



**Thanksgiving and Advent Devotional
2013**

HOPE. JOY. PEACE. THANKSGIVING. CHRISTMAS

This little guide is designed to help us encounter Jesus this holiday season. We want to meet him. We desire for him to have our affection in the midst of all the activity.

Here's how it works:

- Four weeks are dedicated to Thanksgiving and four weeks are for Christmas (the Advent season).
- Each week starts on Sunday and we give you some thoughts and Scripture for that week.
- This is written for your individual time of meditation but we'd love for you to gather with a friend (or a group of friends) each week to share what you're learning.
- Consider journaling your thoughts, prayers and observations. This way you can look back on all that God shows you.
- We also hope someone will get the conversation going on our Women at CA Facebook page each week. If you aren't a member, just go to Facebook and search for our group. We'll definitely accept your request! Also Tweet any insights and use the hashtag #cadevotions

We're excited to be using this guide as a community and pray that it opens the door for great discussion, deep intimacy with Jesus and passionate worship of God.

May the Holy Spirit guide you as you seek God this season!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cheryl & Kelly". The ink is dark and the style is fluid and personal.

P.S. We are grateful to Allison Hughes and Lindsey Price who wrote this devotional.



THANKSGIVING

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF THANKSGIVING

NOVEMBER 3, 2013



Thanksgiving as a Gateway

*“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.”*

Psalm 100:4

Thanksgiving is a day for food, fun, friends, and family. We feast on our favorites and gather with our friends. We throw the football and run 5Ks to stave off the effects of our over indulgence. But what if Thanksgiving was more than a day? What if Thanksgiving became—not just a holiday—but a lifestyle?

*“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

1 Thessalonians 5:16

God’s will is not hiding. It is clear in this verse: give thanks. Continually. In all circumstances. Always give thanks.

Thanksgiving is a powerful tool for transformation. It’s a discipline that changes our perspective. It turns our gaze outward to the goodness of the great Giver. It brings freedom from self-consumption and leads us into the sacred place where God dwells.

Enter His gates with Thanksgiving. Enter His courts with praise.

Psalm 100:4

In Your presence God is the fullness of joy;

Psalm 16:11

We invite you this November to use this little devotional as a tool to practice the daily discipline of Thanksgiving. Each week we provide a short reading and some Scripture to help you on your way. And together, we will practice Thanksgiving, so that instead of being merely a yearly celebration, it becomes a daily offering.

Daily Practice: Keep a gratitude journal in which you record daily at least five things you are thankful for. Do this each day.

This Week’s Readings:

Monday: Exodus 15:1-21

Thursday: Matthew 11:25-30

Tuesday: Psalm 100

Friday: Colossians 2:6-15

Wednesday: Psalm 95

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF THANKSGIVING

NOVEMBER 10, 2013



Thanksgiving as a Returning

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, 'Jesus, Master, have pity on us!' When he saw them, he said, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, 'Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?' Then he said to him, 'Rise and go; your faith has made you well.'"

Luke 17:11-17

Ten healed, ten freed, ten cleansed. One returns. Only one. And Jesus responds with a question. Where are the other nine? Why haven't they returned? How often do we cry for help and then fail to return with gratitude? Jesus wonders at the absence of the nine but delights in the faith of the one who returns. He delights in our thanksgiving! He delights when we fall down in gratitude. He loves our praise.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

James 1:17.

As we approach Thanksgiving, Advent is right around the corner. Advent is about waiting, yearning, hoping for the Messiah. Before we move into that season, let us respond to the anticipation of God's coming by returning to him with Thanksgiving.

Daily Practice: Keep recording the five things you are thankful for each day in your gratitude journal.

This Week's Readings:

Monday: Daniel 6:1-10

Tuesday: Psalm 111

Wednesday: Psalm 103

Thursday: Matthew 26:17-30

Friday: Ephesians 5:1-20

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF THANKSGIVING

NOVEMBER 17, 2013



Thanksgiving as Surrender

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god. They will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God their Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob.

Psalm 24:1-6

From a very young age children have a favorite word, a word used regularly with great passion. It's a self-focused word. It's a grasping and controlling word. It is the word: Mine! This word is demanding and crushing to the soul.

But when we open our clenched fists and let go of "mine" there is freedom. The Psalmist declares everything is God's. Everything: my possessions, my gifting, my family, my friends. All are his. He holds everything together. And this is reason for thanksgiving! If everything is his, then I belong to him. I am the possession of God. That is enough.

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything . . . Everything was created through him and for him.

Colossians 1:15-16

Daily Practice: In your gratitude journal, as you are listing the things you are thankful for, write down the things in your life that you want to remember are truly his.

