Resting in God's Love: An Advent Plan

Week 1

Note: You can find this plan and more on the YouVersion Bible app. Search "whoisgrace" to see all Grace Church reading plans. Visit whoisgrace.com/read for more resources.

DAY 1 ABUNDANT LOVE

Scripture: Psalm 103:8; Psalm 103

Reflection: The word Advent means "coming." At Christmas, we remember and celebrate Jesus' first coming, but we also look ahead with anticipation to the day when He will return at His second coming. This week, we'll focus on the LOVE that the coming of Jesus brings.

The LORD is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. Psalm 103:8 NLT

Take a deep breath and pray Psalm 103:8 back to God- "Lord, You are compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love."

Take another breath and pray it again, inserting yourself- "The LORD is compassionate and merciful toward me, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love."

Take another slow, deep breath. Sit with your eyes closed and be still in the truth of God's love for you.

Pause to Pray: Praise God for His love and talk to Him about whatever you are thinking and feeling as you sit with Him right now.

Take a Next Step: Take God's love with you wherever you go! How might someone experience His love through you today?

DAY 2 RECEIVING THE LOVE OF GOD

Scripture: Psalm 36:5; Ephesians 3:18-19

Reflection:

Use this simple tool for 5-10 minutes of silence and solitude.

- 1- Take 10 deep breaths with each inhale, pray silently "Jesus," and on the exhale, pray, "You love me."
- 2- Your mind might run wild, but spend the first few moments resting in God's love.
- 3- Read Ephesians 3:18-19 multiple times. Read until certain words or phrases feel like they're being 'highlighted' for you. Ask God what he might be saying to you.
- 4- Pray those impressions back to God. Try praying out loud, writing in a journal, or changing your physical posture (open hands or arms wide, kneel down, or lift your head).

Take a Next Step: Share Ephesians 3:18-19 with someone today. It is the reason for the season!

DAY 3 HESED

Scripture: Psalm 13:5-6; Psalm 89:1-4; Isaiah 16:5; John 3:16-17

Reflection: In Hebrew, the word *hesed* is found throughout the Old Testament, often translated as lovingkindness, mercy, steadfast love, or loving devotion. It is hard to capture in just one word the overwhelming kindness of God toward His creation, specifically, the people He has lovingly, creatively, and uniquely made. The *hesed* of God is seen from start to finish, from Genesis to Revelation, in His grand story of redemption. The climax of that story is Jesus.

Ask Yourself:

- -Try to define the hesed of God in words- what adjectives, phrases, metaphors, or images will you use?
- -How have you seen, experienced, or felt the hesed of the Lord in your own life?
- -How does Christmas highlight God's *hesed*? In what way can you intentionally celebrate God's love this Christmas season?

Pause to Pray: (ACTS method)

Adoration- Meditate on one aspect of God's love.

Confession- Confess an area in which you take God's love for granted.

Thanksgiving- Thank God for His faithfulness in a specific area of your life.

Supplication (Say what you need)- Ask God for help in expressing His love to others.

DAY 4 GREATEST COMMANDMENT

Scripture: Matthew 22:35-40; 1 John 3:16-18

Reflection: Upon receiving the love of God, we must not hoard it for ourselves. Instead, we are commanded to reflect that love back to God with our entire being and reflect His love to others.

Use this simple tool to practice silence and solitude.

- 1- Take 5 deep breaths with each inhale, pray silently "Jesus," and on the exhale, pray, "You love me."
- 2- Take 5 more deep breaths this time, with each inhale, pray silently "Lord," and on the exhale, pray, "I love You."
- 3- Read Matthew 22:37-38 multiple times. Read until certain words or phrases feel like they're being 'highlighted' for you. Ask God what he might be saying to you, and write down your impressions.

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (NIV)

4- Pray those impressions back to God using four forms of prayer:

Lord, I praise You... Lord, forgive me... Thank you, Lord...

Jesus, I need your help to love...

Take a Next Step: What does love for God and others look like in word and speech, in actions and truth? How can you show love this Christmas season?

