



# AD VE NT

DAILY  
DEVOTIONAL

# WELCOME

This Advent devotional is designed to give a daily space for connection with God as we prepare for the holy day of Christmas! The team at Vineyard USA has compiled this daily devotional with imagery, songs, scripture, and devotions from diverse voices around our Vineyard churches. Our invitation is that you would enjoy the beauty of the unique expressions, and stylistic variety of this collection. Traditionally, Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas every year. This means that every year the total number of days of Advent ranges from 22-28 days. This Advent devotional has 29 days of worship & Sabbath reflections, devotions, and visio divina exercises. No matter which year and how many days it takes to reach Christmas Day, please engage the bonus material at your own pace. We pray that you would approach every day, not to get something from God, but to simply be with Him. Every week revolves around a traditional Advent theme of HOPE, PEACE, JOY, and LOVE.



## WORSHIP & SABBATH REFLECTION

To begin each week of Advent, we have compiled opportunities for Sabbath reflection and worship through song. During these times, we hope that you will reflect on the lyrics, and hear how the Spirit speaks to you through each song. We pray your Sabbath experiences throughout the Advent season will be a sanctuary for you - to rest and recover from all the busyness that can come with this season.

## VISIO DIVINA

Sprinkled throughout are four Visio Divina (“divine seeing”) devotionals, an ancient practice of reflection by the use of visual imagery. In the same way someone can walk into an art museum and have “an experience” looking at a beautiful piece of art, we can trust that God has made us to enjoy and appreciate beauty through various creative expressions. We also have included in these devotionals, unique pieces of art that give us the artist’s interpretation of a moment of Christ’s birth.



The One who has come and will come, the One who rules.

# WEEK ONE : DAY ONE

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## SABBATH REFLECTION

We enter into this first Sunday of the Advent season, turning our attention to You, God. We acknowledge the darkness that is within us, and that permeates the world.

**Father, forgive us.**

We acknowledge the suffering, tragedy, and pain by which humanity is afflicted, which seems at times to overwhelm us.

**Draw near to us, oh God.**

We consider the mystery of your ways, that you might choose to send our Savior as an innocent baby and not as a warrior or a king; as one who humbly accepted suffering and humiliation and called it glory.

**Our hope is in Jesus Christ, the Messiah.**

We choose in this moment to focus our attention on HOPE; the hope of Jesus Christ and all His coming represents for suffering people, the hope for restoration of all that is broken in the world, the hope of new life and resurrection.

**Hope is the light we wish to see by.**

Grant, oh God, that when he comes, Christ may find us waiting in expectation, our souls quieted, our hearts soft and open.

**We wait in hope for the Lord.**

In Christ all things are made new, and we look forward to the day our hope is fulfilled, each heart reconciled, the work of Christ completed in all the earth.

**Our hope is in Jesus Christ, the Messiah.**

**Amen**

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# WEEK ONE : DAY TWO

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## WORSHIP REFLECTION

The Lord inhabits our worship. Enter this reflection by settling for a moment and inviting God's presence.

As we continue with the theme of Hope, the song this week is *Humble King*. The lyrics are moving and reflect the hope we have that God uses simple, humble people from unexpected places to accomplish His holy, redemptive purposes. Read through the lyrics slowly and notice what messages are highlighted to you. Use the link to listen to the song and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you into hopeful worship with Him.

**Humble King**  
by Brenton Brown

Oh, kneel me down again, here at Your feet  
Show me how much You love humility  
Oh, Spirit be the star that leads me to  
The humble heart of love I see in You

You are the God of the broken, friend of the weak  
You wash the feet of the weary, embrace the ones in need  
I want to be like you Jesus, to have this heart in me  
You are the God of the humble  
You are the humble King

Here in the dusty ground, I bow with kings  
Where wise men laid before their offerings  
I lay no golden crown here at your feet.  
Just this my broken life I offer thee

Listen here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQkLeZTuvqQ>

# WEEK ONE : DAY THREE

SHARON MCCARTER | SOUTHEAST REGIONAL LEADER

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## HOPE

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**SCRIPTURE:** “For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” Galatians 5:5-6

**DEVOTIONAL:** When I think back to my childhood, all of my memories of Christmas were good, *like really good*. Christmas was the time my family shined. We sang carols, hosted parties, roasted marshmallows, wrapped gifts, and went to candlelight services. Then, as the grand finale, we would wake up on Christmas morning to the sight of piles and piles of presents that overflowed from underneath our tree and way out into the family room ...it was completely magical.

My parents remember all of that but, unfortunately, they also remember the constant frustration of having to deal with my brother and me fighting all the time and not getting along over those long Christmas holidays. It got so bad that they resorted to posting an actual “Naughty & Nice List” on our refrigerator. In a moment of desperation, my parents wanted my brother and me to “earn” the gifts that they were giving us. But in the end, they were always going to give us the gifts they had for us, regardless of how we behaved. Keeping score didn’t work because 1) no matter how much we tried, we just could not stay off the naughty list and 2) they knew they would give us all the gifts they had for us no matter what the list actually said. It turns out, they were really just giving us gifts because they loved us, not because we deserved them. So, in that sense, it was the Gospel.

The Gospel is all about the fact that we were all on the “naughty list”. We all mess up. However, in spite of all of that, we were all given the greatest gift of all ... Jesus! And through Jesus comes gift after gift after gift the gift: of grace, salvation, redemption, righteousness, and so much more. Through Jesus, the gifts just keep on coming! And here’s the thing: not one of them is deserved. Not one of them is earned. That’s why it’s called a GIFT.

**REFLECTION:** Read the following verses and reflect on the truth that the Gospel is not about us earning or deserving anything, but about accepting the free gift of Jesus. Check out the following verses that reveal this free gift:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the FREE GIFT of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23 ESV

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a GIFT through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Romans 3:23 ESV

And there are so many more that show the reason that we have HOPE is that salvation is not based on our performance. Our HOPE is in Christ alone. So, rather than being tied up in trying to earn God’s love, take time to receive God’s love so that you will be *freed up* to live a life that **is not** about earning love, but is about generous, gift-giving love. God’s love is undeserved and extravagantly bestowed to YOU.

# WEEK ONE : DAY FOUR

RUBÉN QUINTERO | HISPANIC ASSOCIATION LEADER

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## HOPE

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**SCRIPTURE:** “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf.” Hebrews 6:19-20a

**DEVOTIONAL:** Ensenada is a beautiful port city in Baja, California. I love going there during the summer (I know, it’s cold days now and summer feels far away, but it will surely come back). On some occasions, we have gone fishing in the Pacific Ocean and the experience can be wonderful. However, on one of those occasions, the ocean was not so peaceful. Our boat was moved by the waves with such force that all the passengers felt so small (and so dizzy) that we feared that the boat could capsize. That was not pleasant at all, on the contrary, it was a bit scary. That day fishing was scarce, but we were all grateful to return to the mainland.

