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WHEN THERE WAS PEACE

And God saw everything He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. - Genesis 1:31

God is peace. So the world He created was complete and whole. All was Shalom. But the promise of power traded peace for conflict.

READ: Genesis 1:27-31; 3:1-7, 15

Our first example of peace is in the Garden of Eden. Man was at peace with God, with each other, and with creation. There was no suffering, no need, and no empty desires. Even to a fully perfect God, all was very good. Man's role was not to create peace, but to keep peace through obedience to God. Could they be satisfied within God's boundaries? The answer for them then and for us now is, no. Eve believed Satan's lie, that there was something missing. What God had declared very good, Eve found lacking. Believing the lie, she chose disobedience, and peace was shattered. Cursed to live in the chaos of their making, God didn't leave His people without hope. This world would know suffering and struggle, but there would be One who would come, who had the power to crush evil, consume the chaos of sin, and deliver His children back into eternal shalom.

ADVENT REFLECTION:

Think about the original garden that God made for His people. How good must it have been for God to proclaim it "very good"? Try to imagine a world where we are at perfect peace with God, with each other, and all of creation is at peace. That is the promise of Genesis 3:15. There was perfect peace, and there will be again.



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2

REFLECT AND REJOICE

Use this day to read the truth of Scripture, and reflect on the truth of God's promise of peace. Even in our sin, God promised One who will be our PEACE.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
ONE who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
from ancient days.

Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel.

And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.

And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.

And he shall be their PEACE.

Micah 5:2-5 (ESV)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3

HOPE THAT BRINGS PEACE

May the God of HOPE fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. - Romans 15:13

The season of Advent, for all who believe in the promised Messiah, is meant to be a time of hope. It is an intentional turning of our minds and hearts from the chaos of this world to the promises of God. By returning to the story of creation, we are reminded that God's plan was for shalom, total peace. The coming of Christ made possible the only way to restore peace. He was truly the only hope for peace on earth. Because of Jesus, our hope can fill us with peace now, and sustain us as we wait for the promise of full shalom to come.

LIGHT THE FIRST ADVENT CANDLE.

And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope." May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Romans 15:12-13

Peace begins with hope. The current reality of our world causes us to struggle with the idea of true peace. But when we remember the merciful promise God gave to Adam and Eve, we can stand in the already realized promise of the One who would make peace possible. We are able to live in hope now, because the Messiah has already come to make peace between us and God. We now look forward with hope, because there will be a day when all will be made right. Shalom will return, and the Prince of Peace will reign.

REFLECT AND PRAY:

God is the source of our hope. From this hope comes joy and peace. Because of who God is and what He has promised, we can live with hope. Make a list of the attributes of God and acts of God in your life that remind you of why you can trust Him with your hope. Thank God for the hope that we can have that only comes from Him.





MONDAY, DECEMBER 4

BY ONE MAN

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. - Romans 5:1

The Old Testament is full of laws and practices that brokered a tenuous peace with God. The sacrifices, feasts, and rituals were a constant reminder that nothing man could do was enough to restore peace between God and man.

READ: Romans 5:1-10

Paul's teaching to the church in Rome leaves no doubt that sin had made enemies between God and man. It was only by God's grace that the laws and sacrifices were given to the children of God. But they weren't enough. The acts of man could never be enough to restore our relationship with God. Our only hope for peace with God came through Jesus Christ. And His coming wasn't tied to our perfection. From the deep love of our good God, the Son of God became the Son of Man, so that in the fullness of time, He could bear the wrath of God and reconcile us to God forever. Through Jesus alone, we can have peace with God forever.

ADVENT REFLECTION:

Reread Romans 5:1-2.

Through Jesus, we have: been justified by faith, have peace with God, and obtain access to God's grace. Praise be to the One Man who has given us hope.



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 5

WE HAVE BEEN BROUGHT NEAR

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. - Ephesians 2:13

It was in the Garden of Eden where man first felt the sting of separation from God. No longer was there access to the Creator. Sin separated all mankind from the sources of Shalom. Only through God could that be restored.

