



ADVENT

family devotions



25 Daily Devotions for the
Family leading up to Christmas

“REPEAT THEM TO YOUR CHILDREN. TALK ABOUT THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE AND WHEN YOU WALK ALONG THE ROAD, WHEN YOU LIE DOWN AND WHEN YOU GET UP.”

– Deuteronomy 6:7

As you sit at home, mealtime or bedtime reading.

A PARENTS GUIDE TO USING THIS RESOURCE

Commit to take your family through 25 daily devotions surrounding the coming of Jesus Christ to the world.

Plan your days by skimming the devotions and deciding upon a system that works for your family's schedule. You may choose to take 15 minutes daily or you may want to condense the devotions into a weekly extended time.

Each day includes a scripture reference to read from your favorite Bible translation, a devotion for the family, questions for both younger and older children, and prayer prompts. Use the questions as you see fit for your family. Then, take some time to pray together through each prayer prompt.



HOPE

week 1

SCRIPTURE: Therefore accept one another, just as Christ also accepted you, to the glory of God. For I say that Christ became a servant of the circumcised on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises to the fathers, and so that Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and I will sing praise to your name. Again it says, Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people! And again, Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples praise him! And again, Isaiah says, The root of Jesse will appear, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; the Gentiles will hope in him. Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
— *Romans 15:7-13*

QUOTE: "Whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have what? Hope." — *John MacArthur, A Theology of Hope (Sermon)*¹

DAY 1

His Arrival

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

JEREMIAH 33:14-15

Christmas is said to be the most wonderful time of the year. While it's easy for the holiday to pass by quickly, we encourage you to celebrate the true reason for the season. This Christmas, we invite you and your family to be reminded of the hope, promise, joy and love the Bible gives us in telling God's great story. Before heading off to work or school, during dinner or just before bedtime, set aside time to read each devotion leading up to Christmas Day.

"Advent" means coming or arrival. Believers use this time of year to be reminded of the wonderful truths found in Scripture centered around the arrival of God's Son. So why did Jesus need to come to Earth? To find the answer, we can go back to the beginning in Genesis 3.

As the first two people on Earth, Adam and Eve walked with God in the Garden of Eden. But tragedy struck. We discover sin when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Their sin cost them — and us — a close, intimate relationship with God. However, nothing would keep God from His creation.

In Genesis 3:15, God immediately gave a promise of hope to Adam, Eve — and us. He promised one day He would send a Savior to repair our broken relationship. He would send Jesus to pay the ultimate price and bring back what was lost.

Sure enough, thousands of years after God's encounter with Adam and Eve in the garden, the Gospel of Matthew describes the fulfillment of God's wonderful, long-awaited promise when he writes, "She (Mary) will give birth to a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

As Advent begins, remember why Jesus' arrival to Earth was necessary. He came to restore what sin destroyed. Jesus came to bring hope to all people, giving them the opportunity to have a close relationship with God again.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Can you name some of the members of our family? Today's devotional reminds us that if we were to draw out our entire family tree, we would all be related to Adam and Eve!

OLDER CHILD: Using paper and pencil, draw out your family tree together. If you were to trace your family tree to the very beginning of time, you would see that you're a relative of Adam and Eve!

TEENAGER: While we inherited a sin nature from Adam, it's likely that someone in your family has been instrumental in passing on the faith from one generation to the next. If so, who was it and how did they do it? If not, how can you be sure to pass on your faith to the next generation?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus to restore our relationship with God.

DAY 2 Our Relationship

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

JEREMIAH 33:14-15

Now that we have a better understanding of why Jesus' arrival was necessary, this leads us to another question. How would God restore our relationship with Him?

If we were to trace our family tree back to the beginning, we would find that we are all related to Adam and Eve. They are our great-, great-, great-, great-, etc., grandparents. Whether we like it or not, they are our relatives. Because of our relationship to Adam, we, too, are sinners and have a broken relationship with God. In Romans 5:12, Paul explains: "Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned." Simply stated, we inherited their sin.

But God did not leave us in this condition. He took responsibility for our broken relationship and fixed the problem Himself. How did He do this? God fulfilled His promise and provided redemption for us through Jesus, the righteous branch of David. A little baby born in a manger lived a perfect life in complete obedience to His Father. Jesus willingly took upon all our sins. As a result, God's wrath was unleashed on His Son. Christ suffered and died for us and paid the price for our sins.

After Jesus' death and burial, God would not let His Son remain in the grave. He raised Jesus back to life. He defeated death for the sake of our redemption. No wonder Zechariah would say, "Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and provided redemption for his people" (Luke 1:68). But what did God accomplish? Our redemption.

Since we are made in His image and belong to Him, the Lord brought us back to Himself. Through Jesus, God made the way for anyone who wants to have a relationship with Him possible again.

However, there is still one part missing. Before anyone can enjoy a relationship with the Heavenly Father they must believe in what He has done for them. They must confess their sins and surrender their lives to Jesus. It simply requires a person to "believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Read the following story together as a family.

Jimmy is playing trucks in his room with his older brother. Their mother calls them for dinner, so they clean up quickly and rush downstairs. When they start playing the next day, Jimmy's firetruck is in his brother's bin, and his brother won't give it back. His brother agrees to hand over the truck if Jimmy gives him a cherry lollipop. So Jimmy exchanges the lollipop to get his firetruck back.²

Note: For families with teenagers, you may want to substitute different objects in the illustration.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Act out the above story as a family. Ask your children, "What did Jimmy have to give to get his firetruck back?" Then, explain the importance of redemption.

OLDER CHILD: What did it cost Jimmy to get his firetruck back? Was it worth giving away his lollipop to get his firetruck back? Then, explain the importance of redemption.

TEENAGER: What did Jimmy have to give to get his firetruck back? How does the story explain what God did to redeem us? From God's perspective, was it worth buying us back with the price of His Son? Why?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus and the incredible way He bought us back.

DAY 3 With His People

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

JOHN 1:1-2, 14

When the apostle John poetically writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," he is getting ready to tell the amazing story of Jesus. Jesus, the all-powerful God, is the very One who "became flesh and dwelt among us."

The Creator entered His creation as one of us. He was a helpless baby who had to be fed, changed and cared for. He had to be taught how to walk and talk. He was the Word who had created all that exists, and there He lay in a manger cooing.

