



I WONDER
AS I
WANDER

DEVOTIONS
FOR ADVENT

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I wonder as I wander, out under the sky,
How Jesus the Savior did come for to die
For poor ornery people like you and like I.
I wonder as I wander, out under the sky.

When Mary birthed Jesus, 'twas in a cow's stall,
With wise men and farmers and shepherds and all,
But high from God's heaven a star's light did fall,
And the promise of ages it then did recall.

If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing,
A star in the sky or a bird on the wing,
Or all of God's angels in heaven for to sing,
He surely could have it, 'cause he was the King.

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INTRODUCTION

Whether you've lived in the same place your entire life or you've relocated each year, you have a wanderer's soul. Each of us is prone to wander from God. Advent holds an invitation to reorient yourself and discover the wonder of a life-changing journey toward Bethlehem—and beyond. Each devotion in this booklet offers you a relevant Bible passage on which to reflect, a meaningful meditation, a short prayer and a suggestion for additional Scripture reading in order to guide you on this journey.

Born Seekers

*Like a bird that wanders from her nest,
so is a man who wanders from his home.*

PROVERBS 27:8

We are born seekers. We know in our souls there must be something more than the here and now of the world around us. But sometimes our seeking hearts can launch us on journeys that lead nowhere.

The haunting melody and longing lyrics of the beloved carol “I Wonder as I Wander” capture the seeker’s true desire. Originally an Appalachian folk song, the words beckon each one of us to step outside of our regularly-scheduled lives and into a journey meant to orient our soul toward the One who came seeking each one of us:

*I wonder as I wander, out under the sky,
How Jesus the Savior did come for to die
For poor ornery people like you and like I.
I wonder as I wander, out under the sky.*

In a culture where commercial celebrations of Christmas seem to begin a little earlier every year, Advent is a call to step off the pop culture superhighway and take the scenic route as you wander toward Bethlehem. Whether this is your first Advent or your eightieth, the journey is new every year. As we walk through time this Advent, we’re invited to wonder as we wander, discovering afresh the wonder of God’s gift to us—his Son, Jesus.

Lord, my wandering has often led me away from you. Please teach me this Advent what it means to journey with you. Amen.

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**FOR FURTHER REFLECTION READ PSALM 25:4-7**

## Prone to Wander

*Now devote your heart and soul  
to seeking the LORD your God.*

**I CHRONICLES 22:19**

**T**he first few pages of our Bibles contain the genesis of our “prone to wander” hearts and souls. In those pages, we discover that our first parents, Adam and Eve, first wandered from God when together they chose to disobey him. As a consequence of that choice, God sent them from a perfect home to wander into a world in which they’d have to toil and roam. There was no way of return to Eden.

Though the journey from Eden has given humanity a history full of pain and sorrow, there is also grace embedded in our wandering. The impossibility of return to the Garden has meant that we have been given the opportunity to learn to walk with God as we move toward a destination we can’t begin to fully imagine.

Again and again, Scripture shows and tells us his ways are not our ways. The Bible shows us how God uses imperfect people, ordinary places and impossible circumstances to unfold his perfect plan to rescue and redeem prone-to-wander human beings like you and I. What is he using in your life today to call you to a deeper walk with him?

**Father, I recognize the ways I am prone to wander  
from you and recognize that your grace is at work in my life,  
calling me to learn to walk with you today. Amen.**

**FOR FURTHER REFLECTION READ GENESIS 3:21-24**

## Sheep Gone A.W.O.L.

*I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant,  
for I do not forget your commandments.*

PSALM 119:176

Sheep are herd animals. This means they've been wired by their Creator to find security in numbers. They'll stick together as a group in order to ensure the entire flock will stay as safe as possible. A grazing sheep must be able to keep with other members of the flock. If one happens to wander, it instinctively recognizes it is in danger and becomes frightened and disoriented. A sheep gone A.W.O.L. needs help to find its way home.

It is not a mistake that God often referred to his straying people as lost sheep. As they wandered from him, he continually pursued them with both kindness and discipline meant to return them to the safety of his care. Jesus referenced this image of a wandering lamb that would have been very familiar to his first-century audiences when he told his critics the parable of the lost sheep. When we wander from God, he always takes the initiative to seek us and return us to the safety of his care.