DAY 5 RESTING IN GOD'S LOVE

Scripture: Psalm 23; Zephaniah 3:17; Romans 8:38-39

Reflection:

Lie: "I'm a mess. How could God love me?"

Truth: There is absolutely nothing I can do to earn God's love.

Truth: Nothing and no one can take God's love away from me.

Truth: God loved me yesterday. God loves me today. God will love me through all my tomorrows. No.

matter. What.

Use this simple tool to practice silence and solitude.

- 1- Take 10 deep breaths and just sit in the presence of Father, Son, and Spirit, allowing His love to envelop you with stillness and security.
- 2- Read Romans 8:38-39 multiple times. What is the Lord speaking to your heart?
- 3- Take time to write down and pray those impressions back to God.

Take a Next Step: Continue to make space for God during this Advent season, Invite a friend to read *Walking with Joy: An Advent Study* along with you.

Save the Date for Christmas at the Warner! (https://christmasatthewarner.com/)

Walking with Joy: An Advent Study

Week 2

DAY 1 WHAT IS JOY?

Scripture: Psalm 16:11; Luke 2:8-14

Reflection: The word Advent means "coming." At Christmas we remember and celebrate Jesus' first coming, but we also look ahead with anticipation to the day when He will return at His second coming. This plan will help you focus on the JOY that the coming of Jesus brings to your life.

What is joy? We often confuse joy with happiness, but Wayne Grudem teaches us that the "fullness of joy is found in knowing God and delighting in the excellence of his character. To be in His presence, to enjoy fellowship with Him, is a greater blessing than anything that can be imagined." Joy is not dependent on our emotions or our circumstances! There is real joy to be found in Christmas because Jesus has brought the presence of God to us.

Use this simple tool for a moment of silence and solitude.

- 1- Take 10 deep cleansing breaths with each inhale, pray silently "Jesus," and on the exhale, pray, "You are with me."
- 2- Read Psalm 16:11 multiple times. Read until certain words or phrases feel like they're being 'highlighted' for you. Ask God what he might be saying to you.
- 3- Pray those impressions back to God.

Take a Next Step: Pause and be mindful of the presence of God with you today, and walk in the joy of knowing He is with you.

DAY 2 THE THIEF OF JOY

Scripture: Habakkuk 3:17-19; John 10:10

Reflection: Christmas comes with a lot of emotions and expectations from all areas of life. The thief (Satan) wants to steal our joy during this time and hold us back from experiencing the wonder of God being with us. We wrestle with insecurity as we compare our season to others on social media. We feel guilty for not getting our kids all they wanted or missing out on a family gathering. Sadness clouds the season as we miss those who passed away. Sometimes, we are even angry because of disagreements with loved ones. We must slow down and become aware of these emotions so we can address them in a healthy way to not allow them to steal our joy.

Pause to Pray: Use John 10:10 to lead you into prayer-

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Take a Next Step: Be observant today: What is stealing your joy? What is reminding you to walk in joy?

DAY 3 JESUS

Scripture: Isaiah 9:1-7; Philippians 2:5-11

Reflection: In order to walk with joy, we must grow in our understanding of God and his character. In Isaiah 9, the coming Messiah, Jesus, is described as the "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Use this simple tool for a moment of silence and solitude.

- 1- Take 10 deep breaths with each inhale, pray silently "Jesus," and on the exhale, pray, "You are my joy."
- 2- Read the four titles for Jesus in Isaiah 9:6 multiple times. Ask God what He wants to teach you about himself. How do these titles of Jesus help bring joy to your life?
- 3- Pray those impressions back to God and praise God for his character and his presence with us celebrated through Jesus' incarnation at Christmas.

Take a Next Step: As you go about your day, pause and be mindful of who Jesus was, and is, and will always be.

DAY 4 ABIDING

Scripture: Psalm 27; John 15:8-11

Reflection: During Christmastime, there is a lot of nostalgia around the idea of coming home. Home is the place where we are safe, secure, known, and loved. Jesus Christ is our ultimate home. When we make our home with Him or abide with Him, we can more fully experience joy. He keeps us safe and secure. He knows us intimately and loves us way more than we deserve.