This Week's Readings:

Monday: 1 Samuel 2:1-10

Tuesday: Psalm 8

Wednesday: Psalm 9

Thursday: Luke 1:46-55

Friday: Hebrews 13:1-16

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF THANKSGIVING

NOVEMBER 24, 2013



Thanksgiving as a Grace

As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.' Jesus replied, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.' 'We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,' they answered. 'Bring them here to me,' he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Matthew 14:15-21

This is a Thanksgiving meal of epic proportion. Here sits a crowd of over five thousand who are hungry and tired. The need is overwhelming, and the disciples have no desire to care for this gathering, they want to send them away. But what is overwhelming to them is not overwhelming to Christ. And his solution is that the disciples “give them something to eat.”

Bewildered, they bring him the only thing they have: five loaves and two fish. And Jesus transforms it into a feast. He makes it more than enough. In the process He pauses. He looks to heaven and he says, “thank you” to his heavenly father.

We call it saying grace before a meal. Have you ever wondered why it's called “saying grace?” Perhaps because in our prayer of thanks we are acknowledging that all is from God and all that he gives is a grace. As we partake of the nourishment that sustains life we pause to recognize the giver of the grace, the ultimate provider of the meal.

Look back at Jesus. The need of the crowd incites his compassion. He will make sure they are fed and not only fed but full. He says, “They do not need to go away.” He responds to need with compassion. Often when we are most needy, he seems to draw most near. The things about you that you find most repelling, most embarrassing, most shameful—these are the

very places where he longs to meet you. These are the places where he says to you, "You need not go."

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

2 Corinthians 12:9

And because his grace is sufficient for us we can extend that grace to others. It is a grace to be gracious. As you go about this week, seek opportunities to extend grace by meeting a need, offering forgiveness, speaking encouragement.

Daily Practice: We hope that your gratitude journal is filling up with lists of people, places, and things in your life that you are grateful for. Keep writing in it! As we move toward Thanksgiving, write down the people in your life that you are especially thankful for. Consider sending them a note expressing your gratitude for them.

This Week's Readings:

Monday: Isaiah 12:1-6

Tuesday: Psalm 69

Wednesday: Psalm 92

Thursday: Luke 2:1-20

Friday: Colossians 3:1-17



CHRISTMAS

AN INTRODUCTION TO ADVENT

The Waiting and the Hoping

Christmas can be a lovely time of year. It's full of shopping, baking, planning, eating, laughing, and gathering. After weeks of excitement and anticipation families gather to share gifts and traditions on Christmas day. But there is a deeper truth that resonates throughout this season. We are living more than the traditions of turkey and tree decorating and opening stockings. We are living the Gospel. We are walking in the story of Christ coming into the world.

This season of Advent, the four weeks leading into Christmas, are about waiting and hoping. For some people Christmas can be a difficult time of the year. Families are broken, loved ones are missed, money is tight. Despite what many Christmas songs proclaim, this season is not about all things being right in the world. It's quite the opposite in fact. Advent is actually about looking for a light in the darkness. We are waiting, yearning, hoping, and anticipating the coming of the Savior who heals our wounds, restores our relationships, redeems our lives, forgives our sins and *will* ultimately make all things right.

Advent is the season to anticipate Jesus' coming, knowing that at the first Christmas he did not come with great fanfare or acclaim. Jesus did not come into a world where all was as it should be. In fact, Mary and Joseph were in hiding because Herod had ordered the execution of all male children near Bethlehem. Jesus came in a very dark time in history and was born in the darkest part of the night, in a stable. Certainly this is not where Mary and Joseph would have chosen for their child to be born if they had written their own story.

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

This advent I want to look for the Christ even in the darkness. I want to see him in the ordinary and the difficult. I will look and I will wait. We are not yet to the Silent Night. Today we cry out "O Come, O Come Emmanuel!"

This month as you read through the Scripture and meditation each week, consider this:

When have you had to wait?
 against hope,
 for love or because of love,
 in pursuit of joy,
 with an inexplicable peace.

Where is God calling you to wait and trust today?

What passage of Scripture especially spoke to you or brought you encouragement in this season of waiting?

As you think about the hard stuff of life, pray that the Lord will bring redemption and hope, restore love, ignite joy, and breathe peace into your life. As you do this, may you find yourself anchored in Him this Advent Season.

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 1, 2013

Ruth: Hope in the Waiting

I would have been without hope if I had not believed that I would see the loving-kindness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord. Be strong.

Let your heart be strong. Yes, wait for the Lord.