In all this, Jesus never stopped being the all-powerful God. In Philippians 2, He willingly gave up His power to become flesh and dwell among us. The word "dwelt" literally means to pitch a tent. In the Old Testament, God's presence stayed with His people inside a special tent as they traveled around the desert. But when Jesus came to set up camp with us, He came as an actual human to literally walk with His people.

How amazing that the God of the universe would stoop so low! He deserved to live in a palace and have everyone serve Him. Instead, He was born in a manger and grew up to be the most humble servant. He healed the sick, made the blind see and raised the dead. He didn't care how smart, rich or good people were. He chose to hang out with some of the least popular folks in town. His heart was to truly be with His people, to experience their sadness and joy, and to be their friend.

In His sinless life and sacrificial death, Jesus proved how much He loves us. Then, in His farewell speech before returning to His Father in heaven, He made one of the most comforting promises of all: "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). Jesus intends to dwell with us even today.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: How does a mom help a tiny baby? Can you imagine Jesus being a tiny baby just like that?!

OLDER CHILD: As a family, consider the following: Who is someone in your neighborhood that you can serve this Christmas? Put together a plan to put these thoughts into action. Consider how Jesus is the most humble servant to ever live.

TEENAGER: By taking on flesh and living among people, Jesus came close to serve those in need. As a family, ask each other about what needs exist in your community and then create a plan to meet one of those needs directly. Make sure you take time to get to know and understand those you are helping.

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who has promised to always be with His followers.

DAY 4 Our Future Hope

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

MATTHEW 1:18-21

Have you ever learned the meaning behind your name? Maybe your parents chose to name you after a family member or another significant event. When the angel said, "You are to name him Jesus," he had much purpose behind it.

The name "Jesus" means "to rescue or deliver." The angel said Jesus was to be given this name "because he will save his people from their sins." In other words, the angel announced that this little baby would fulfill the promise that God made in the Garden of Eden. Jesus would make a way possible for everyone to have a relationship with God through His sacrifice and resurrection.

While we look back at how Jesus walked with His people, followers of Christ have even more to be thankful for during this time of year. Christmas is also a wonderful season to look forward to when Christ restores His creation.

The book of Revelation states that when Satan no longer rules the Earth, God will make His home with us. He will wipe away all of our tears, and there will be no more death, crying or pain. Revelation 21:3-5 reminds us of these truths:

"God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away. Then the one seated on the throne said, 'Look, I am making everything new.'"

We are reminded of this future promise in the third verse of the Christmas

hymn "Joy to the World":
No more let sin and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
far as the curse is found,
far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.

What a wonderful hope we have to anticipate!

As your family enjoys this Christmas season, take time away from the presents, parties and big meals to picture the scenes of the first time Jesus came. Then, take a moment to imagine what it will look like when He makes all things new.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Ask your child to share about a time they had to wait. How did they feel? Sad? Anxious? Remind them that God's people had to wait thousands of years for Jesus to be born.

OLDER CHILD: How do you think God's people felt as they waited thousands of years for the birth of Christ? Can you recall a time where you had to wait? What helped you wait patiently?

TEENAGER: Presents, parties and big meals aren't necessarily bad, but they can take our minds off the true focus of Advent. What are some ways you can transform these events to ensure Jesus is the focus?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, whose birthday we celebrate and whose return we anticipate.

DAY 5 The Real Gift

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

LUKE 2:1-7

There is nothing like hearing others share stories from the Christmases of yesteryear. Family gatherings are often filled with memories and childhood recollections as loved ones talk about their parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins visiting the homes of their grandparents for the holidays.

Wanda is a wife, mother and grandmother from Statesville, North Carolina. Her face glows when she talks about the holidays and the fond memories she had as a child on Christmas Eve. Wanda tells this story:

“The evening meal, in and of itself, was enough to make our celebration unforgettable. Following the meal, we would gather in the living room around the Christmas tree while my grandmother would read the Christmas story from Luke 2. She did not stop with just the reading, but challenged us to remember the true meaning of Christmas and how we should keep Christ in our hearts year-round. We would sing several Christmas carols that my sister would play on the piano and my dad would lead in his beautiful, baritone voice.

The last part of the evening was the opening of gifts. Thinking back over those times, I cannot remember a single gift that I received or a favorite dish that I enjoyed. Instead, I recall my grandmother’s voice as she read to us and talked to us about the One who was the very essence of her life. That is what left an indelible impression upon my heart and mind.”

During the holidays, keep in mind the reason we celebrate Christmas. It is not about the gifts that come wrapped in colorful, glittering paper, but the gift of Jesus, who was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: What is your favorite Christmas memory? Why?

OLDER CHILD: Can you retell the story of the birth of Christ by memory? After your child shares, read Luke 2 together as a family.

TEENAGER: Why do you think Wanda forgot about the gifts she received and the food she enjoyed, but could remember her grandmother's voice as she read the Christmas story?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus and giving us a beautiful story we can share with our family, neighbors and friends.

DAY 6 The Promised Hope

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

MATTHEW 2:1-11

Long before Jesus came to Earth, it was written that a ruler of Israel would be born in the town of Bethlehem. Speaking of Bethlehem, Micah 5:2 records “out of you will come from you to be ruler over Israel for me.” At the beginning of chapter two, Matthew makes the connection that the birth of Jesus is that promised hope and fulfillment of prophecy.

With Jesus — the promised hope’s arrival — observe the differences between the Magi, also known as wise men, and Herod’s response to Immanuel. Whereas the Magi believed in the Messiah, Herod did not believe Jesus to be the coming king. Consequently, the Magi chose to go in worship, while Herod never chose to worship Jesus.

The outcome from both parties’ choices was different as well. Since the Magi went with hopeful intent, they received joy (Matthew 2:10). Scripture reveals the Magi’s emotions for the Savior and how they demonstrated their hope by following the star and prophecy.

One can imagine that, since they received joy when they followed the star with such fervent hope, how much more joy they would have had seeing the Messiah. They even fell to their knees and worshipped Him! Perhaps, the New American Standard Bible (NASB) best describes the Magi meeting Jesus. It notes, “Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary His mother, and falling to their knees, *they worshipped Him*” (2:11, emphasis added). These were wise men. In fact, many versions of the Bible refer to the Magi as “wise men.”