Use this simple tool to practice silence and solitude.

- 1- Take 10 deep breaths with each inhale, pray silently "Jesus," and on the exhale, pray, "You make my joy complete."
- 2- Sit for 5 minutes, abiding in the presence of Father, Son, and Spirit, allowing His joy to fill you.
- 3- Read John 15:8-11 multiple times. Read until certain words or phrases feel like they're being 'highlighted' for you. Ask God what he might be saying to you.
- 4- Pray those impressions back to God.

Take a Next Step: How can you share the joy of the Lord with someone else today?

DAY 5 JOY and HOPE

Scripture: Psalm 51:12; Romans 15:13

Reflection: Walking in joy has its foundation in hope. We have hope because God keeps His promises. God always had a plan to make a way for sinners to be restored to His presence. God kept his promise and sent Jesus to be born of a virgin, to walk the earth as fully man and fully God, and to die on behalf of every sinner. We celebrate Jesus' birth to remind us of God's faithfulness to save His people. One day, God will keep his promise for us to be with Him for eternity. Let the hope of this future help you to walk in joy throughout this season.

Ask Yourself: How have I seen joy and hope go hand-in-hand?

Pause to Pray: Praise God for his faithfulness to us in sending his son, Jesus. Thank Him for the ways that He has restored your joy this week. Ask for His joy to overflow from your life, touching the lives of the people around you.

Take a Next Step: Continue to make space for God during this Advent season, Invite a friend to read *Clinging to Hope: An Advent Study* along with you.

Save the Date for Christmas at the Warner! (https://christmasatthewarner.com/)

Clinging to Hope: An Advent Study

Week 3

DAY 1 HOPE FOR THE SEASON

Scripture: Luke 1:5-25, Hebrews 11:1

Reflection: We've all turned on a Christmas movie and watched the opening scenes with a big city all decked out in lights glistening in the freshly fallen snow, with the hustle bustle of people and cars and noise. Everyone and everything is moving at a frenzied pace. It might look pretty and idyllic, but as the movie moves along, you find out everyone is miserably unhappy and desiring more out of life.

The holiday season has a way of bringing up a lot of feelings, memories, and emotions. It also has its own version of a rat race that can feel impossible to keep up with. Anticipation hangs heavy in the air – if you've ever been around kids, you know this means they are absolutely bursting with excitement. They're hopeful for what's to come.

Anticipation and hope are part of the Christmas story. The people of God waited with hopeful anticipation every day for the promised Messiah. Over the next few days, we'll be looking at the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth in Luke 1 as a lesson of biblical hope.

Biblical hope is the confident expectation that God will fulfill his promises. You can live a different life NOW because of what you know will happen in the future.

Ask Yourself:

- Do I feel hopeful during this advent season? If the answer is no, what is keeping me from feeling hopeful? If yes, what is bringing me hope this season?
- What stands out the most about Zechariah's and Elizabeth's story from the passages in Luke?

Pause to Pray: Jesus, open my eyes and ears to what you want me to hear and see this week. Help me to see you as the only beacon of hope in this holiday season. Turn my worry/concern/fear/obsession/intrusive thought/etc. into hope for healing/peace/restoration/joy that's only found in you.

Take a Next Step: Take a moment to reflect on the current state of being in your advent season. Where are you lacking hope? Do something TODAY to actively put your hope in Jesus!

DAY 2 THE OBJECT OF OUR HOPE

Scripture: Psalm 39:7, Luke 1:6

Reflection: We learn through today's passage in Luke that Zechariah and Elizabeth were Israelites who believed that God had not forsaken them and that the Messiah would someday come. While others walked away, they remained faithful. Because their hope was in God and his promises, they continued to live in anticipation of the Messiah's arrival.

In the words of the psalmist from the reading today, "and now, O Lord, for what do I wait?"

As you experience this advent season, put your hope in Jesus and his promises. Let go of the things that the world offers – the temporary source of hope. The object of your hope determines how you live your life.

Pause to Pray: Use this simple tool for a moment of silence and solitude.