Psalm 27:13-14

I spent my childhood moving across Canada and the United States. My Dad was a pastor and from birth until I married, I started over every two to three years. It was not the life my parents envisioned for their family. Whether through the influence of others or the Call of God, we were modern day nomads. Going to seventeen schools is part of my story. I look back on my life, and there was a lot of pain in the leaving, but I would not change a thing. Uncertainty it taught me the importance of a personal faith. I came to know God as a God undaunted by my questions and sympathetic to my weakness. Hard endings and new beginnings forever sealed in me the necessity of family, whether the one we are born into, or the ones we make on our own.

In light of my story I have always resonated with the story of Ruth in the Bible. She is a young woman who *chooses* to go to a land not her own. She lost everything. She lost her husband and her status in society and became a penniless outsider and widow. Yet she remains faithful to her family and leaves her home, her traditions and her religion to be a comfort to her mother-in-law.

Ruth is patient and persistently hopeful as she provides for her family and trusts. Ultimately, Boaz, a distant relative becomes for her a redeemer. He takes her, as she is – poor. He removes her shame through marriage. He sustains her life and creates a new family with her. This redeemer completely changes the course of her story. Through this human redeemer she will become the great-great-great-great+ grandmother of the ultimate Redeemer, Jesus.

Ruth shows us what it means to hope in the face of loss. Brennan Manning says “Hope + Faith = Trust.” In this Advent season perhaps you are hoping for something, but perhaps you don’t even know what to hope for anymore. When Ruth lost everything she never could have known that Boaz was on the horizon. She simply took the next steps – steps of faithfulness, hope and faith.

As we read through Ruth in this first week of Advent, we join with her sorrow and hope. We trust that a Light is appearing in the darkness.

This Week’s Readings:

Monday: Ruth 1-2

Tuesday: Ruth 3-4; Isaiah 43:1-2

Wednesday: Psalm 25:3-6; 130:5-8; Isaiah 11:1-10

Thursday: Isaiah 40:28-31; Lamentations 3:21-25

Friday: Matthew 1:1-16; Romans 15:13

Saturday: Romans 5:1-8; 8:22-30

Week 1 Advent Songs:

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming

Thou Who Wast Rich Beyond All Splendor

O Little Town of Bethlehem

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 8, 2013

Song of Solomon: Love in the Waiting

*"You have made us for yourself, O Lord,
and our heart is restless until it rests in you."*

St. Augustine

We were visiting some friends the other day, and noticed a sign in the dining room. It was an invitation. Their teenage daughter had been asked to homecoming. We started to ask her about it, and her excitement could not be contained. She grinned from ear to ear as she told us about the boy, how he asked her, and how happy she was to be going. This was a big deal. I'd never experienced being asked to a dance or some other school event by "that boy." In fact, I mostly hadn't been invited anywhere. Being a part of this girl's excitement, stirred up happiness and hurt in me all at the same time.

We want to be wanted. From Disney Princess stories to romantic comedies, we are constantly reminded of the longing to be pursued. Our hearts cry out, "See me. Notice me. Choose me!" And sometimes we are chosen and other times we're overlooked. In those times we end up feeling unattractive, unwanted, and unseen. There are deep soul wounds inflicted by the sense of rejection. No friend, parent, or man can heal those wounds. As we try to fill that space on our own, we are left disillusioned and often desperate.

If only I can get a date. If only I can get married. If only I can have a best friend and a kindred spirit who "gets me." If only I can have a child. If only I can have that job. If. If. If. Then I will feel loved. Then I will be complete. We spend our lives waiting for the next thing to make us feel whole. But under all these legitimate longings is an even deeper longing.

The Song of Solomon tells the story of passionate love. With pretty descriptive language about the physical love between a man and a woman, the groom and his bride go back and forth telling of their treasure in one another. We read of a love

that cannot be contained or held back. Nothing can keep this man from his woman. This is a metaphor for God's love for us. It is passionate, it is unstoppable, and it is to be received.

During this week of Advent meditate on God's unstoppable, uncontainable love for you. Read through the Scriptures and open your heart to the God who sends his son to be born into poverty and conflict and suffering because He wants you, because He loves you and he wants to be with you. Emmanuel, God *with* us.

This Week's Readings:

Monday: Song of Solomon 1-2; Psalm 13:5-6, 17:7-8

Tuesday: Song of Solomon 3-4; Psalm 23

Wednesday: Song of Solomon 5; Psalm 33:4-5

Thursday: Song of Solomon 6; Psalm 59:16-17

Friday: Song of Solomon 7; John 1:1-5, 3:16

Saturday: Song of Solomon 8; Matthew 1:18-24

Week 2 Advent Songs:

Once in Royal David's City

Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

We Three Kings

While Shepherds Kept Their Watch

Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 15, 2013

Mary: Joy in the Waiting

My brothers and sisters, when you have many kinds of troubles, you should be full of joy, because you know that these troubles test your faith, and this will give you patience.