Since these were indeed “wise men,” Herod can be seen as the exact opposite — foolish. Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” As a result, Herod’s hope was misplaced as he did not believe in God, nor have his wisdom or joy.

The Magi did not pursue the King of the Jews with an unjustified belief. No, the Magi sought the King of the Jews based on God’s prophecy. Together as a family, remember Christ came to give hope, and that hope rests upon a solid foundation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: As a family, sing “Away in a Manger.”

OLDER CHILD: Go outside one evening and stargaze together. Talk about what you’ve learned about the Magi, and how they showed their hope in God by following the star to Jesus.

TEENAGER: What can you do to make sure you are actively pursuing Christ in joyful worship? After sharing as a family, commit to everyone putting one of these strategies into practice this week.

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who came to give hope that rests upon a solid foundation.



PROMISE

week 2

SCRIPTURE: So the Lord God said to the serpent:
Because you have done this, you are cursed more than
any livestock and more than any wild animal. You will
move on your belly and eat dust all the days of your
life. I will put hostility between you and the woman, and
between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike
your head, and you will strike his heel.

— *Genesis 3:14-15*

QUOTE: “You cannot judge God by your calendar.
God may appear to be slow, but he never forgets his
promises. He may seem to be working very slowly or
even to be forgetting his promises, but when his
promises come true (and they will come true), they
always burst the banks of what you imagined. ... God’s
grace virtually never operates on our time frame, on a
schedule we consider reasonable.”

— *Tim Keller, Hidden Christmas*³

DAY 7

His Promises

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

ISAIAH 7:13-14

Have you ever tried to tell the future? Were you right?

The Bible says only God truly knows what will happen in the days ahead.

In this passage, we witness one of the most popular prophetic Scriptures used to describe the birth of Jesus. The word prophecy is defined as "being the prediction or foretelling of future events." In other words, prophecy means keeping a promise.

God is good at keeping His promises. Let's look at several ways God has kept His promises over thousands of years:

- God promised that Jesus would be born in the family line of King David (2 Samuel 7:12-13, Matthew 1:6, Luke 3:21).
- God predicted that Jesus would be born to a virgin named Mary (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23, Luke 1:27).
- An angel called Jesus "Immanuel," meaning "God with us," hundreds of years after Isaiah said that would be His name (Isaiah 7:13-14, Matthew 1:23).

The evidence speaks for itself. Just as God promised, Jesus was born in King David's family, He was born of a virgin and He came to earth to be Immanuel. Since all these predictions of the long-awaited Savior came true, Isaiah 7:13-14 is known as a prophetic passage.

God proves that He keeps His promises. He always has and always will. Therefore, we can trust God and confidently put our hope in Him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: What is one way you can remember Jesus is the reason we celebrate Christmas?

OLDER CHILD: Who is one person who needs to know the true meaning of Christmas? Pray together as a family about how you can approach them, and invite them to the Christmas service at your church.

TEENAGER: Think of three friends who do not have a relationship with Christ. Write their names on a piece of paper and put the paper in a place where you will see it every day (on your nightstand, in the bathroom, in your locker, etc.). Every time you see their names, ask the Lord to give you or someone else the opportunity to share the gospel with them.

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who perfectly fulfilled every promise made in the Old Testament.

DAY 8 My Beloved Son

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

PSALM 2:6-9

Maybe you've listened to a Christmas song on repeat this season. The Bible has a way of repeating itself, too. Some scholars estimate over 1,000 direct or indirect quotes from the Old Testament are found again in the New Testament.

As we read and study God's Word, it is always important to pay close attention to repeated words and phrases. In each case, the Bible is driving home an important truth.

In our devotional reading from Psalm 2, we discover one of those important repeated phrases: "You are My Son; today I have become your Father."

Luke and the author of Hebrews directly quote Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:33, Hebrews 1:5 and Hebrews 5:5. They clearly describe the unique relationship Jesus has with the Heavenly Father. However, the Holy Spirit did not stop there, but mentions Jesus as God's Son in many more passages throughout the Gospels.

We find several places in the Gospels where the Holy Spirit inspired the authors to drive home the fact that Jesus is God's Son even more. Notice these passages:

- Before Jesus' birth, the angel Gabriel announced to Mary, "the holy one to be born will be called the *Son of God*" (Luke 1:35, emphasis added).
- At Jesus' baptism, just before He began His public ministry, God declared from heaven, "This is *my beloved Son*, with whom I am well-pleased." (Matthew 3:17, emphasis added).
- When Peter, James and John were with Jesus on a high mountain during His transfiguration, God said from heaven, "This is *my beloved Son*, with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to Him!" (Matthew 17:5 ESV, emphasis added).

The Holy Spirit makes it abundantly clear that Jesus is greater than the angels, speaks with utmost authority and has an exclusive position with the Father. The One the Old Testament foretold is the One the New Testament confirms. Mary and Joseph's son was the promised Son of God.

Jesus, the Son of God, came to repair the brokenness that sin created. Jesus, the Son of God, came to live the life we could not live. Jesus, the Son of God, came to die the death we certainly deserved to die. Jesus, the Son of God, the little baby born in a manger, gives us reason to celebrate.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: What is one way you can celebrate the birth of Jesus?

OLDER CHILD: Read *Isaiah 9:6* together as a family. Invite your children to list out all the names of Jesus that are found inside this verse.

TEENAGER: As the Son of God, what does Jesus reveal to us about His Father?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who came to live the life we could not live.

DAY 9

Mindful of Us

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

PSALM 8:1-4

When David wrote Psalm 8, he could not get over the overwhelming majesty of the Lord. God's name, reputation and fame captivated him. The splendor of His glory in the heavens amazed him. As he continued writing, he began to compare the smallness and insignificance of man to the Almighty God. He wondered why a big, great God would be so mindful of such small beings – the human race.

The creation story helps us answer David's question. Genesis 1 describes man as being made in God's image, fashioned in His likeness. Adam and Eve, the first people on Earth, were His delight. God loved coming to the Garden of Eden and spending time with them.

Sadly, as we read on days one and two in our devotions, all that changed in Genesis 3 with the temptation and fall of man. God would no longer walk with His creation in that garden. Man's relationship with God was altered forever. However, the Lord would not leave humanity in this broken state of existence. He would send a Redeemer, a Savior, a baby – His promised Son.