- 1- Take 10 deep breaths with each inhale, pray silently "Jesus," and on the exhale, pray, "My hope is in You."
- 2- Read Psalm 39:7 multiple times. Invite God to examine your heart and mind.
- 3- Form your prayer around anything God reveals to you (praise, confession, thanksgiving, requests).

Take a Next Step: Take a moment to reflect on the current state of being in your advent season. Where are you lacking hope? Do something TODAY to actively put your hope in Jesus!

DAY 3 BIG PROBLEMS. GREATER HOPE.

Scripture: Luke 1:7, Psalm 130:5-8

Reflection: A harsh reality of life is that there will be pain and suffering. Having hope is not the absence of problems; it's being able to hope in spite of the things that aren't going the way we want them to. These trials and struggles give us the opportunity to hope. Listen – this doesn't mean it's easy. Hope has to be fought for.

Right away, in today's reading, we find out that despite their faithfulness to God, Zechariah and Elizabeth were never able to have a child and now find themselves "advanced in years." In other words, the worldly odds are stacked pretty heavily against them having a child. They were doing the right things and still did not receive the blessing of children. Yet, their hope remains.

As followers of Jesus in the modern world, we have the benefit of being further along the road in the story of the Messiah. He comes to earth as a baby, lives life among man, performs miracles, and teaches about a new way to live. He is eventually killed and buried, only to raise to life three days later, completely changing the trajectory of history. THIS is why we can have a deep and joyful hope no matter what we are facing in this life.

Ask Yourself:

- What problem/situation are you facing in this season that gives you an opportunity to hope?
- How can this kind of hope (hope in spite of circumstances) offer you a different experience this Advent season?

Pause to Pray: Jesus, open my eyes and ears to what you want me to see and hear this week. Help me to see you as the only beacon of hope in this holiday season. Turn my worry/concern/fear/obsession/intrusive thought/etc. into hope for healing/peace/restoration/joy that's only found in You... Amen.

Take a Next Step: For the next three days, commit to memorizing Psalm 130:5: "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;" When your hope begins to falter, recite this scripture as a reminder of where your hope lies.

DAY 4 WAIT ON THE LORD.

Scripture: Luke 1:8-14, 2 Corinthians 1:10; Psalm 130:5-8

Reflection: It can be easy to assume that our unanswered prayers mean that God isn't working and moving. In fact, nothing could be more untrue. He is always working and moving – in His divine timing, not ours.

In today's reading from Luke, the angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah to let him know that after all these years of waiting, he is going to become a father. Now! Even though he and his wife are "advanced in age." Can you imagine what that must have felt like? The answered prayer they'd been waiting for coming at the absolute most unlikely of times. Yet, God's timing is always perfect.

In the passage in 2 Corinthians, Paul reminds the readers that they can put their hope in God because he has delivered his people before. We can look at God's faithfulness over the generations to deliver his people and have hope in our own deliverance.

In the meantime, how we wait matters. Even when it's hard to see what the next step is. Even when it's painful. Even when... (insert whatever it might be).

Pause to Pray: Use this simple tool for a moment of silence and solitude.

- 1- Take 10 deep breaths with each inhale, pray silently "Jesus," and on the exhale, pray, "My hope is in You."
- 2- Read 2 Corinthians 1:10 multiple times. Open your heart and mind to what God is speaking to you as you wait for Him in this season.
- 3- Form your prayer around anything God reveals to you (praise, confession, thanksgiving, requests).

Take a Next Step: As you work on memorizing Psalm 130:5, create a scripture image and share it with a friend.

"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope"

DAY 5 SURE HOPE

Scripture: <u>Luke 1:18-19</u>; <u>1 Peter 1:3</u>; <u>Hebrews 11:1</u>

Reflection: Our time in Luke 1 comes to a close with Zechariah trying to wrap his head around the news that he and Elizabeth will finally have the child they have long prayed for and desired. He's trying to make sense of it because it doesn't make any sense. The angel Gabriel responds in one sentence that says in part, "I stand in the presence of God..." That's the answer. That's how any of this is possible. God.