**Good Shepherd, thank you for pursuing and finding me  
when I wander. Help me to follow you today. Amen.**

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**FOR FURTHER REFLECTION READ LUKE 15:1-7**

## The Only Thing?

*Heal me, LORD, and I will be healed; save me  
and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise.*

JEREMIAH 17:14

**T**hey're bringing their "A" game.  
It's a tale of two halves.  
It's do-or-die today!

If you're a fan, you'll recognize the shopworn clichés that pepper most sports commentary. These bits of wisdom are shorthand ways of motivating players and inspiring fans. But they capture a reality that extends far beyond the playing field in our competitive world. Legendary Green Bay Packers coach Vince Lombardi famously said, "Winning isn't everything. It's the only thing."

No one wants to be a "loser" in this world. As a result, some of us are tempted toward the kind of pull-yourself-up-by-the bootstraps thinking that results in self-reliance. A self-reliant person—especially someone who comes across to the rest of us as a winner—may not appear at first glance to be a spiritual wanderer. If we follow the world's formula for a winner's life, it will lead us in the opposite direction of the journey in which God is inviting us. The Advent journey leads us toward a humble feeding trough in an overcrowded first-century town. Which direction will we travel today?

**Savior, I confess my desire to win in the ways the world  
measures success can lead me away from you and toward  
self-dependence. Save me and I will be saved. Amen.**

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**FOR FURTHER REFLECTION READ PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11**

## Hush

*This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says:  
“In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and  
trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.”*

ISAIAH 30:15

**A**t this time of year, quiet can be hard to come by. Retailers blast chipper versions of secular Christmas songs with a few jazzed-up versions of sacred carols thrown into the mix. Our schedules are often filled with all kinds of seasonal obligations: programs and parties, gatherings and gift exchanges. In the midst of it all, God is inviting us to come to him and simply be still in his presence.

I invite you to try an experiment today. Carve out some space to set a timer for ten minutes and simply sit in silence before God. Attempting to be still can seem at first to be a recipe for remembering tasks you need to complete at this busy time of year. It can be helpful to keep a pen and paper nearby, and jot those racing thoughts down in order to get them out of your head, with the purpose of returning to a few moments simply to be with God. It is a practice that can re-orient your soul's compass toward wonder at who he is and how he loves you today, throughout Advent—and all year long.

**Lord, I turn from my regularly-scheduled busyness during  
this time of year and turn to you. Here I am. Amen.**

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**FOR FURTHER REFLECTION READ MATTHEW 11:28-30**



## Waiting for You

*You will seek me and find me, when  
you seek me with all your heart.*

**JEREMIAH 29:13**

**M**ore than five hundred years before the birth of Jesus, God told the Jewish people that they would become more than seekers when they sought God wholeheartedly—they would become finders. The prophet Jeremiah spoke these words to a morally-compromised, spiritually-weakened people who'd determined to do religion their own way rather than worship God's way. God both preserved and disciplined the chosen people as they were forcibly removed from their homes and marched hundreds of miles into captivity in Babylon. This should have been the end of their story, just as it had been for countless other conquered people groups in the ancient near east.

But instead, God used captivity to call his people to repentance. If they would turn from doing things their own way and return to God, he promised to restore them. They did, and were miraculously permitted to begin returning to their homeland seventy years after they were taken into captivity. This return helped set the stage for the birth of a Child who came to seek and find all who had wandered far from God.

The wonder of this Advent journey is the opportunity to turn and return to him.

**Gracious Father, I thank you that you are not far off,  
but waiting for us to turn to you. Find us in our seeking;  
save us from our wandering. Amen.**

# I WONDER AS I WANDER

The cherished carol “I Wonder as I Wander” launches this memorable, inspiring Advent journey through Scripture’s themes of seeking and being found by God. The journey captures the surprise, truth and wonder of God’s pursuit of each one of us. Contemporary examples mix with ancient, unchanging truth to guide readers to the One born in Bethlehem who has been pursuing us every step of the way.

This book, along with many other *Creative Communications for the Parish* products, is available on **amazon**kindle and **nook**by waterbrook

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