

Peace *on* Earth

Creative
Commons
Sample

FAMILY DEVOTIONS
for Advent

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“Peace on Earth”

is what Jesus promises to bring us at Christmastime. If you have a family, though, the weeks leading up to December 25 can feel anything but peaceful.

Besides the shopping, decorating, visiting, cooking and other preparations we make during Advent, there is the world at large that can feel at odds with a message of peace. News of violence, conflict and poverty fill our television screens and social media feeds.

What kind of peace can Jesus bring to a world like ours? Perhaps precisely the kind we need.

Our Christmas preparations will probably not all go as planned. There might be chores left undone, packages delayed in the mail, cookies that come out burned on the bottom and raw in the middle. But Jesus promises us peace in our imperfection.

And we are unlikely to solve the political and social ills of the world this Advent season, either. There will continue to be war, injustice and suffering in the world. But Jesus promises us peace in our unrest.

While we may never achieve perfect peace on this side of heaven, this Advent, we can work to bring the peace of Jesus to our broken world, a little bit at a time, beginning in our own homes and families. It is my hope that this booklet can be a tool to help you do that.

There is a reflection for each day with prompts toward prayer and action—all small things that we can do to open our hearts to receive the peace of Jesus this Advent season. Each of the four weeks focuses on a simple prayerful theme: Come, Lord Jesus, come; We wait for you, Jesus; Jesus, teach us to give; and Jesus, bring us joy.

As you work through the pages of this booklet, and through the days of Advent this season, I pray that you and your family will grow in love for one another and in readiness to bring more peace to the world. Together, let us look to Jesus in the manger, and open our hearts to receive the peace that can only come from him.

Happy Advent!

Danielle Bean

Advent Week 1

COME, LORD JESUS, COME



SUNDAY, WEEK 1

Holding Baby Jesus

THINK

Oh my goodness, the world is noisy! Even if we manage to turn off the music, news, TV and social media for a while, our inner “noise” can sometimes rush in to fill the void. Even in quiet moments of solitude, our minds race from one thought to the next, from one worry to the next. With Christmas on the horizon, our minds might be busier than ever with worries about activities, obligations and finances.

In those noisy inner moments, let’s take a deep breath and remember that Jesus came to us as a baby. A baby. It doesn’t get any simpler or smaller than that. Jesus didn’t come for our Christmas trappings, either. He came for us. He wants who we are, not anything we can do.

Today, let’s remember baby Jesus and hold him for just a minute, quieting our minds and opening our hearts to be filled with his love.

PRAY

Jesus, you came to us as a baby, helpless and small. Help us to see a call to quiet and stillness in your smallness. Stay close to our hearts today, as we go about our busy lives, and give us the gift of your peace. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

ACT

Pay attention to the “noise” in your life today and those things that you allow to disturb your peace. Whenever possible, turn off the noise, whether it be inside or outside your thoughts, and say a small prayer in its place: “Come, Lord Jesus, come.”

Let Go of the Hurt

THINK

One Sunday, after sliding into the pew a few minutes late with multiple children in tow, I had an older woman who was seated behind me hiss into my ear, “Some of us were on time today, and we are trying to pray!”

“I’m so sorry!” I said, as I fought back tears, avoided the woman’s angry stare and then rushed out of the church when it was all over.

I was upset for days. While I don’t think being late for church is a great idea, I don’t think hissing in other people’s ears about it is a good idea either. As I reflected on my mixed feelings, I realized that in holding on to my hurt, I was letting that woman’s unkindness disturb my peace—a peace that God wants me to have.

We can’t control the actions of others. When people hurt us, though, we can control whether we will hold on to that wrong. We can decide whether to let it continue to hurt us or to let it go. Today, let’s think of hurtful things we might be holding on to and practice letting go.

PRAY

Jesus, you know the ways in which we have been hurt. You know how much we struggle sometimes to let go of anger. Give us the strength to recognize the ways we have been wounded and the strength to turn that hurt over to you for real healing. Come, Lord Jesus, come.



ACT

Forgive someone. It doesn’t have to be about anything big or dramatic. It could be as simple as choosing not to return unkind words or actions with unkindness of your own. Say a prayer to Jesus instead.

Time for Focus

THINK

Do you ever find yourself not paying attention when you should? It might be when a friend is telling you about her vacation. It might happen as you are listening to a teacher give a lesson. Suddenly, you realize your thoughts have been somewhere else. Perhaps on a vacation of their own?

This happens to all of us. It can be hard to focus. And sometimes, just knowing that we *should* focus creates a feeling of pressure and obligation that we want to rebel against.

This Advent, Jesus is inviting us to focus. He is not demanding and not pressuring, but he is inviting us to focus on something important. Remember how he comes to us as a tiny baby? That baby has something small that he wants to give us so that we can let it grow in our hearts. He wants to give us his light, his love and his peace. He wants us to be still and know that he loves us. Will we listen? Will we focus?

PRAY

Jesus, you come to us where we are and invite us to focus on the good things you want to give us. Help us quiet our minds and hearts enough to see you and hear you in the big and small moments of every day. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

ACT

Set a timer to go off at three different times today: in the morning, afternoon and evening. Every time the timer rings, take note of what you are doing and what you are focused on. Pause to say a small prayer, inviting Jesus into your thoughts and activities.



Jesus' Humble Way

THINK

Many of the people who lived during Jesus' time did not really like him. Even those who said they were waiting for a savior often rejected him, because he was not the kind of savior they wanted. They wanted a flashy hero with a sword, maybe even a king, wearing elegant robes and a shiny crown.