We live in a time where there are SO many other people, things, ideas, and beliefs that we could put our hope in. Honestly, some of them might make us feel better in the moment. But we know that won't last. A hope in circumstance is flimsy; the only thing worth waiting for and hoping for is Jesus.

The Bible tells us that Jesus is our living hope. We serve a living God and a living Savior. And He is with us. Right here, right now, day in and day out. We weren't meant to do this life alone, and we don't have to. When we put our hope in Jesus instead of the things around us, we can live our lives on the solid foundation of a Savior who loves us and won't ever leave us.

Ask Yourself:

- What have you learned about God over the last few days?
- How have you grown in hope over the last few days?
- What does hope look like in your everyday life?

Pause to Pray: Use this simple tool for a moment of silence and solitude.

- 1- Take 10 deep breaths with each inhale, pray silently "Jesus," and on the exhale, pray, "My hope is in You."
- 2- Read 1 Peter 1:3 multiple times. Ask God to fill you with hope and pray any impressions back to Him using praise, confession, thanksgiving, and requests.

Take a Next Step: Continue to make space for God during this Advent season, Invite a friend to read *Finding Peace: An Advent Study* along with you.

Save the Date for Christmas at the Warner! (https://christmasatthewarner.com/)

Finding Peace: An Advent Study

Week 4

DAY 1 COMING PEACE

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:7; Isaiah 9:1-7; John 14:6

Reflection: The word Advent means "coming." At Christmas, we remember and celebrate Jesus' first coming, but we also look ahead with anticipation to the day when He will return at His second coming. This plan will help you focus on the PEACE that the coming of Jesus brings to your life.

The prophet Isaiah spoke with hopeful anticipation of the coming of the "Prince of Peace." We know that this prince is King Jesus. His coming has brought peace to any person who receives His salvation. It is peace in our relationship with God the Father.

One glance at the world reminds us that not everyone knows this peace. We who know the peace of God must be people of peace where we live, work, and play. So that the world will know that Jesus is better. He alone is the Way and the Truth and the Life that brings peace.

Pause to Pray:

Use this simple tool for a moment of silence and solitude.

- 1- Take 10 deep breaths with each inhale, pray silently "Jesus," and on the exhale, pray, "Prince of Peace."
- 2- Your mind might run wild, but spend the first few moments resting in God's love.
- 3- Read Jeremiah 29:7 and John 14:6 multiple times. Read until certain words or phrases feel like they're being 'highlighted' for you. Ask God what he might be saying to you.
- 4- Pray those impressions back to God. Pray out loud, write in a journal, or change your physical posture (kneel, open your hands, raise your head).

5-

DAY 2 BURDENED

Scripture: Psalm 55:22; Matthew 11:28-30; Philippians 4:6-8

Reflection: Anxiety. Worry. Stress. Concern. Mental Load. So many ways to describe the inner struggles and turmoil that weigh down our lives. Often, we feel alone and unseen as we try to make it through each day, get a little sleep, and start it all over again.

Amazingly, God came down to our world of stress and chaos. In his humanity, Jesus faced the concerns of day-to-day living. He mourned, he hurt, he felt, and he experienced a real life in the real world with real problems. The baby in the manger is the Savior who walked the road of life. And He died for you. In his death, He took the burden of sin and brokenness so that you wouldn't have to carry that load anymore. Psalm 55:22 instructs us to "cast" our cares and burdens on the Lord. That word means to throw, hurl, or fling something. Throw it all on Jesus today!

Pause to Pray: Take a few deep breaths. Inhale His peace, and exhale your worries. When you're ready, open your hands and pray (ACTS method)-

Adoration (praise)- Lord, You are...

Confession- Jesus, I am sorry... Forgive me.

Thanksgiving- *Thank you, Lord...*Supplication (say what you need)- *Spirit, I need You now...*

Take a Next Step: If you're facing a big decision, feeling anxious, or facing something stressful, set an alarm on your phone to prompt you to read Matthew 11:28-30. As you read, take a few more deep breaths and invite the peace of Christ to fill you. (You can also do this on behalf of someone else- who needs peace in this season?)

