 1. What is giving you a loud mind this week that you need to release to God? (Or what is a specific idol that you need to renounce and repent of worshiping?)*
- 2. How is it comforting to you that silence can be a form of worship?*

December 24

Past & Future Faithfulness

by Allie Hobbs

Habakkuk 3:2 reads, “Lord, I have heard the report about you; Lord, I stand in awe of your deeds. Revive your work in these years; make it known in these years; in your wrath remember mercy!” The author, the prophet Habbakuk, has heard about the mighty acts of God in the past, and prays a prayer marked by profound hope in a hopeless time. Although Habbakuk is in awe of God’s deeds, it appears that there is a need for a new and fresh move of God. God’s past faithfulness is giving Habbakuk hope that God will be faithful in the future to revive his work and be merciful.

The tone of Habbakuk’s prayer is hopeful for a few reasons. First, because Habbakuk hasn’t isolated himself. The text says, “I have heard the report about you,” implying that other people around Habbakuk are speaking of the good and mighty works of God that they have experienced in the past. Second, because Habbakuk has lifted his eyes off of himself. He then says, “I stand in awe of your deeds.” Rather than looking at his dismal circumstances, his mind’s eye is on the past deeds of God. Third, he trusts that God hasn’t changed. When he calls on God to “revive your work in these years; make it known in these years,” he is confident that God can do what he did again, he hasn’t changed. And finally, the prayer is hopeful because Habbakuk knows the character of God. He calls on God to remember his mercy, trusting that what God said about himself in Exodus 34:6 is true: “...The Lord—the Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth...”

Whether hope for you this Christmas season has been warm and cozy or bitterly cold, the invitation today is to pray this same prayer - one that is full of hope in a hard circumstance - and to remember that God’s past faithfulness is the best indicator of his future faithfulness.

Read

Habakkuk 3:2

*2 Lord, I have heard the report about you;
Lord, I stand in awe of your deeds.
Revive your work in these years;
make it known in these years.
In your wrath remember mercy!*

Pray

*Lord, I have heard the report about you; Lord I stand in awe of your deeds.
Revive your work in these years; make it known in these years. In your wrath
remember mercy! Amen.*

Reflect

- 1. What past work of God keeps you hopeful that God can move the same way again?*
- 2. What work are you asking God to revive in these years, specifically in 2025?*

December 25

The Joy of Christmas Day

by Ashleigh Pinkerton

On this Christmas Day, these verses capture the profound mystery and joy of what we celebrate—the revelation of Jesus, who came to dwell among us. Today, we rejoice that God, who existed from the beginning, chose to enter into our world in the most personal and tangible way, making himself known in the form of a child born in Bethlehem.

John speaks as one who witnessed this revelation firsthand. He saw, heard, and touched the son of God, Jesus Christ. This personal encounter with the living God is the foundation of the gospel message. As we celebrate Christmas today, we are invited to reflect on this incredible reality: the eternal God became flesh and revealed himself to humanity so that we might have fellowship with him.

The coming of Jesus is not just a historical event but an invitation into a relationship with God. The word of life appeared so that we could experience eternal life, not just in the future, but now, through fellowship with the Father and his Son. In this season, let's renew our awareness of this relationship, to marvel at the closeness of God, and to share this good news with others.

If you feel far from God today, remember that Advent is a time when God draws near to us. The very essence of Advent is the reminder that God took the initiative to come to us through Jesus, making himself known in a way we can see, hear, and even touch. No matter how distant you may feel, Jesus came to bridge that gap, inviting you into close fellowship with him. Take heart and know that God's presence is near, and he is reaching out to you with love and grace today, and every day.

Read

1 John 1:1-3

1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— 3 what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

Pray

Heavenly Father, on this Christmas day, we thank you for revealing yourself to us through Jesus, the word of life. As we celebrate his birth, fill our hearts with the joy and peace that come from knowing we have eternal fellowship with you. Help us to draw closer to you and to share the love and light of Christ with those around us. Glory, hallelujah. Amen.

Reflect

- 1. What does your fellowship with God look like right now? How can you deepen your fellowship with God as we move into a new year?*
- 2. What does it mean to you that the eternal God chose to reveal himself in such a personal and tangible way through Jesus? How does this impact your celebration today?*

But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger."

Luke 2:10-12