All throughout the Old Testament, the prophets foretold the coming of God's Son:

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." (Micah 5:2, NIV)

"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." (Hosea 11:1, NIV)

God proved His incredible mindfulness of mankind with the arrival of Jesus. Through Him, the Lord made a way out of sin and back to Him. God's great love was put on display with His Son's life for the sake of our redemption.

As your family celebrates Jesus' arrival on Earth this Christmas, remember the way God has restored our relationship back to Him. As the Lord gives you opportunity, share the story of God's mindfulness of mankind with others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Ask your child to retell the Christmas story from Luke 2. If they stumble, help them with the big picture.

OLDER CHILD: As a family, look up and watch "The 3 Circles" video by No Place Left. Then, practice drawing out this simple gospel presentation, and discuss as a family how you can use this method with those who do not know Christ.

TEENAGER: Why is it so easy to listen to what the world says about us and forget about what God says about us? After discussing this with your family, take a moment and listen together to the song "Who You Say I Am" by Hillsong Worship.

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus and proving His incredible mindfulness of mankind.

DAY 10

Journey from Babylon

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

MATTHEW 2:9-11

On a long trip, you've probably asked your parents, "Are we there yet?" Think about the sense of pure joy you had when you reached that sought-after destination or long-standing goal.

We can imagine the Magi felt this way after completing their 900-plus mile journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. This trip takes only a few hours by plane, or two or three days by car. But for the Magi seeking the King of the Jews, it took over four months. No wonder they "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy."

Nowhere else in Scripture is there such an expanded and intense sense of joy recorded. Did this overwhelming joy spring from the journey's ending? Was it from finding the child? Notice it wasn't on the arrival at the house where the child was, but when they saw the star that the rejoicing began. What if this was not a journey of distance, but a journey of time?

In 539 B.C., an 80-year-old Israelite named Daniel lived in Babylon and received one of the greatest prophecies ever delivered. As one of the most illustrious Magi that Babylon had ever seen, he was honored and exalted by the greatest kings of his day. He received the 70-week prophecy from the angel Gabriel that foretold the coming of the Messiah (Daniel 9).

How often Daniel must have shared that astounding prophecy with the Magi of his day. It was the renown of Daniel that would have intrigued the long line of Magi that followed him.

Hundreds of years later, the Magis' exploration of the prophecy and Hebrew Scriptures caused them to begin their journey to Christ. The promise of Habakkuk the prophet rang clearly in the ears of the Magi as they traveled: "For the vision is yet for the appointed time; It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it carries, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay." (Habakkuk 2:3, NASB)

The celebration of Christmas confirms the fulfillment of all God's promises. Blessed are those that rejoice exceedingly with great joy at the fulfillment of the greatest prophecy: Jesus is coming again!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Make a box of pudding together. While you are waiting for the pudding to set, talk about how hard it is to wait for something you really want, like tasty pudding. Talk about how long the Magi had to wait to see King Jesus.

OLDER CHILD: When was the last time you went on a long car ride? How did you feel once you arrived at your destination? Can you imagine how long the four-month trip of the Magi must've taken?

TEENAGER: If you knew Jesus' second coming was happening in four months, would you live your life differently? If so, what would be different and why?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who fulfilled God's long-awaited promise.

DAY 11

Wonderful Counselor

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

ISAIAH 9:6-7

Praise God that a Child was born! Thank the Lord that He gave us His one and only Son, whose birthday we get to celebrate this season. Isaiah told us hundreds of years before Jesus' birth how He would grow up, live with us and be given the title Wonderful Counselor. What a glorious truth!

However, every Christmas we hear the words "Wonderful Counselor" and struggle to know their meaning and understand why Jesus was given this title. Pastor J.D. Greear, of the Summit Church in Durham, North Carolina, describes "Wonderful Counselor" in a unique way. He says,

Wonderful Counselor is two words in Hebrew. When translated, "Wonderful" means beyond understanding. It's a word you used when something was too wonderful for words. Isaiah said that when He comes, this Messiah would be beyond our words to describe Him. He is wonderful, glorious, magnificent, awesome — awesomer than all the words we use to say awesome.

The word translated "Counselor" means one who advises or instructs or guides, but from a position of authority. This is someone to whom you bring your worst problems and he shows you the way out.⁴

What problems are you facing? Do you need someone you can go to who will show you the way out of the worst situations? Yes! His name is Jesus.

The little baby born in Bethlehem was the promised One described by Isaiah. As His followers, we can bring all our problems, struggles, pains, sufferings and disappointments to Him. He loves us and cares about every part of our lives because He is the Wonderful Counselor.

This Christmas, thank the Lord for giving us a Wonderful Counselor who wants us to bring all of our problems and situations to Him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Did you know that you can pray to Jesus anytime and anywhere?

OLDER CHILD: When was the last time you prayed? How can you remember to take your worries to Jesus in prayer?

TEENAGER: What do you think keeps people from coming to Jesus with their problems? How does understanding Jesus as the Wonderful Counselor encourage you to go to Him in prayer more often?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who is the One we can go to who will show us the way out of our worst situations.

DAY 12

Always on Time

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

GALATIANS 4:4-5

Have you ever planned something very carefully? Whether you've worked on a school project, baked a treat or invited people to a party, all of these events take some thought and effort beforehand.

This week, we've seen in our devotional readings how the Lord used the writers of the Old Testament to tell us how He was planning to bring Jesus, our Savior, into the world. God kept every promise He made in the Old Testament by slowly revealing His faithfulness throughout the pages of the New Testament.

In Galatians 4:4-5, Paul begins by saying, "When the set time had fully come..." (NKJV). In seven words, Paul packs a lot of much needed truth that helps us understand God and His Word. All the while, he is affirming God's redemption story that the writers of the Old and New Testaments described. Paul helps us understand two important characteristics about God and His Word.

First, these words show us the accuracy of God's timing. From the time that Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden of Eden until Jesus was born, humanity experienced a great deal of pain, suffering and death because of sin. Fortunately, God knew man's limits. He knew when the time was right for Jesus to perfectly complete His plan. This shows that God is never early. He is never late. The Lord waits until everything is exactly in place before He decides to act. God is always on time.