How can a ship stand firm in the sea when the wind blows? What does it need in order not to drift because of the waves? Ships have been around for many centuries and a fundamental element for any of them is the anchor. This is usually a very heavy item that is attached to a chain, thrown into the water, and buried in the bottom of the sea in such a way that the ship does not move. Therefore, its function is clear: to make the ship remain still despite the currents.

Hebrews 6:19 says: “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.” If our soul is a ship that God has made, He did not forget to put an anchor so that our soul is firm and safe against the currents that could lead it adrift. Hope, in the permanent and unalterable promise of salvation through Jesus Christ, is the anchor that keeps us stable, safe, and firm.

Certainly, there are days that we feel that our souls can sink into the sea of our problems or the struggles that we face. We can be afraid to see the waves so big around us. Yet, now is the season of Advent, the season when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. The season is designed to remind us that the Father sent us a Savior. Our Savior Jesus stopped the wind and the storm when His disciples feared drowning in the Sea of Galilee. He is still calming the storms in our lives every day.

Hebrews 6 says that our hope is in the promise of salvation given by God through Jesus Christ, and we are encouraged to know that the Lord has made a covenant that will remain unchanged. Christmas reminds us that God became a man in Jesus to give us that hope.

**REFLECTION:** At what moments in your life do you feel that your soul needs to launch the anchor of hope to stand firm? Why do you think the Holy Spirit wants you to remember today that you are saved by God’s grace?

# WEEK ONE : DAY FIVE

## 2 MINUTES OF SILENCE & STILLNESS BEFORE GOD

**SCRIPTURE:** “Once when Zechariah’s division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord.” Luke 1:8-15a

**VISIO DIVINA:** Center yourself by taking a deep breath and relaxing your body as best you can. Allow your shoulders to lower away from your ears. Let your arms rest in your lap and let your feet be fully supported by the floor. Feel the weight of your body held by the chair. Spend this time quietly. Open yourself up to God’s voice.

### **Brief pause.**

Take a deep breath in and out. Continue breathing deeply as you read the image on the next page. At this moment, simply notice the visual qualities of what you see: colors, line, shape, form, space, and texture.

### **Brief pause.**

Now, take a deeper look. What parts of the image on the next page are your eyes most drawn to? What parts of the image did you quickly brush by or overlook? Observe your own emotions. How does this image make you feel?

Imagine yourself in this piece. What are the places in your life where you are waiting for God to meet you or answer your prayers? What do you do when it seems that God isn’t answering your prayers? What happens when God meets you in unexpected ways? Where are the places that you are still waiting in hope? Ask the Holy Spirit to bring comfort in places where you have given up hope or are still waiting.

## 2 MINUTES OF SILENCE & PRAYER

# WEEK ONE : DAY FIVE

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## VISIO DIVINA

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# WEEK ONE : DAY SIX

MIKE SAFFORD | SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA REGIONAL LEADER

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## HOPE

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**SCRIPTURE:** “For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you. Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.” Isaiah 64:3-4

**DEVOTIONAL:** As we enter this Advent season, pause to consider this for a moment: how would life be different had God always granted exactly what you asked, exactly when you asked for it? Who can blame us for wanting to see God’s might and capability that “no eye has seen”? Yet we want to “see” them pointed in specific directions of our choosing and preference. We easily slip into relating to God like a distant benefactor, living two turns past Neptune (the planet), who lobs down breakthroughs and miracles whenever necessary. Of course, we don’t think of it this way. But after years of pastoring, fathering, husbanding, friending, and more, I can say with great confidence that my posture toward God is all too often akin to divine customer service: “Just give me what I know I need now, Lord.” However, I can say with equal confidence that had God acquiesced to my deeply held opinions, I would still be named Mike, but be an entirely different person.

An overarching theme throughout the entire body of scripture is God’s capacity for surprise. Moses is shocked by God’s intended pathway for his people. Isaiah is confident that he’s unworthy to be the mouthpiece of God. Peter confidently rebukes Jesus when he announces they’re heading toward Jerusalem. Our propensity, like these heroes of the faith, is to say, “No God, not that way... not like that... not right now”. Yet, as God graciously leads us according to His wisdom, desire, and intent (Jer 29:11), we inevitably will encounter moments or seasons where we are confused or downright appalled by how/where He is leading. Surprise is a natural byproduct of not being in charge. It reminds us of our dependence. It reaffirms that God is present in our story, not to be a resource, but to be its confident, unmatched King.

The Advent season is designed as a remembrance of God arriving as a baby, in a surprising way, and then through that baby, invites us to freedom and life. The Advent season is consistent with God’s repeated emphasis, all through Scripture, on His wisdom and capacity to lead where He knows we need to go. If you’re in a season right now of shock, pain, surprise, or the like, let the surprising leadership of Jesus fill your soul with HOPE. You may not know where the story is going, but your Heavenly Father knows exactly what He’s doing with you.

**REFLECTION:** As you think about how God has surprised you with twists and turns that were hard, but good, how has that formed resilient HOPE in you?

# WEEK ONE : DAY SEVEN

THE VINEYARD USA TEAM

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## HOPE

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**SCRIPTURE:** "There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off." Proverbs 23:18

**DEVOTIONAL:** There are times when hope burns bright like a torch in the darkness, lighting the way ahead. Other times hope is a bit more controlled, like the fire in the burner of a hot air balloon. When focused on a target, hope can lift you above the circumstances and give you a different perspective. Then there are the times when hope seems more like a candle in the wind, hard to grasp...difficult to keep burning.

In our family, birthdays are a thing. A BIG thing. The house gets decorated for each child and the cake and candles are the highlight of the evening. This year was the big 5 for my youngest and we had high hopes for this event. She invited her friends to a party in the park. As we finished up the tea party, the sun shone brightly. The friends were all gathered, poised, and ready to sing to the birthday girl. The moment I grabbed the lighter and reached for the candles the wind picked up. Decorations, plates, napkins, and even the lid to the cake box took flight. No matter how many times I tried to light the candle, the wind blew it out. I was just about to give up and sing Happy Birthday without the candles (which would have been a real letdown) when another mom came to the rescue. She grabbed the box lid and placed it behind the candle to block the wind. I quickly lit the flame with gratitude. Trust me when I say, you've never heard the Happy Birthday song sung so quickly and with such enthusiasm. Praise God! Crisis averted.