James 1:2-3

A few evenings ago I was holding my little boy, Nicholas. Fourteen months before we brought him home, I had had a miscarriage, and this rocked my faith. Time has passed, and my heart is healing, but frequently when I count my four little ones, I feel that aching void. There are still days when I grieve, and I will always long to hold that baby someday. But when I look at Nicholas, I get a *glimpse* of the bigger picture. I'll never know why our third baby didn't make it, but one thing I do know is that we needed Nicholas. He is not just happy; he is joyful. He loves to make people smile and laugh and an inner joy just radiates from him. Day by day, I've watched God use the gift of this tiny boy to bring joy back to my heart and our home.

There are parts of our stories that we wish we could escape; things too painful to mention, experiences beyond our control. Sometimes the Christmas season can be a particularly painful reminder of those things. It's difficult to be amidst merriment and cheer when our hearts are bewildered and grieving. It's hard to be with family when the time is filled with conflict more than care. The holidays can be incredibly lonely and disappointing.

The first Christmas day was preceded by great angst. Picture Mary, a very young woman, cast into loneliness and awful reputation when she discovers she is pregnant by the Holy Spirit (who will believe that story?). Consider her fiancé, Joseph, confronted with what appears to be betrayal. He wants to put Mary away quietly so that he can move along without her stain. But an angelic conversation connects him back to her and together they face the present condemnation of their community and the future with this divinely human child.

But in the midst of their confusion and condemnation and grief there is a great joy. Rather than berating God for the desolate road ahead, Mary worships, she surrenders. She says to the angel, "Behold, I am the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And then later she sings, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of me!" Often the joy God provides comes hand in hand with pain. Joy is not always in a changing circumstance or good news, often it is found deep in the reality of an unwavering God.

During this third week of Advent, ponder the areas in your life that God is calling you to greater levels of joy. How is he asking you to trust him, especially in the presence of uncertainty and pain? What unexpected circumstances are avenues for you to worship him in new ways this week?

This Week's Readings:

Monday: Psalm 19:8-9; 28:7-9; Isaiah 7:14

Tuesday: Zephaniah 3:17; Isaiah 9:6-7; 61:1-3

Wednesday: Psalm 30:4-5; Galatians 4:4-7

Thursday: Luke 1:26-38; Galatians 5:22-23

Friday: Luke 1:39-56; Micah 5:2

Saturday: Luke 2:1-21; Isaiah 9:6-7

Week 3 Advent Songs:

Angels from the Realms of Glory

Hark the Herald Angels Sing

The Gospel Brings Tidings

Go Tell it on the Mountain

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 22, 2013

Anna: Peace in the Waiting

*I've told you all this so that trusting me, you will be unshakable and assured,
deeply at peace. In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties.*

But take heart! I've conquered the world.

John 16:33

Waiting can be brutal. Few of us approach it with exuberance. Typically we try to speed up the process or numb the reality. Technology is a great accomplice. Waiting for an appointment in the doctor's office? Candy Crush. Have a few minutes between meetings? Check your email. Getting your oil changed? Text somebody, anybody! One unexpected side effect of technology is that it has sidetracked us from waiting, and hijacked any space for peace.

As we approach the culmination of this Advent season, we remember that this is what Advent is about: making space to wait, to trust and to accept God's miraculous peace as we anticipate the coming of Christ.

Toward the end of the Christmas narrative we meet Anna (meaning *grace*), a prophetess from the tribe of Asher. She was at least 84 years old and had been widowed for all but seven of her adult years. Over those many years she chose to be steadfast in worship and service in the temple. She found peace in the presence of God. And then a miracle happened right before her. God came near in the form of a child. Jesus was brought to the Temple. And when she saw him she gave thanks and declared him to be the Redeemer of Jerusalem.

These are the last few days of Advent. We have been waiting together. Hoping for the Messiah in a world where all is not yet as it should be. This has been a journey of hope, love, joy, and peace. Hope for the hopeless. Love for the unloved. Joy for the grieving. Peace for the anxious. This is our story.

This is our song.

This Week's Readings:

Monday: Amos 3:7; Luke 1:42-45

Tuesday: Philippians 4:6-8; Psalm 29:10-11

Wednesday: Proverbs 3:16-18; Luke 2:22-32

Thursday: Luke 2:33-40; 2 Thessalonians 3:16

Friday: Matthew 2:1-12; Romans 8:5-8

Saturday: Matthew 2:13-23; John 14:27

Week 4 Advent Songs:

Angels We Have Heard on High

O Come All Ye Faithful

Silent Night

Joy to the World

But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

Luke 2:10-11