DAY 3 CONTENTMENT vs GREED

Scripture: Genesis 3:1-6; Philippians 4:10-13, 18-19; 2 Thessalonians 3:16

Reflection: Have you ever wanted something *more?* Have you ever felt dissatisfied or discontent? Have you ever found yourself looking for *more*, hoping for *more?* In Genesis 3, Eve and Adam, for the first time, considered that there might be *more*. Maybe what God had given them wasn't enough. Maybe their lives weren't complete.

Adam and Eve wanted *more*. But the reality was, they already had it *all*.

Shalom is the Hebrew word for peace. It means far more than the absence of striving or war. Its meaning is closer to the idea of completeness, something being whole. Before sin, what God had made was perfectly complete. All of creation was in a state of *shalom* with God. Adam and Eve's relationship with one another and with God was wholly complete. Perfect.

Since the Fall, we have been plagued with a desire to do more, be more, have more. No one wants to be labeled greedy, but that's who we are.

And then Jesus enters our lives. And He promises to restore *shalom*. He promises to make our lives complete. He promises to satisfy our every craving for *more* with something far bigger and better than anything in this world.

Ask Yourself:

-Take an honest assessment: What are the areas of discontent in my life?

Pause to Pray: Take a few deep breaths. Inhale His peace, and exhale your worries. When you're ready, open your hands and pray (ACTS method)-

Adoration (praise)- Lord Jesus, You are enough...

Confession- Jesus, forgive my greed and discontent...

Thanksgiving- Thank you, Lord, for providing...

Supplication (say what you need)- Jesus, open my eyes and heart...

DAY 4 FEAR NOT

Scripture: <u>Isaiah 41:10</u>; <u>John 14:1, 25-27</u>; <u>John 16:33</u>

Reflection

The world feels scary. But this is not the first time the world has been wracked by turmoil. In the Old Testament, God repeatedly reminded the Israelites that they need not fear, for He was present with them. At the end of His ministry, Jesus assured the disciples that though He must suffer, die, and return to the Father after the resurrection, they need not fear, for His presence would be with them. He warned them of the hardships, trials, and suffering they would face. And He offered the peace of His unending presence.

Pause to Pray: Use this simple tool for a moment of silence and solitude.

- 1- Take 10 deep breaths with each inhale, pray silently "Jesus," and on the exhale, pray, "You are with me."
- 2- Your mind might run wild, but spend the first few moments resting in God's love.
- 3- Read John 14:27 multiple times. Invite the Holy Spirit to fill you with the peace that only Jesus can give.
- 4- Ask God what he might be saying to you and pray those impressions back to Him. Pray out loud, write in a journal, or change your physical posture (kneel, open your hands, raise your head).

Take a Next Step: Is someone in your life afraid? Share a verse image for John 14:27 and offer to pray with them.

DAY 5 FINDING PEACE

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6; Luke 1:30; Luke 2:9-11, 28-32; Ephesians 2:17; Colossians 3:12-17

Reflection:

We all need to find peace. Mary found it in the angel's promise. The shepherds found it as they gazed on an infant in a manger. Simeon found it as he held the infant Messiah in his arms. The disciples found it in the Rabbi Jesus. Paul found it in the blazing light of a risen King. We find it as we remember that every promise of God is fulfilled in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Pause to Pray: Use this simple tool for a moment of silence and solitude.

- 1- Take 10 deep breaths with each inhale, pray silently "Jesus," and on the exhale, pray, "Prince of Peace."
- 2- Read Colossians 3:12-17 multiple times, inviting the peace of Christ to fill you.
- 3- Ask God what he might be saying to you and pray those impressions back to God. Pray out loud, write in a journal, or change your physical posture (kneel, open your hands, raise your head).

Take a Next Step: Share the peace of God with someone this Christmas. Through your kindness, gentleness, patience, love, and generosity, may the peace of Christ be with you and also with them. Amen.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

We hope to see you at Christmas at the Warner! (https://christmasatthewarner.com/)