Have you ever been there? You have high hopes for what God is doing in your life and ministry. You are trying to do the next good thing - Love well, serve well, and hold onto hope, but the wind seems to be working against you. You get a little flame only to have it snuffed out.

Friend, the Father knows your hope seems small. He comes as a shield, your glory, and the One who lifts your head. Take a moment, and allow the Father to lift your gaze toward Jesus. Receive the light of His countenance upon you. Allow the Holy Spirit to reignite the flame in your heart to burn brightly once again, especially during this holiday season.

**REFLECTION:** In what areas of your heart do you need the Father to be a shield and restore your hope? Take a moment to fix your eyes on Jesus and receive the hope that comes from His Spirit.



Though the Nations rebel against the rule of God's  
anointed, He will rule them and subdue them.

# WEEK TWO : DAY ONE

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## SABBATH REFLECTION

Oh Great God, we are gathered here, Your people, seeking out Your face and the peace that is found in Your Presence.

**Let us dwell always in Your presence, and walk in Your peace.**

When humanity opened the door to sin, we were plunged into darkness and despair. But You, Loving God, have made peace with us and restored us to grace.

**For Your infinite mercy and lovingkindness, we thank You.**

You sent Your son Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, into the world as a human to save and heal Your children who were lost. The light of peace came into the world.

**We who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace!**

We prepare our hearts now and acknowledge that Christ's work on the cross was the beginning of Your kingdom here on earth. Your kingdom is a peaceable kingdom, where lion and lamb may lie down together, where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female. We are all one in the peace of Christ.

**May the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, and may we carry the light of peace wherever we go.**

**Amen.**

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# WEEK TWO : DAY TWO

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## WORSHIP REFLECTION

The Lord inhabits our worship. Enter this reflection by settling for a moment and inviting God's presence.

As we continue with the theme of Peace, the song this week is the medley of a traditional hymn and a Vineyard Worship song: *Silent Night | Peace*. The lyrics are beautifully blended and express the peace God offered the world through the birth of Jesus. Read through the lyrics slowly and notice what messages are highlighted to you. Use the link to listen to the song and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you into peaceful worship with Him.

### Silent Night | Peace

by Casey Corum, Franz Xaver Gruber, Joseph Mohr, John Freeman Young

Silent night holy night, all is calm all is bright  
Round yon virgin mother and Child, Holy Infant so tender and mild  
Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace

Peace, Your peace so sweet. My burdens down at Your feet  
My soul finds rest how I need Your peace

Silent night holy night, shepherds quake at the sight  
Glories stream from heaven afar, heavenly hosts sing alleluia  
Christ the Savior is born. Christ the Savior is born

Peace, Your peace so sweet. My burdens down at Your feet  
My soul finds rest how I need Your peace

Silent night holy night. Son of God love's pure light  
Radiant beams from Thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace  
Jesus Lord at Thy birth. Jesus Lord at Thy birth

Breathe in peace, breathe out strife  
Breathe out death, breathe in life  
Breathe in love, breathe out hate  
Breathe out fear, breathe in faith

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4boPBsvvIM>

# WEEK TWO : DAY THREE

DANY & LETTY MERCADO | MIDWEST NORTH REGIONAL LEADERS

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## PEACE

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**SCRIPTURE:** “When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” John 4:7-10

**DEVOTIONAL:** Peace is often elusive. We might even wonder what peace truly is. Yet God is always working in our lives to draw us to Himself and His Peace. Being rejected. Being ignored. Feeling empty. Feeling that we don't belong. These are common feelings. Negative feelings. Hard experiences can drive us to the very ONE who can satisfy the longings in our souls. As we search for belonging and look for connection, we might find ourselves in the embrace of Jesus who grants us the peace that we long for.

We tend to think and believe that even the good gifts God gives us in His infinite grace, will be our source of satisfaction and fulfillment. If we are honest, we have learned that even after seeking and obtaining the things we thought would give us peace, satisfaction, fulfillment, or a sense of belonging, we are still left with the question: Is this all?

It is here, where the beautiful reality of Shalom (Peace) finds us and tells us: “If you only knew the gift that God has for you and who you are talking to.” (This is verse 10 of our scripture today). Peace is not a concept. It is a person. And that person is Jesus Christ.

Peace is a gift; Jesus is that gift in which we can find everything we have longed for. In Him, we are never rejected. In Him, we are never ignored. In Him, we will always belong. In Him, is love that satisfies for real and forever.

In this Advent season, Jesus, the Prince of Peace, invites us to live a life of shalom in Him.

**REFLECTION:** Have you considered what blessings or good things have become your source of peace, instead of Jesus? What has stolen your peace in this season of your life? As you reflect on your answers, take a moment to breathe in and out. As you breathe, remember that Jesus is right here, right now with you. As you breathe, feel the peace settle on you and within you. Find today's portion of peace with Him.

# WEEK TWO : DAY FOUR

MELANIE FORSYTHE-LEE | WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION LEADER

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## PEACE

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**SCRIPTURE:** “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.” Isaiah 9:6-7a

**DEVOTIONAL:** Years ago, when my children were small, I found myself in HomeGoods, searching for the perfect picture to hang in our newly updated bathroom. In the midst of all the options, my son found a sign that had an abstract painting of a dove with the word ‘Peace’ printed beneath it. I brought it home with me because I so desperately needed some of that peace, but hanging that sign in my bathroom did little to change the atmosphere of my chaotic and busy home. We hurry past tie-dyed peace sign shirts to buy Christmas decor declaring “Peace on Earth”, and all the while, the store is playing the Beatles song ‘Give Peace a Chance’ over the speakers. If peace could be achieved by simply naming it, wearing it, or singing it, we would be full of peace, but we are not. The truth is, peace is not passive. In your life, there is almost nothing you will fight harder for than peace.

I think it’s fascinating that the prophetic scripture about Jesus we are meditating on today *connects peace with governance*. To govern well, you must be actively engaged and responsive to the environment you are called to lead. For Jesus, Prince of Peace wasn’t just a title He gave himself. Jesus *WAS* peace. The responsibility of peace was one Jesus placed on His shoulders, and He carried that peace into every situation He entered. I spent decades trying to escape my everyday life to find peace, blaming everyone and everything for my frazzled and exhausted existence. It took years of unlearning to discover that I was not a victim in this peaceless existence and then accept the invitation to partner with the Holy Spirit in cultivating peace both internally and externally.