Second, Paul uses this phrase is so he can remind the believers in Galatia — and us today — that God always keeps His promises. Just as the Gospel writers used words and phrases from the Old Testament to help us understand how God would fulfill His promises, Paul uses a verse from the book of Psalms to link both testaments together and remind us of God's faithfulness throughout all of Scripture. Consider the words of Psalm 102:13 (NKJV): "You will arise and have mercy on Zion; For the time to favor her, *Yes, the set time, has come*" (emphasis added).

Today, you and your family can rest in the fact that our Heavenly Father is always true to His Word, and He is always on time. Therefore, we can experience joy in our lives and in our homes.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Why do we talk about Jesus at Christmas?

OLDER CHILD: Get two pieces of fruit (like bananas) for an object lesson. If possible, find one banana that is yellow and ripe, and another that is green and unripe. Have your kids take a bite of each of the bananas. Ask, "Which banana tasted the best?" (Hopefully, they will choose the one that was ripe.) Then say, "The banana that tasted best was the one that was ripe." Fruit is best when it has finished ripening over time — then it is ready to eat. When Jesus came as a baby, the time was ripe and God was ready to send Him to be born in a manger.

TEENAGER: Oftentimes, we only think about what happened on Christmas, but not the why. Why do you think that is? How might having a gospel mindset change the way we celebrate Christmas?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who is always on time and brings joy to our lives and homes.



JOY

week 3

SCRIPTURE: In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 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.”

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!” — *Luke 2:8-14*

QUOTE: “The joy that Jesus came to bring is from outside this world. It is the very joy that Jesus himself has in God the Father — which he has had from all eternity and will have forever.”

— *John Piper, The Dawning of Indestructible Joy*⁵

DAY 13

Things Treasured

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

LUKE 2:15-20

Did you know the Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic? Or that today there are more than 6,000 languages in the world? That means the Bible needs to be translated into all those languages so people all over the world can hear about Jesus. Thankfully, the Lord is using a lot of people to complete this big job.

However, translating the Bible is hard work. This is especially true with today's devotional reading. A more practical way of writing this passage could be: "Mary took all the things that were being said about her newborn son and stored them away in a safe place, her memories. She then, as time would permit, would try to put them all together and attempt to make sense of them."

In other words, Mary was building her faith. Faith is built on the accumulation of what is learned, heard and experienced. These are held in our memories and then sorted out for truth. Ultimately, they result in our beliefs.

In Luke 1:31-33, Gabriel announced to Mary "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end."

In Luke 1:42, Elizabeth proclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and your child will be blessed!"

The shepherds excitedly shared in Luke 2:11-12, "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."

All these sayings would become the underpinnings of Mary's faith. That faith would ultimately be tested at the cross but fully rewarded when hearing, "He is risen!"

Christmas is the joyous beginning for all believers' faith. The Lord's continued interaction in the believer's life will shape that faith. But ultimately faith is founded on the things treasured and pondered in the heart.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Sing "Go Tell It on the Mountain" together as a family

OLDER CHILD: Close your eyes and pretend you were one of the shepherds celebrating the birth of Jesus. What would you hear? Smell? Feel?

TEENAGER: What do you treasure and ponder in your heart about your relationship with the Lord? How has this helped build your faith in Him?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who brings joy into our lives not only during Christmastime but every day.

DAY 14

Great Joy

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

LUKE 2:8-12

Imagine the scene: A group of ordinary men, working the night shift on a hillside outside of the city. The task of caring for their flock of sheep was the same this night as it had been for generations before. These shepherds were ordinary men doing a common task. Yet, this night would be anything but typical.

Luke explains that when the angel appeared and the glory of the Lord showed around them, these ordinary men were terrified. Their fear was so great that the angel's first words were, "Fear not." Shock, surprise, awe and amazement were likely just a few of the emotions this band of overseers experienced in those moments.

The angel's announcement didn't end there. The message given to these men that night was the greatest message ever relayed: "Good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people." The Prince of Peace came down that night in the form of a babe for all people. He came for those ordinary shepherds, the kings on their thrones, the young and old, friend and foe.

After the message was delivered and the heavenly host sang their praises, the shepherds responded in what was the only appropriate response: They went to find this baby. They believed, worshipped and then proclaimed what they had seen and heard.

Scripture does not record what happened to the shepherds after that wondrous night. It is probable that the next night found them back in that same field, watching over those same sheep. Yet nothing would ever truly be the same. As Luke 2:20 records, "The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them."

The joy of that announcement would be forever etched in their memories. Those men were likely transformed by the overwhelming peace they must have experienced as they peered into that manger.

Two thousand years later, the story holds that same transforming power. Those who hear the message and believe can walk in joy and peace. Like the shepherds, we can choose to believe, worship and proclaim this good news as we celebrate this Christmas season.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Sing “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” together as a family.

OLDER CHILD: How do you think you would feel or respond to seeing an angel? Would you laugh? Cry? Sing back?

TEENAGER: How does having faith in Christ give us joy and peace? What does this look like in your everyday life?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who offers everyone real joy and true peace when they put their faith and trust in Him.

DAY 15

Heartfelt Joy

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

LUKE 2:25-38

Today's technology is unbelievable. From self-driving cars to talking robots, our world is changing faster than ever before. What was only an idea a few years ago is now commonplace in our homes and workplaces. Technology has dramatically changed our lives.

Take having a baby, for instance. Moms and dads can go to a doctor's office and see images of their unborn baby. They can hear the heartbeat and find out if it's a boy or girl. Several decades ago that would not have been possible, and certainly not 2,000 years ago. However, for Mary and Joseph, no ultrasound was needed! They had something that no amount of technology could reproduce. This young couple had angelic visitors from the Lord.

The angel Gabriel personally came to Mary with the news that she would give birth to the Messiah. In a dream, Joseph was told by an angel to give the baby the name "Jesus." Wow! To be told that you will not only become parents but are going to be the earthly mom and dad of the long-awaited Savior ... talk about a gender reveal party!

The Bible describes many beautiful moments surrounding Jesus' birth. One of the sweetest encounters with the newborn King was when Simeon and Anna met Him. As Mary and Joseph were fulfilling the requirements prescribed by the Torah for their new baby, two unsuspecting people were given the opportunity to express their heartfelt joy. Consider the reactions of Simeon and Anna recorded in Scripture:

"Simeon took him up in his arms, praised God, and said, Now, Master, you can dismiss your servant in peace...." (Luke 2:28-29).