What they got instead was a carpenter's son. Just a guy like them, who had no money and no flashy message to give them. He told them to do things like love their enemies, serve others and take up their crosses to suffer along with him. You can see why this message might not have excited the people of Jesus' time!

And sometimes, the message doesn't sound all that great to us, either. We get angry with our enemies, we get tired of serving. Sometimes the suffering of this world seems so unfair and pointless, and we want to reject it all.

And yet, Jesus comes to us in his humble way, not to *tell* us anything necessarily, but to *show* us the power of smallness and humility. To show us that all the flashy things the world offers us will never make us truly happy in the end. Jesus wants everything that is good for us, so by his example, he shows us what is good. Smallness and stillness. Will we follow him?

PRAY

Jesus, so many of the things you teach us seem silly by the world's standards. The world tells us to seek wealth and fame. Yet you tell us to seek simplicity and smallness. Help us to see our world as you do. Help us, we pray, to value the things that you do. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

ACT

Today, look for an opportunity to choose "smallness" by taking on a chore no one else wants to do. Do it without complaining or expecting praise. Do it out of love for Jesus and out of a desire to see things as he does.

THURSDAY, WEEK 1



Let God Love You

THINK

Do you suffer from a “when-then” way of thinking? For example, “When I bring up my grades in math, then I will be happy.” Or, “When I make more money, then I’ll enjoy my life.” Or, how about, “When I lose 20 pounds, then I will feel great!”?

It can be tempting to think this way, but when we do, before we know it, we are living only in the hope of some future reality that might never come to pass, and we are ignoring the very blessings that lie before us every day.

There is nothing wrong with setting goals or looking for ways to improve ourselves, but we need to be properly focused on the present, with gratitude for all that God gives us right now. When baby Jesus was born and Mary wrapped him in swaddling clothes, he didn’t do anything at all. He did not set goals and plan his future career. He simply was present in that moment. All kinds of activities were going on around Mary and Jesus—there were angels and shepherds; there was celestial singing, for crying out loud! And yet, Jesus just was. He just allowed himself to be held in his mother’s loving arms.

Can we do that? Can we just be? Can we be still and allow others to love us?

PRAY

Jesus, you know how restless our hearts can be. You know how we sometimes fill our days with activities in an effort to “earn” our worth. Help us to know that we are worthy of loving and of being loved simply because of who we are, who you made us to be, exactly as we are today. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

ACT

Think of all the things you will do today. Plan a time when you can put all of your “duties” and “accomplishments” aside and spend a few minutes simply being. Sit in stillness, allowing yourself to feel God’s love.

Seeing Beauty

THINK

I remember taking my youngest son with us to church years ago when he was a baby. When he got fussy, I sometimes would take him to the back of the church and show him the stained glass windows. His eyes would grow wide as he took in all the beautiful colors and lights.

These were the same stained glass windows the rest of us walked by without even seeing them just moments before. But to his small eyes, this colored glass was a miracle and a great joy to behold.

Babies are born with their eyes wide open; they are ready to see, taste and hear all that the world has to offer. As we grow older, though, we tend to grow accustomed to many of the miracles we see and hear every day.

Jesus himself told us that we must become like children if we want to see heaven. Let's open our eyes to the wonders that surround us. Let's see everyday beauty and joy for the miracles that they are. Let's pause for just a moment to give thanks.

PRAY

Jesus, show me those blessings in my life that I take for granted. It might be people or talents or material goods. My prayer today is that you may help me to open my heart and to be more grateful for the great gifts you give me. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

ACT

Think of someone who has done something nice for you recently, even if it was something small. Send that person a note of thanks. It can be handwritten and mailed, sent by text or posted to their social media account. Let them know you notice and are grateful for what they do.



More with Less

THINK

When I was pregnant for the first time and shopping for a crib, an elderly lady I knew scolded me: “You don’t need a crib! My babies all slept with nothing but a blanket in a dresser drawer!”

I never have tried the dresser drawer thing, but I have come to know that, while it’s nice to have some baby things, new parents don’t truly need to collect all the gear that baby magazines are pushing these days.

Neither do we need many of the things we buy, and do, in preparation for Christmas. While it is appropriate to buy gifts as a means of expressing affection and of recognizing this holy season, we can carefully choose how we spend our time and money.

Do we need to impress the neighbors by turning our yard into an animated, glittering display of lights and splendor that rivals Disneyland? Are we shopping our way into debt? Are we tempted to buy useless gizmos for some people just so we can cross their names off our lists?

In preparation for Christmas, we can choose what things to buy and what things to do thoughtfully. With some thought and discernment, we can be sure that our extra efforts are meaningful. We can ensure that they draw us toward, and not away from, Jesus.

PRAY

Jesus, help me to plan to celebrate your coming with gifts and activities that draw me closer to you. Help me avoid the sins of wastefulness and greed and focus instead on connecting with others in meaningful ways during this season of love. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

ACT

Think of something you “always do” or “always buy” for Christmas that no longer feels meaningful to you. Cross it off your list and start a new tradition this year!

While we may never achieve perfect peace on this side of heaven, during Advent, we can work to bring the peace of Jesus to our broken world, beginning in our own homes and families.

Peace on Earth will guide you and your whole family through a peace-filled Advent, allowing you all to grow in love for one another and to bring more peace to the world. Together, this Advent season, let us look to Jesus in the manger and open our hearts to receive the peace that can only come from him.



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