Chaos and confusion are the weeds of life. They need no invitation, moving in and taking over every patch of dirt they find. Peace is something we intentionally sow, actively clearing out the weeds of chaos and planting the seeds of peace instead. This Advent, wage peace, not chaos.

**REFLECTION:** What is one area of your life/influence that the Holy Spirit is inviting you to actively wage peace?

As you identify your “one area”, ask the Lord to show you what “seeds of peace” you can begin to plant there. What prayers, thoughts, or actions will be your seeds of peace?

# WEEK TWO : DAY FIVE

## 2 MINUTES OF SILENCE & STILLNESS BEFORE GOD

**SCRIPTURE:** “But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.” Luke 1:30-33

**VISIO DIVINA:** Center yourself by taking a deep breath and relaxing your body as best you can. Allow your shoulders to lower away from your ears. Let your arms rest in your lap and let your feet be fully supported by the floor. Feel the weight of your body held by the chair. Spend this time in silence. Open yourself up to God’s voice.

**Brief pause.**

Take a deep breath in and out. Continue breathing deeply as you read the image on the next page. At this moment, simply notice the visual qualities of what you see: colors, line, shape, form, space, and texture.

**Brief pause.**

Now, take a deeper look. What parts of the image on the next page are your eyes most drawn to? What parts of the image did you quickly brush by or overlook? Observe your own emotions. How does this image make you feel?

And now use your imagination. Imagine that you are Mary as she the angel speaks to her about how God is inviting Mary into His plan. What insecurities rise up in you as you consider this news? What questions enter your heart? Are you filled with peace in the midst of the unknown or do you feel anxiety take over your thoughts? What would your response be to this encounter? Where is God asking to dwell within your human limitations?

## 2 MINUTES OF SILENCE & PRAYER

# WEEK TWO : DAY FIVE

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## VISIO DIVINA

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# WEEK TWO : DAY SIX

THE VINEYARD USA TEAM

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## PEACE

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**SCRIPTURE:** “In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; God makes salvation its walls and ramparts. Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith. You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal.”  
Isaiah 26:1-4

**DEVOTIONAL:** We think of peace in many different ways. Peace can mean the absence of conflict or strife. Peace might mean a strong sense of confidence when a difficult decision is in play. Peace may mean the ability to breathe, sleep, or rest free from anxiety. Even in this writing, it seems that each description of “peace” above could be a welcome gift for ourselves, our communities, and our world. We need each aspect of peace.

Today, Isaiah invites us into an image of peace found within “a strong city” with walls and ramparts God has made from “salvation”. This is the imagery of a *sanctuary and a safe place*. Even before Isaiah shares the promise of “perfect peace”, he describes a safe place with gates- a “strong city”. And within the sturdy walls of God’s salvation, we learn that the Lord will keep “in perfect peace” those with trust in Him. Inside God’s “salvation walls” is the invitation to trust Him and be “kept” in perfect peace. It is as though in the safe place of our salvation, that trustworthy place, is a space of perfect peace that Jesus keeps for His beloved. It’s not a place we achieve, it’s a sanctuary kept for **us** - a place of peace.

At the beginning of this reflection, we thought about the different aspects of peace - the absence of conflict, inner confidence, and non-anxious rest. In the middle of this reflection, we learned about the strong sanctuary of God’s salvation in which we are “kept” in perfect peace. At the end of this reflection, we notice that our sanctuary-like relationship with Jesus is the entire package of peace. In Christ, who we anticipate in this Advent, is the salvation from which God constructs the walls of sanctuary. And it is in Him that we find the beautiful, multi-faceted holistic peace - our Prince of Peace.

**REFLECTION:** Settle yourself for a moment. Identify which aspect of peace you need most at the moment. Imagine yourself in a place of sanctuary and ask Jesus to grant you that “piece of peace”.

# WEEK TWO : DAY SEVEN

JOSH WILLIAMS | ASSOCIATE NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF EVANGELISM & JUSTICE

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## PEACE

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**SCRIPTURE:** “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” John 14:27

**DEVOTIONAL:** Do you experience peace as a gift? Peace as a tangible offering from our Living God that you could pick up, bring close to you, and even breathe in? A peace that would steady your heart and make it unafraid? That peace is offered to us by Jesus and that peace is the presence of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit.

Our world is chaotic. The chaos isn't just a disruption from the usual peace. Chaos is the way of the world — its systems, structures, and default patterns. It leads to sin, corruption, injustice, and brokenness. That's why the peace Jesus offers through the Holy Spirit is so radical. The peaceful work of the Holy Spirit cuts through! It re-orders the human heart, giving new life to the soul. It restores families and relationships once broken. It can make communities whole. Peace can reconcile tribes and disparate, divided groups. This peace truly can bring peace on Earth and goodwill to all people.

Do we want that true peace of the Spirit to enter our hearts and our communities this Advent? If so, we need the Spirit's power to shed off what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called “negative peace”. This negative peace is characterized by the way some of us often prefer quiet or zero conflict and what feels like safety to our heads and hearts. In this “negative peace”, we don't really need a Comforter because we're already too comfortable. We've created a world unto ourselves, but it's a world that is far from the conflict and chaos that Jesus leads us to enter into as we seek God's Kingdom, which heals and transforms the chaos of the world, as a daily act.

This Advent, what would it look like to take a step into the discomfort — even chaos — of our world with true peace by our side, in us? True peace that is changing us into the kinds of people with untroubled and unafraid hearts? Perhaps that's leaning into a courageous conversation with someone who has hurt us or engaging a neighborhood group about a way to serve folks in need this winter. Whatever it is, listen to the Comforter, the Advocate, and ask, “Who needs comfort?” “Who needs an advocate?” Listen for an answer and step courageously to bring peace to a chaotic world.

**REFLECTION:** Where do you desire peace as a tangible gift in your life? Where do you experience the stuckness of a sanitized negative peace? How could you invite the Comforter, this gift of peace through the Holy Spirit, to free you into a wholeness that will empower you to bring peace to chaos? On a walk, in a journal, with a friend, reflect on these things with the Spirit right beside you. When discomfort or distraction comes, return to Jesus and continually ask for the peace of the Spirit. Come, Holy Spirit. Bring peace to your beloved.



Jesus is the One who has established and continues to build the dwelling place of God in the Church.

# WEEK THREE : DAY ONE

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## SABBATH REFLECTION

God of heaven and earth, You sent your angels as messengers to Your servants, bringing news of comfort and joy, of Your plan to heal a world gone astray

**Bringing news of Emmanuel, God With Us.**

To Mary, You sent a message of Your favor. You chose her to carry and give birth to Jesus, the Son of the Most High.