"At that very moment, she (Anna) came up and began to thank God and to speak about him to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38).

Simeon praised God as he held Jesus in his arms. Anna thanked God and immediately began to tell others about the Lord's plan for salvation. Are there any better responses to Jesus?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: What makes you happy? What is one thing you can do to help others be happy during Christmastime?

OLDER CHILD: How can you help your joy for Jesus overflow into others' lives this holiday season? As a family, brainstorm ways you can serve your community and share the joy of Jesus through service.

TEENAGER: Read John 15:1-11 with your family. As we abide in Jesus, what does He produce in and through us that fills us with His joy?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who gives us many reasons to express heartfelt joy.

DAY 16 Overcoming Darkness

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

ISAIAH 9:2-3

One of the most beloved traditions surrounding the celebration of Christmas is singing Christmas carols. For centuries, poets and composers have gathered inspiration from the story of Christ's birth and the joy, hope and peace that it provides. The lyrics of these hymns inspire and remind worshippers of the beauty of this birth. Phrases such as "a thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices" from the song "O Holy Night" proclaim that this is an epic tale.

Yet, this isn't just a beautiful story; it is the pivot point for humanity. People were walking in darkness, but God sent a great light. He made a way. Jesus left the glory of heaven to be born in a manger. The weary world rejoiced.

Weary. That is a word that many can relate to during the Christmas season. Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines "weary" as "exhausted in strength, endurance, vigor or freshness." This isn't just referring to ordinary fatigue; this is sheer exhaustion.

This world can certainly bring weariness. We grow weary of bills, busy schedules and complicated relationships. Sheer exhaustion feeds off of circumstances that seek to overwhelm us. In the midst of it all, we can easily forget that these things are temporary. The difficulties faced today will all pass away; and one day, every one of us will stand before our Creator and none of it will matter. None of it. The only thing that will matter in that moment is whether or not we chose to live our life surrendered to Him.

Managing the troubles of this life may be the current reality, but they will cease to exist. Meanwhile, rest can be found in Christ. Taking our burdens to Him and being refreshed by the truth found in His Word can restore the joy this world can so easily steal away. Strivings can be set aside when eyes are fixed on the eternal truth that there is reason to rejoice. In the end, light wins. Jesus overcame the darkness!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: As a family, sing “O Holy Night.”

OLDER CHILD: Together, sing or listen to “O Holy Night.” Then, talk through each verse of the song and the meaning behind them.

TEENAGER: What are some things that seem to take energy out of you? What are some things that give you energy? How can we find rest and refreshment in Christ?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who overcomes darkness and brings light into our lives, families and homes.

DAY 17

Marvelous Purpose

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

JOHN 13:34-35

As we reflect on the birth of Jesus, let's consider God's marvelous purpose for sending Jesus to Earth. Jesus lived a sinless life, took the punishment for every sin as He died on the cross, then rose from the grave, conquering sin and death. Therefore, all who believe are no longer separated from God by sin, but are forgiven, freed from sin, adopted as children of God and filled with Christ's joy.

Just as the Old Testament foretold, Jesus' marvelous purpose for coming was to rescue His people. His sacrificial love and willingness to take the punishment for sin is nothing short of amazing. As a result, we who believe are consumed with a deep desire to live in worship and joyful adoration of Jesus, our Savior.

So, as joy-filled followers of Christ, how do we live in worship and adoration? What transformation shows that Jesus is Lord of our life? Jesus answered that question when he was asked in Luke 22 which commandment in the law was the greatest. He responded, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (v. 37) and to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (v. 39). Through the power of the Holy Spirit inside of us, living in worship means learning how to love.

That same sacrificial love that brought Jesus to Earth and compelled Him to the cross now fills our hearts and overflows onto everyone around us. People will notice how different this love is: patient, kind, humble, forgiving and enduring. This love always looks for the best in others; it cares for others more than self and is full of joy.

When we love one another in this way, it is actually Jesus loving through us. We're continuing to live out Jesus' purpose for coming to Earth, and are telling the world that Jesus is still here to rescue His people.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Sing "Jesus Loves Me" together.

OLDER CHILD: Read Matthew 22:37-39. Come up with hand motions to help memorize this verse together.

TEENAGER: Share how Jesus has transformed you. Be sure to include what you were like before Christ, how you came to know Him, and what life is like now that you know Christ as your Lord and Savior.

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who transforms lives.

DAY 18 Overflowing with Joy

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

LUKE 1:26-33

Have you ever been afraid? Fear is a powerful emotion. Sometimes we are afraid of scary movies, bad storms, dangerous animals or unexpected sounds we hear at night. From our reading today, when we put ourselves in Mary's position, it is not hard to understand why she was afraid.

In Mary's situation, fear was a natural response when the angel Gabriel appeared to her. At her young age, nothing had prepared her for this moment.

It is OK to be afraid of some things. The Lord has given us this emotion to help and protect us. Fear is a natural reaction designed to keep us safe when we find ourselves in a potentially dangerous situation.

Fortunately, Gabriel's visit was not a dangerous situation. He was sensitive to her emotions and eased her fears. Within moments, Mary's fright melted away. She was able to focus on the wonderful news he had come to deliver — she would give birth to the Son of God. Gabriel declared, "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus" (Luke 1:31).

Gabriel's message brought Mary comfort. Her fear was gone and her heart overflowed with joy. As she had time to reflect and recall all that happened to her, Mary confidently said, "My soul praises the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior..." (Luke 1:46b-47).

Thankfully, Mary was able to receive the wonderful message Gabriel came to deliver. She fought through her fear and did not let it distract her from hearing the good news Gabriel came to bring. With Christmas only a few days away, are you able to hear the wonderful, good news about the baby Mary would name Jesus? What distractions are keeping you and your family from experiencing true joy this Christmas?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: When you are afraid, what makes you feel brave?

OLDER CHILD: How do you fight fear? Commit to memorizing Psalm 56:3.

TEENAGER: How does knowing you are in Christ help you overcome your fear?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who offers overwhelming joy to all His children.