**My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. From now on all generations will call me blessed.**

To Joseph, the angel gave assurance that Mary's son was from God, and should be named Jesus

**Because he would save us from our sins.**

To shepherds among their flocks, angels brought good news of great joy that will be for all people.

**A Savior has been born to us; he is the Messiah, the Lord.**

To Kings from the East, a star rose signifying the birth of Jesus. When they saw the star they were overjoyed, and they bowed down and worshiped the Christ Child, offering costly gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

**We worship the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and lay all our treasures at His feet.**

You have brought us joy through Your Son, the Messiah.

**A Savior who is Christ the King.**

**Amen.**

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# WEEK THREE : DAY TWO

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## WORSHIP REFLECTION

The Lord inhabits our worship. Enter this reflection by settling for a moment and inviting God's presence.

As we continue with the theme of Joy, the song this week is a medley of another traditional hymn and a Vineyard Worship song: **Angels We Have Heard On High / Glory to God**. These timeless and timely lyrics call us to celebrate the joy brought into the world through the birth of Jesus. Read through the lyrics slowly and notice what messages are highlighted to you. Use the link to listen to the song and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you into joyful worship with Him.

### Angels We Have Heard On High / Glory To God

by Chadwick (PD), Butler, Brown

Angels we have heard on high sweetly singing o'er the plains  
And the mountains in reply, echoing their joyous strains

Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong?  
What the gladsome tidings be which inspire your heavenly song?

Gloria, in excelsis Deo  
Gloria, in excelsis Deo

Glory to God, glory to God, glory to God in the highest

Come to Bethlehem and see, Him whose birth the angels sing,  
Come, adore on bended knee, Christ the Lord, the newborn King

Gloria, In excelsis Deo  
Gloria, In excelsis Deo

Glory to God, glory to God, glory to God in the highest

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlzU1mFM3Rc>

# WEEK THREE : DAY THREE

PHIL CHORLIAN | EASTERN REGIONAL LEADER

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## JOY

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**SCRIPTURE:** “Arise, Lord, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might... For the Lord has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling, saying, ‘This is my resting place forever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it. I will bless her with abundant provisions; her poor I will satisfy with food. I will clothe her priests with salvation, and her faithful people will ever sing for joy.” Psalm 132:8,13-16

**DEVOTIONAL:** My wife Norma and I always wanted to make Christmas a joyful, memorable time for our kids. We would plan special Christmas excursions into New York City, go all out decorating the house, create memorable family traditions, and of course, do all we could to ensure that there would be lots of presents under the tree on Christmas morning.

I remember one Christmas Day when I found one of my daughters (who will remain nameless) crying on the couch. It was hard to make my way to her through all the opened boxes and strewn wrappings. It looked like a Christmas tornado had blown through the living room. I asked her what was wrong, and she shared in her little-girl way that she had been so excited about Christmas that the experience of it couldn't match her expectations. She was experiencing angst which is a very familiar aspect of the human experience.

We look to a lot of things to bring us joy. We think that circumstances and experiences and accomplishments - external things - will bring us the joy that we are looking for. Yet they always disappoint. They do not deliver what was promised. Inevitably we are left feeling like my daughter on that Christmas Day. “Is that it?” we ask ourselves.

The only joy that lasts and endures is the joy that we find knowing that Jesus has chosen us to be His resting place forever. Jesus was born in a stable on Christmas morning so that He could bring an end to our exile and open the way for us to become temples of the living God. Because of the incarnation, we can live in Him and He can live in us.

I am convinced that the deepest joy that we can experience are the moments when God reveals His presence to us and when He gives us a taste of what it means that we are His resting place. Every other joy is temporary and fleeting, but through God's presence, we can experience the deepest form of - joy - the joy that our hearts are longing for; the joy that we've been searching for all of our lives. This is a joy that can endure even through the tears and disappointments that this broken world can bring. The joy that has always eluded us is found in His presence and we will ever sing for joy!

**REFLECTION:** Ask Jesus to reveal His presence to you right now. Sit and expectantly wait for Him to draw near to you. Let His presence fill you with His joy. Give Him that one thing in your life right now that is taking away your joy. Let Him carry it and ask Him to give you a new song of joy.

# WEEK THREE : DAY FOUR

CHRISTINA LOWERY | ASSOCIATE NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF CHURCH HEALTH & DEVELOPMENT

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## JOY

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**SCRIPTURE:** “Mary responded, “Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me. He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him. His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones. He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands. He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful. For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever.” Luke 1:46-55

**DEVOTIONAL:** I love watching my kids open their presents on Christmas morning...the squeals and screams of joy erupt as the carefully wrapped paper is torn and anxiously awaited gifts are revealed. There’s nothing like being tackled with bear hugs and shouts of, “Thank you so much, mom – oh my gosh, thank you, dad – I love it! It’s just what I wanted!” This is the sound of sheer joy.

In today’s passage, we find Mary breaking into her shouts of joy and thanksgiving in the mysterious unwrapping of a heavenly promise she had received just months before. If you read all of Luke 1 from the beginning, you’ll find that Mary was *pregnant with a promise* that she would give birth to the coming King of Israel and “Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:32)

Now, if you don’t know the story well, and if you were reading this passage for the first time, you might assume by her rejoicing that she has already received the promise. But that is not the case! Mary is filled with joy *before* the promise is fulfilled. She experiences jubilant elation as more of the promise is revealed to her. She’s not yet holding her child, and she’s certainly not yet watching him rule and reign as the promised King. What we must notice here is that her explosion of joy is rooted in her belief and faith.

In the verses that proceed this passage, we learn that Mary has come to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who is also pregnant. As Mary enters the room, Elizabeth becomes filled with the Holy Spirit and begins to prophesy, joyfully exclaiming to Mary, “God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. Why am I so honored that the mother of my Lord should visit me? When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said.” (Luke 1:42-45)

The Greek word for “blessed” here actually means, “happy” and “joyful.” Mary’s steady, unmoving belief that God would do what He told her He would do is indeed the place her joy comes from. Her song was not a response to receiving the gift, but to believing the gift would come. During this season of Advent, might God want to spark that belief and faith in your heart again for the fulfillment of a divine promise? Today, let’s remember that faith is the seed of our joy!

**REFLECTION:** Is there a promise or gift from God that you have been anxiously waiting to receive? How is your heart? Are you becoming discouraged in the waiting, or have you remained grounded in your belief that God will do what He said He would DO?