LOVE

week 4

SCRIPTURE: Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. — *1 John 4:7-10*

QUOTE: "He loves us not because there is something in us that attracts Him to us; He loves us because He determined to love us in spite of our unattractiveness. ... It's a love we don't deserve, a love that will never end. It's a love that perseveres even when we fail Him."
— *John MacArthur, Brave Dad*⁶

DAY 19

Love Beautifully Defined

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

1 JOHN 4:9-10

We can describe love in many ways. We love our pets. We love our moms and dads. We love ice cream. We love Christmas. We could go on and on because we love many things. However, how would God describe the word “love”? God shows us the real meaning of love through His Son’s birth in Bethlehem and His death on the cross.

The Lord beautifully defines love by what He gave at Christmas more than 2,000 years ago. God gave His Son, Jesus. God trusted Mary and Joseph to raise His Son. Jesus’ parents taught Him to love and serve the Lord. Throughout His earthly life, Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life.

However, sin caused a big problem with having a relationship with God. God is perfect and holy — without sin. We, on the other hand, have sin in our lives. Therefore, to have a relationship with God, we need someone perfect and holy to stand in our place. We need a substitute who loves us the same way God loves us. As we discussed on days one and two, that substitute was Jesus.

It was a sacrifice for God to send Jesus to Earth and allow Him to be crucified for our sins. God lovingly placed our sins on His innocent Son at the cross. Instead of making us pay for our own sins, Jesus took our punishment and died the death we deserved. Because of God’s great love for us, He sent Jesus in our place.

Charles Spurgeon once said, “If there was to be reconciliation between God and man, man ought to have sent to God; the offender ought to be the first to apply for forgiveness; the weaker should apply to the greater for help; the poor man should ask of him who distributes alms; but ‘Herein is love’ that God ‘sent.’ He was first to send an embassy of peace.”⁷

God wants a relationship with you and your family. He sent Jesus to demonstrate to the world the unfathomable depth of His love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Who do we celebrate on Christmas? Why is it important?

OLDER CHILD: Who is one person you can commit to sharing Jesus with before next Christmas? Come up with a plan on how to get to know them better and to share the gospel with them.

TEENAGER: The greatest present we could ever receive is Jesus. Spend time today as a family thanking God for His great gift.

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who shows us what true love is all about.

DAY 20

True Light

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

JOHN 1:4-5, 8:12

When driving through a neighborhood or walking in a mall during the Christmas season, children love to point out all the beautiful Christmas lights and decorations. They are always excited and thrilled to see the many colors and ornaments. In truth, many adults would say the same thing. There is just something about all the lights during this time of year that brings much-needed light to our dark world.

There are many places the Bible describes Jesus as being light in the darkness.

- Matthew 4:16 says, “The people who live in darkness have seen a great light, and for those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.”
- As you recall from day 15, Luke describes Simeon’s first reaction as he looks at the newborn Christ child for the first time. In Luke 2:32, Simeon says, “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel.”
- John 1:9 describes Jesus as, “The true light that gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.”

All throughout Scripture, we see Jesus as the beautiful picture and symbol of light. The Bible is clear that those who put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior will not walk in darkness. As His followers, we can rest in knowing that Jesus brings His light into the lives of those who have surrendered to Him. When we give our lives to Christ, we walk in His light and not in the darkness of the world.

While the Lord gives us this light for many reasons, one of the most important reasons we have this light is to share it with those walking in the darkness — those who are far from Christ. Ask the Lord to give you the opportunity to share the light of Jesus with your family, your neighbors and others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Sing “This Little Light of Mine” together.

OLDER CHILD: As a family, consider who you can share Jesus with in your neighborhood. Purchase a Christmas candle and gift the candle to this neighbor. Pray that God provides you the opportunity to share the light of Christ through this gift.

TEENAGER: What are some ways you can be a light to those around you? As a family, choose one way and put it into action this week.

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who gives us a reason to share the gospel with our family, extended family, our neighbors and those all around us.

DAY 21

God's Great Love

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-8A, 13

What would happen if you mistakenly tried to put a fresh set of contact lens in your eyes while still wearing your old ones? Most likely, your eyes would quickly become irritated and everything around you would be distorted and blurry. However, if you took the old contact lenses out and put the new ones in, everything would become clear and focused.

In all of Paul's letters, he helps us see how to live our lives with clarity and focus. He says in today's devotion, "Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love — but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13). Why is love the greatest? Why does Paul want us to focus on love so much?

Love is one of God's many attributes. In 1 John 4:8, the Bible says that God is love. The word for love used in both of these verses comes from the Greek word "agape". This kind of love is self-giving and expects nothing in return. Agape is the God-kind of focused love.

God shows His focused love in many ways, but none better than when He sent Jesus to be born in a manger. Jesus came to live the life we could not live. Because of God's great love, Jesus died in our place. He died the death we deserved. What an amazing, loving gift God has given!

But if Paul wants us to primarily focus on love, why does he also mention faith and hope? He is not downplaying these two words. While we live on this Earth, we need faith and hope desperately. It is not until we reach heaven that faith and hope will have fulfilled their purpose. In heaven, love will last forever. Until then, we cannot live without faith and hope. No one can. Especially those who are far from God and do not have a relationship with Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: What is one way you can show love to a family member today?

OLDER CHILD: Give each family member a sheet of paper and writing tool. Set the timer for two minutes. Have each member write down everything they think of when they hear the word "hope." Once the time stops, repeat the exercise with the word "faith." Once more, repeat the steps with the word "love." Then, discuss as a family and refer back to what you studied in today's devotion.

TEENAGER: How does godly love differ from worldly love? Is faith and hope possible apart from godly love? Why or why not?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who showed us what agape love looks like.

DAY 22 Humble Worshippers

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

MATTHEW 2:10-11

One of the greatest parts of this season is giving gifts to our family and friends. Seeing the excitement and joy on the faces of our loved ones opening their presents is priceless. In Matthew 2, the Magi from the East gave several impressive and expensive gifts to Jesus and His family. As wonderful as it was to give Him their gold, frankincense and myrrh, there was a far greater gift given that day.

Of course, Mary and Joseph appreciated receiving the extravagant gifts these men brought. Jesus' parents would use them to help provide food, clothes and other necessities for their home.

God also provided these gifts for Jesus and His family for other reasons. He knew they would soon be making a trip to Egypt to protect His Son from King Herod. Herod was an insecure, power-hungry ruler in Israel at the time. He would not tolerate competition from anyone who wanted to call themselves "king." Therefore, God had everything under control, and the Magi brought gifts at just the right time.

However, the gift that God delighted in most was not the gold, frankincense or myrrh, but their gift of genuine, humble worship. Seeing these dignitaries fall on their knees to worship Jesus must have been a remarkable sight for Mary and Joseph. The weary travelers wasted no time in expressing their love and adoration for the King of Glory. They were captivated by their Creator, overtaken by their Redeemer and in awe of their King — the King of the Jews. They wanted nothing more than to be in His presence. God was now flesh and living among men.

These Magi would not miss out on the opportunity to worship the Christ child. No amount of money or distance would keep these VIPs from the chance to worship the King of kings.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Close your eyes and pretend that you are one of the Magi. Describe what you may have seen and heard.

OLDER CHILD: When was a time you gave your all in worship? What factors helped that happen? What obstacles seem to get in the way of always worshipping that way? Why?

TEENAGER: What is the most precious gift you have ever received? Why was it so special?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who is the best gift the world could ever receive.

DAY 23

Obedient Love

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

MATTHEW 2:13-15

As Christmas Day approaches, many moms and dads try to determine whether their children are deserving of the toys they have requested. Did they obey well? How was their attitude while obeying?

When a parent tells their child to do something, it needs to be obeyed — especially in safety situations. Why? The answer is simple. The parent loves them and wants to keep them safe. That is why God spoke to Joseph in his dream.

The point of today's reading is to bring attention to Joseph's response of obedience to God's command. Indeed, the apostle John communicated this idea well. He wrote, "For this is what love for God is: to keep his commands. And his commands are not a burden" (1 John 5:3). Similarly John later writes in 2 John 1:6, "This is love: that we walk according to his commands. This is the command as you have heard it from the beginning: that you walk in love."

God calls us to show our love for Him by obeying the commands in His Word. While giving a sermon titled "The Fatherhood of God," Charles Spurgeon said,

"It is not for me to rise up and go in rebellion against His wishes. If He be a father, let me note His commands, and let me reverentially obey. If He has said "Do this," let me do it, not because I dread Him, but because I love Him. And if He forbids me to do anything, let me avoid it."⁸

Let us love and obey the One who gives great commands, which are only given out of love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Sing “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” together.

OLDER CHILD: As a family, sing or listen to “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen.” Talk through each stanza and the meaning behind it.

TEENAGER: How does having certain rules show us that we are loved?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who loves us and has given us His Word to study and obey.

DAY 24

Love Poured Out

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

MATTHEW 1:22-23

When people are sick, they become appreciative of those who are there for them. You've probably heard stories of children in hospitals who were encouraged by visitors. Regardless of whether they are there to help treat the child or lift their spirits, the one factor that remains is that someone was *with* them.

Similarly, God loves us and wants to be with us. But this desire does not mean that He is in need of us or anything else, for that matter. As we learned in the first week of our study, God desires to have a relationship with us.

Why would a holy, all-powerful, all-knowing God even want to have a relationship with anyone from the human race? People can be sinful, weak and, most of the time, a lot of trouble.

Charles Spurgeon beautifully explains God's heart and purpose when He sent His Son to come as a man and be with us. Sending Jesus shows:

1. How low God bent down to save man. He added the nature of one of His own creatures to His own divine nature, accepting the weaknesses, frailties and dependency that the creature experiences.
2. What a great miracle it was that God could add a human nature to His own and still remain God.
3. The compatibility between the unfallen human nature and the divine nature; that the two could be joined shows that we are truly made in the image of God.
4. That we can come to Him; if He has come to us, then we can come to Him.⁹

What an incredible God! He truly wants a relationship with His creation. He wants it so much that He is the one who has made the path possible. That path is called His Son, Jesus. This Christmas Eve, why not come to Him? You and your entire family. What are you waiting for? God is with us — and you!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Make a get well soon card for someone in your neighborhood who is sick as a way to tell them about Jesus.

OLDER CHILD: Consider someone in your community who is sick or in need of help. As a family, cook and deliver a meal for this person as a way to share the gospel.

TEENAGER: Oftentimes, nursing homes can be a lonely place, especially during the holidays. If possible, go with your family to a local nursing home and spend time with someone who is lonely there. Afterward, discuss the experience with each other.

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who truly loves us and is always here for us.

DAY 25

Celebrating the Birth

As you sit at home, meal time or bedtime reading.

JOHN 3:16-18

Every parent knows that life changes when their first child is born. They feel the weight and responsibility of parenthood as they bring their firstborn home. At the same time, they have irresistible love for the baby in their arms. This baby has not done anything to earn their love. Instead, parents have an unconditional, freely given, endless love for their child. It is through the lens of parents' love for their child(ren) that we can only begin to understand the incredible depth of love that God has for us.

Today, Christmas Day, we celebrate the birth of Jesus and the amazing events that unfolded among the shepherds, angels, and Mary and Joseph. We also celebrate the reason God the Father sent His Son to us in the form of a little baby in Bethlehem. God sent Jesus to Earth on a mission.

Jesus' mission was to restore what sin destroyed. Jesus went to the cross and died a brutal, humiliating death to reconcile us with God.

Could you ever send your child to a place where you knew they would experience pain and suffering? Could you send your child to live among people who would torture and kill him or her? Could you love someone enough to sacrifice your own child for that person's life? Thankfully we do not have to make that choice. But, praise the Lord, God did!

The Lord kept His promises and lovingly sent His Son so that all who make Him the Lord of their lives could experience hope and joy now and for eternity. God's grace changed the fate for all mankind when Jesus was born. Jesus' birth is worth celebrating. Merry Christmas!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: How did you celebrate your last birthday? What was your favorite part? How can we celebrate Jesus' birthday with just as much fun this Christmas?

OLDER CHILD: Can you remember a favorite birthday celebration? What made the celebration so special? How can we incorporate part of that celebration into our Christmas plans?

TEENAGER: What would you be willing to give up in order to help people know Jesus? How would giving that up help others know Him?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who gives us today to celebrate His birthday.

NOTES

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