# WEEK THREE : DAY FIVE

## 2 MINUTES OF SILENCE & STILLNESS BEFORE GOD

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 1:39-56

**VISIO DIVINA:** Center yourself by taking a deep breath and relaxing your body as best you can. Allow your shoulders to lower away from your ears. Let your arms rest in your lap and let your feet be fully supported by the floor. Feel the weight of your body held by the chair. Spend this time in silence. Open yourself up to God's voice.

**Brief pause.**

Take a deep breath in and out. Continue breathing deeply as you read the image on the next page. At this moment, simply notice the visual qualities of what you see: colors, line, shape, form, space, and texture.

**Brief pause.**

Now, take a deeper look. What parts of the image on the next page are your eyes most drawn to? What parts of the image did you quickly brush by or overlook? Observe your own emotions. How does this image make you feel?

Imagine yourself in this piece. If you imagine yourself as Elizabeth, pregnant in your old age, what feelings run through your heart as you hear Mary greet you? What does it feel like for your baby to jump in your womb and then loudly exclaim "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!" Do you feel the joy of being a part of this story with Mary?

Imagine yourself as Mary. Hear the song - the great Magnificat - coming out of your mouth, as you declare, "My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on, all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me - holy is his name." What do you feel as you are embraced emotionally and physically by Elizabeth?

## 2 MINUTES OF SILENCE & PRAYER

# WEEK THREE : DAY FIVE

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## VISIO DIVINA

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# WEEK THREE : DAY SIX

BECKY OLMSTEAD | NATIONAL VINEYARD KIDS LEADER

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## JOY

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**SCRIPTURE:** A prayer of the Apostle Paul for his friends in Ephesus “...may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.” Ephesians 3:18-19

**DEVOTIONAL:** Christmas is a wonderful time to reflect on the love of God. We know it’s beyond our understanding, and that we can never fully comprehend endless love beyond measure. In spite of what we do or don’t understand, the God who loves us is continually revealing His love to us.

I’ll never forget the day I had a supernatural revelation and experienced God’s amazing, unsurpassing love for me.

The journey started seven years earlier when I was a 20-year-old college student, and my mom was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig’s disease. During the nine-month period we knew she had the disease, I watched my mom go from a vibrant, healthy woman to being trapped inside a failing body. I was living at home at the time, so I experienced this horrible tragedy up close. All my prayers for healing seemed to fall on deaf ears. But my prayers for grace and strength were met in unbelievably miraculous ways. As hard as that time in my life was, God was so present. His faithfulness and goodness never failed me.

Now, seven years after my mom’s death, looking back, I could still remember God’s faithfulness, but I was struggling with fear. Could I trust God with my future? My attitude was, “God, You were faithful to me while my mom was sick and dying, but don’t ever let me be in a place so painful again!”

When I shared my fear with a few friends, they prayed for me. As they prayed, I was immediately overwhelmed with God’s love. He revealed to me that in the midst of those very hard days, His love was always there. His love had built qualities into my character (and life) that only come through hardship. God had made His home in my heart as I trusted Him and I experienced His love keeping me strong because I didn’t run away when life got hard.

When I brought my fear to Him with the help of my friends, I got a glimpse of God’s massive love. His love swept over me that day and wiped out the fear. It was replaced with a blanket of assurance of perfect love. I still don’t fully understand it, but I know I want to stay under the blanket!

**REFLECTION:** What fears keep you from trusting in His love? Are you facing the temptation to run away from a hard circumstance? Allow God to reveal to you His endless love beyond measure for YOU in the midst of what you are experiencing in life today.

Say a breath prayer. Breathe in and say: “God, Show me your love for me.” Breathe out and say: “I want to know you more.”

# WEEK THREE : DAY SEVEN

CHRISTIAN DUNN | NATIONAL YOUTH DIRECTOR

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## JOY

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**SCRIPTURE:** “And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” Ephesians 3:17b-19

**DEVOTIONAL:** Last summer some friends and I hiked into the Sawtooth Mountains in Idaho. After what felt like an eternity of hiking, we entered the “bowl” on top of this mountain. As we came out of the trail, we were greeted by an enormous crystal blue lake, out of which rose snow-tipped cliffs that the sun was illuminating in all of their glory. Standing there, I quickly realized that trying to “take it all in” was going to be both wonderful and futile. Something about the scale and the beauty were just too much for my brain to process.

I’m sure you’ve had similar experiences—an amazing sunset, a mountain range that stretches for miles, the birth of a child, the power of the ocean—that are just too “big” to fully grasp. They are beautiful, powerful, joyful, and utterly outside our ability to fully comprehend.

As I read this passage I get a similar sense. Paul invites us to know the love of Christ, and then proceeds to describe His love in *four dimensions*! He invites us to know how wide God’s love is, able to welcome in even the most broken and sinful; how long His love is, faithful to us throughout our highs and lows, able to span generations and on into eternity; how high His love is, able to overcome any obstacle that threatens to keep us away from His embrace; and how deep His love is, able to heal the most profound wounds and bring a peace that changes us forever.

Can we know this love? It seems too amazing to wrap our heads and hearts around, but there it is. Paul invites us to explore, learn, experience, feel, ponder, and share Christ’s love and the joy it brings in our whole lives. He wants us to know something that “surpasses knowledge” to such an extent that we are filled to “all the fullness of God.”

Wow! That is a breathtaking invitation, is it not?

That night we camped in the bowl, surrounded by peaks too big to climb, a lake too deep to swim to the bottom, mountain ranges stretching too far into the distance, and the glory of God revealed in his creation too wide for my eyes to fully take in. We hiked and explored and camped and swam and still only scratched the surface of the beauty of that place. Indescribable joy.

Advent is the perfect time to pause and do the same with God’s amazing love. The invitation this season is to stop the hurry and hustle and pause. We could have kept hiking and missed the experience, but we paused and camped out. We took it all in. This Advent, could we spend time each day pausing to camp in the joy of God, exploring how wide and long and high and deep His love for us is? Let’s choose to not just scratch the surface, but to jump in, eyes and hearts wide open, and be filled with the fullness of his joy in us because of His love for us.

**REFLECTION:** Recall a moment of indescribable emotion - joy, sorrow, surprise, challenge. Ask Jesus where He was at that moment. Let him show you how He was with you. Ask Him how He was loving you at that moment. Let the present emotion of Jesus with you become a marker of joy for you.



A throne of faithfulness and covenant love  
established forever.

# WEEK FOUR : DAY ONE

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## SABBATH REFLECTION

Creator God, we have celebrated the hope, peace, and joy that come from You. And now we celebrate Love, which is from You, and is Your very nature.

**God is Love.**

You formed the universe out of the void, and breathed life into Your creatures, all because of Your great love.

**In You, we live and move and have our being. We exist because of Your love.**

Humanity rejected You. But because of Your love, You made a way to restore us to relationship with Yourself.

**Love made a way. That love is Jesus Christ.**

Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God With Us. Born of a virgin girl in a stable, laid in a manger, Jesus entered the world in humility and compassion.

**Jesus lived, was crucified, died, and was resurrected from death, all for love. Love has conquered death.**

It is his example we live by: self-sacrificing love. And we know that "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

**Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."**

May our hearts be illumined with the light of Love.

**And may we share Your love wherever we go.**

**Amen.**

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# WEEK FOUR : DAY TWO

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## WORSHIP REFLECTION

The Lord inhabits our worship. Enter this reflection by settling for a moment and inviting God's presence.

As we continue with the theme of Love, the song this week is **Adore Him** from Vineyard Worship in the UK. Through these profound lyrics, we are connected to the love of God that encompasses our lives and the world through Jesus. Read through the lyrics slowly and notice what messages are highlighted to you. Use the link to listen to the song and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you into love-infused worship with Him.

### Adore Him

by Samuel Lane

It is by grace that we are saved  
Through faith and not by works  
For it is through Jesus that we have life  
To live is a blessing, to live is Christ

Come, let us, Adore Him  
Come, let us, Adore Him

So we've been raised with Jesus Christ  
Let's set our hearts on things above  
That we may be filled with the fullness of God  
And walk in the freedom He's given us

Come, let us, Adore Him  
Come, let us, Adore Him

To our God, to our Father  
Be the glory, forever and ever

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRi1ohUYz6U>

# WEEK FOUR : DAY THREE

PHIL & JAN STROUT | FORMER NATIONAL DIRECTORS

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## LOVE

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**SCRIPTURE:** “I will sing of the Lord’s great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself. You said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.” Psalm 89:1-4

**DEVOTIONAL:** Some of my earliest childhood memories are of singing together with my family. Gathered around the piano or riding in the car, we would all sing, find our harmonies, and enjoy that special moment. It was one occasion at Christmas, when my sisters and I sang publicly, for the first time, in our church. I was too young to read, but I stood in the middle, holding the music as we sang a 1900’s Christmas carol, DEAR LITTLE STRANGER. Every year since then, the singing of that wonderful story has been our ongoing tradition.

Where might I find opportunities to sing of the Lord’s great love during this Advent season? The Lord’s love stands firm forever. His faithfulness is in heaven itself! That which the Lord promises, He is faithful to fulfill.

One of the most beautiful songs sung in that original time of Advent waiting was by Jesus’s mother, Mary. In Mary’s song, she sings of the day when, finally, God’s justice will come. Her song parallels Psalm 89, as she declares that His throne will be established and His mercy will extend to those who fear Him from generation to generation. (Luke 1:46-55)

In both Mary’s song and the Psalmist’s declaration, their song was sung concerning God’s promise of the future reign of Jesus Christ. In each case, they sang of God’s great love and His faithfulness BEFORE the promise was fulfilled. They glorified God for what He was going to do.

Now, as I look back on our family’s Christmas caroling and shared traditions, I realize that we sang in the confidence of a promise fulfilled. Jesus Christ had already been born. The Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Messiah were all complete. The New Testament announcement of the newborn King, the Savior, was already heralded as Good News, and so we sang.

**REFLECTION:** Consider this prayer, “Lord, help me to sing of Your great love today. Let my mouth make known Your faithfulness as I trust in Your promises, even those that are yet to be fulfilled.” Reflect on what comes to your mind after praying and soak in how His love feels to you at the moment.

# WEEK FOUR : DAY FOUR

THE VINEYARD USA TEAM

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## LOVE

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**SCRIPTURE:** “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” Romans 12:9-12

**DEVOTIONAL:** As we come down to the wire in this holiday season, it’s possible a tiny bit of stress has crept in. Is anyone feeling that? In each of our previous three weeks, we focused on the themes of hope, peace, and joy. Is it possible that we have leaked a bit as the Christmas hustle has grown around us? Or are you and yours just continuing to roll in tons of hope, peace, joy, and love? Is it starting to feel like your Advent idea (what you are waiting for) is just to get this all over and done with? It seems that maybe today’s passage in Romans 12 holds a few helpful elements of God’s love that are a remedy to the clamoring chaos of this last week before Christmas.

“Love must be sincere.” Today, as you look at your to-do list, read each item on that list and ask yourself, “Can I do this task with genuine sincerity toward whoever is the beneficiary of that task?” What a grounding thing for us to become aware that love is sincere even at Christmas and to ask the Spirit to help us love, give, plan, cook, host, and do our tasks with sincere love.

“Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.” Maybe this sounds a bit more dramatic than we would put it, but this passage offers us a “permission slip” to say yes to the good, sweet moments and opportunities and say no to the forced and out-of-balance demands of the chaos around us. You have permission today to “cling” to good and disengage from the frenzy. The Holy Spirit will help.

“Be devoted to one another in love.” Honestly, this may be truly challenging since our loved ones are often as pressured and harried as we are; which isn’t the best recipe for “loving devotion”. Yet the invitation for us might be to review our motives and examine the reasons we are working so hard in the first place. Quite a plumb line for us to use at Christmas time when our temptation is to just “get them a pair of socks” and be done. As you think of those you are connected to and planning to celebrate with, let the love of God for that person well up and blend with yours. May the oil of God’s loving devotion ease the friction in the gears of your activities.

“Practice hospitality”. How fitting this little phrase is being highlighted to us today at the height of, arguably, one of the highest traffic, forced hospitality-laden seasons of the year. Yet, as we reflect on these two words, we can invite the Spirit to remove the “have to” pressure of hosting and replace that pressure with the grace to simplify and enjoy the process. It doesn’t say, “practice PERFECT hospitality” or “you HAVE TO...” This simple phrase frames a simple act of being a welcomer, just as you are, with what you’ve got. God will help with the rest.

**REFLECTION:** There are more invitations and relevant sections of this powerful passage. As you go into reflection, read each phrase slowly and notice what jumps out, which word or phrase, and think about how different Christmas would be if you followed your instincts.

# WEEK FOUR : DAY FIVE

## 2 MINUTES OF SILENCE & STILLNESS BEFORE GOD

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 2:8-20

**VISIO DIVINA:** Center yourself by taking a deep breath and relaxing your body as best you can. Allow your shoulders to lower away from your ears. Let your arms rest in your lap and let your feet be fully supported by the floor. Feel the weight of your body held by the chair. Spend this time quietly. Open yourself up to God's voice.

**Brief pause.**

Take a deep breath in and out. Continue breathing deeply as you read the image on the next page. At this moment, simply notice the visual qualities of what you see: colors, line, shape, form, space, and texture.

**Brief pause.**

Now, take a deeper look. What parts of the image on the next page are your eyes most drawn to? What parts of the image did you quickly brush by or overlook? Observe your own emotions. How does this image make you feel?

**Brief pause.**

Imagine yourself in this piece. What would you be thinking if you are Joseph sitting beside your new wife as you just watched her give birth on a dirty floor? As you looked at your new son that you know isn't your biological son, but you are supposed to care for him? What can you imagine needing from God at that moment?

Imagine you are young Mary as you drift off to sleep for a moment because you are utterly exhausted. You have given everything. What do you think and feel about this new baby that is yours? What do you imagine saying to God that night?

Imagine you are one of the people who came to visit this newborn baby. What are you feeling as you look at him? What emotions come over you as you hear his soft coos and loud cries?

## 2 MINUTES OF SILENCE & PRAYER

# WEEK FOUR : DAY FIVE

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## VISIO DIVINA

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# WEEK FOUR : DAY SIX

JOEL SEYMOUR | SUPER REGIONAL LEADER

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## LOVE

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**SCRIPTURE:** “I will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the Lord has done for us — yes, the many good things he has done for Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. He said, “Surely they are my people, children who will be true to me”; and so he became their Savior. In all their distress he, too, was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy, he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.” Isaiah 63:7-9

**DEVOTIONAL:** One of my great joys of Christmas, as a kid, came *after* Christmas. I loved sharing the news of my favorite gifts with my school friends. I loved hearing what they received, too. My first memory of this is in kindergarten when I shared about a toy Jeep with forest ranger *action figures, not dolls*, that included a tower with a zip line. My friend was given a SWAT van that opened up to reveal a working CB radio (hey it was the late 70s after all). My Christmas presents gained even more meaning when I told others about them.

As I grew older, I realized that the gifts given were expressions of my mom’s love for me. This became more tangible to me when I became a parent myself. Gifts- even Christmas gifts - are meaningful to the recipient, because they are outward expressions of love toward them. Gifts - even Christmas gifts - are meaningful for the gift giver because they are a way to express and tangibly show love. Love becomes real when it’s expressed.

In our scripture, there is a section where the Lord recounts what He has done for His people. Then, Isaiah responds with praise. The Lord’s love is real to Isaiah it has been expressed through “deeds,” “compassion,” and “many kindnesses.” During Advent, we have the invitation to reflect on Jesus’ love expressed for us. He is our Savior. He left heaven to become one of us. He lived a perfect life and died a perfect death for us. He rose to save us. He redeemed us. Love becomes real when it is expressed. Love becomes real when it is acknowledged.

Isaiah realized: An expression of love given to us deserves an expression of love from us. “I will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord, the deeds for which he is to be praised”. Two expressions of love from us are seen here. We express our thankfulness and love to the Lord by thanking him directly. We express our love by telling others about the kindnesses of Jesus. Christmas is a natural time to express the kindness of Jesus to Jesus. This devotional gives you a daily chance to praise God for his “gifts” to you. Christmas parties and family gatherings become reminders of all God has done for you. Telling others about what God has done has natural open doors as Jesus’ name, *Christ*, is literally all around!

Love becomes real when it is expressed. An expression of love given to us deserves an expression of love *from us*.

**REFLECTION:** Pause and take time to praise God for all His kindnesses, mercy, compassion, and deeds that have expressed His love to you. Now think about who you will encounter today and tomorrow. Who can you tell about what God has done for you?

# WEEK FOUR : DAY SEVEN

THE VINEYARD USA TEAM

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## LOVE

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**SCRIPTURE:** “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” 1 John 4:7-12

**DEVOTIONAL:** It’s the day before Christmas. As we have gone through this Advent season, we’ve covered the themes of hope, peace, joy, and finally love. It is fitting to flow into Christmas celebrations and this coming new year steeped in love. Our passage today mentions “love” or “loved” 13 times. It mentions love for God, His love for us, love for one another, showing love, and completing love. One might think that “it’s all about love”. That’s because it is. It’s truly all about love.

From the beginning - like the Adam & Eve beginning - it was all about love. Creation was formed out of love and with the design that all creation would forever know the Creator and His love.

In the middle, the barriers between God and his beloved creation grew. So much pain, sorrow, betrayal, and death made it nearly impossible for God’s beloved creation to remember Him, let alone experience His love. Yet, with the love of God - nothing is a completely lost cause.

So God, in His love, launched a plan of love crafted by love so the barriers between Him and His beloved creation would be forever removed. That plan is stated right in the middle of today’s passage. “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live (without the barriers) through him” (1 John 4:9). The “him” referenced in the last word of the sentence is Jesus. God’s son. With the Father and the Spirit at the beginning and then sent in the middle as our loving Savior to remove - forever - the barriers between God and His beloved creation. You are His beloved creation.

At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus. At Easter, we will celebrate how Jesus forever removed the barriers between God and creation through his death, burial, and resurrection, all because of love. As we wrap up this Advent season, you are invited, anew, into that amazing love - to receive it freely and then to give it away freely. “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us” (1 John 4:11-12). In all you do this holiday season and beyond, may the love of God breach every barrier in your life and overflow from you to anyone you meet and in every place you go every day.

**REFLECTION:** How has God’s love broken down barriers between you and Him? How has God’s love broken down barriers between you and others? Consider the invitation to let God’s love go before you into every family event and holiday gathering and ask Him to make you aware of the difference in your experience.

# CHRISTMAS EVE : CHRISTMAS DAY

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## WORSHIP & SABBATH REFLECTION

### Litany for Christmas Day

Gracious, generous God: On this day we celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ, Your Son, Your Self in human form. **We celebrate the Son of God.**

We are transfixed by the story of Jesus. We looked for a warrior; **You sent a baby.**

We looked for royalty; **You were born to peasants.**

We looked for power; **You showed us meekness.**

We looked among rulers and politicians; **You were found among cattle and shepherds.**

We looked for military victory; **You gave us resurrection.**

We looked for riches; **You gave us selflessness.**

We looked for a king; **You gave us a servant.**

We worship Jesus, the humble hero of God's redemption story. May we become more sensitive to the themes of that story: **seeking peace, embracing vulnerability, humbling ourselves, looking for glory in lowly places.**

May we recognize our part in the story, **our place as Christ followers, our calling to gentleness and humility, our opportunities to give our most profound gifts.**

May we grow ever more like Jesus, and live in the light of His presence and example.

Amen

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# MERRY CHRISTMAS

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