READ: Ephesians 2:1-6, 12-19

Sin slammed closed the gates of Eden, and those who had been close enough to walk with God now wandered in the desert of a new reality. Life eternal was traded for guaranteed death. Friends of God became enemies, as humans sought to put hope in their own power. The story of shalom could have ended there in the garden. "But God"! Ephesians 2:4-5 tells us God's mercy was so rich because of His great love, that He made us alive through Christ. Through our sin, we are separated from God. Through Christ, we have been brought near. Paul's message to the Ephesians gives us great hope, because we are reminded that peace could never be restored through our actions. The law wasn't enough. The sacrifices weren't enough. Nothing we can do by our power is enough to save us. It was only through Jesus. The Son of Man came to be peace between God and all who believe in Him. Because of Christ, the access to God in the garden has been restored through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Peace with God means the presence of God. And in the presence of God, there is life.

ADVENT REFLECTION:

Read Ephesians 2. The coming of Christ is about so much more than making things more peaceful on earth. He is our peace with God. Because of His blood, we are reconciled to a holy God. That doesn't free us to sin more, but to desire His presence more. Spend time in prayer today, thanking God for drawing us near to Him.





WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6

PEACE MEANT FOR ALL

This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. - 1 Timothy 2:3-4

The desire for peace is common across all of humanity. This Christmas season, books, songs, and decorations will proclaim a need for peace, but too many are looking for peace apart from God. The story of Jesus' birth is our reminder that Jesus came to make peace available for all.

READ: 1 Timothy 2:1-5

At Christmas, our minds turn to family and friends. We enjoy celebrating the joy of the holiday season. Too often we forget that there are many who celebrate the holiday of Christmas without ever experiencing the peace that came in the person of Jesus. Without Christ, they have no hope for true shalom. Perhaps this is why Paul urged Timothy and fellow believers to pray and intercede for all people. This is the role of the Church. All of us who have experienced the hope of God should be driven to intercede in prayer for those who do not yet believe. God wants all people to believe in Him. In His sovereignty, He knows there will be many that won't, but still we are called to pray and share the reason we have hope. The baby in the manger became the ransom for all who believe. The message of Christmas is a powerful proclamation of the Good News of Jesus. Christ is the only mediator between God and man. The celebration of His birth can open the door for us to share the full story of our Messiah. He is so much more than a baby in a manger. He is the only Way, the only Truth, and the only Life.

ADVENT REFLECTION:

Let's use the days of Advent as a time to intercede for all who have not set their faith in God. Pray for your family, your neighbors, your friends, your enemies, and everyone God brings into your path. Pray that this Advent season will be the time that they believe in Christ, the Son of God who came, so they could have peace with God.



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7

EIFE AND PEACE

"... to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." - Romans 8:6b

Having peace with God is more than access to heaven when we die. Our hope is not just for eternal life, but for life, here and now. Because of Jesus, we are people that have been given the confident promise of life and peace.

READ: Romans 8:1-10

We don't connect condemnation to the Christmas story, but truly, the proclamation of "No Condemnation" couldn't have happened without the coming of Christ. His life and death made it possible for Paul to proclaim over all who believe that there is no longer condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. He doesn't say there is "less condemnation." We are not in "better standing" with God because of Jesus. In Him, we have been made fully righteous. Only the perfect Son of God could make us righteous. It is through Him that we can have life and peace, because He has freed us from sin. Peace with God doesn't mean we are perfect, but we are made righteous through Jesus. We are free from the guilt of sin. This chapter of Romans begins with the declaration of freedom from condemnation, and ends with the promise that nothing will separate us from the love of God. Because of Christ, we never again can be separated from God.

ADVENT REFLECTION:

Read Romans 8:38-39.

Because of Christ, we can rest in the truth that nothing will separate us from God. We have been given full life and peace through Jesus. Spend time in prayer, thanking Jesus for taking on our condemnation and giving us life.





FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8

THE GOOD SHEPHERD BRINGS PEACE

"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand." - John 10:28

The gospel of Luke tells us that shepherds were the first to come celebrate the birth of the newborn King. They left to proclaim the coming of the Messiah, the One who would save the people. Years later, Jesus would take on the title of Shepherd, and make a way for all who believe in Him to have eternal life.

READ: John 10:14-18, 27-30

The busyness of the Christmas season can cause the celebration to feel empty and impersonal. We can believe in the birth of Jesus, and still feel alone and unseen. But the One who came so that we can have peace with God is our Good Shepherd. The truths we see about Him should change the way we celebrate His birth. We are fully known by our Good Shepherd. He knows every one that is in His care. Christ knows our struggles. He sees our weariness and the battles we face. Our Good Shepherd cares. He cared so much for us that He willingly laid down His life for us. Nobody made Him, and nothing could have stopped Him. The Good Shepherd secures us forever. When the chaos of this world causes us to doubt the goodness of our Shepherd, we should remember His promise that nothing will ever snatch us out of His hand. He gives us eternal life and security, all because of His great love for us.

ADVENT REFLECTION:

Do you carry weariness and pain this Christmas season? Let Christ's words comfort you. The Good Shepherd knows us, sees our needs, and has secured us to God through the gift of eternal life. Spend time in prayer, sharing your hurts and needs. The Good Shepherd cares for us.



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9

REFEECT AND REJOICE

Use this day to read the truth of Scripture, and reflect on the hope we have because of the righteousness given to us through Christ. Through His birth and death, we have been reconciled to God forever.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the

blood of his cross. Colossians 1:13-20



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10

JOY THAT GIVES PEACE

"Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel. - Isaiah 12:6

John Piper describes joy as "a good feeling in the soul produced by the Holy Spirit as He causes us to see the beauty of Jesus in the Word and in His works." The world has seen pain and sorrow because of sin. But those who belong to God hold tightly to the hope of a Messiah. Through the coming Savior, joy was restored to His people!

LIGHT THE FIRST AND SECOND CANDLES.

"Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation." With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say on that day: "Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted. "Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel." - Isaiah 12:2-6

We are no longer waiting for our salvation. The coming of Christ as a baby should fill us all with joy, because He has become our Savior. Our joy is not tied to this world, but to the One who has overcome the world. That joy wasn't just present during Christ's life on earth. He gave us the gift of salvation and the Holy Spirit who sustains our joy with His mighty hand. Our joy is meant to be anchored to His works, His Word, and His promises. When we remember all He has done and the hope Christ has set before us through His second Advent, our souls can shout for joy, even if our hearts are aching.

REFLECT AND PRAY:

Make a list of the things that are bringing you joy in this season. What is robbing you of joy? Lift these things to God in prayer. Fear and worry can be thieves of joy. Ask Him to help you to trust Him. Take time to praise God for His goodness and the joy He restores to us. Spend time in worship, singing your praise to Him.



MONDAY, DECEMBER 11

PEACE IN THE STORMS

And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. - Mark 4:39

Even in the physical presence of Christ, the storms came. The unexpected happened. Those closest to Jesus felt the fear of death. But, in the middle of the storm, Jesus displayed that He has the authority to establish peace in any situation.

READ: Mark 4:35-41

This storm at sea confirms the hard reality that even those in the middle of God's will are guaranteed to face storms. The only reason the disciples were on the boat that day was because of Jesus. In the middle of their obedience, a storm came that threatened to take them down. Doubt and fear flooded their minds, and the reality around them caused them to believe their doubts. Instead of taking their fears to Jesus, they came to Him with accusations. "Do you not care?" Oh, those words are so familiar. We believe that Christ came to make peace with God, but does He care about our struggles, fears, and storms? The answer is yes! In the boat that day, Jesus calmed the storm, and He made the disciples face the truth: they still had doubt. Sure, He could cast out demons and heal any disease. Yes, He could provide for thousands, but did He care about them? Jesus' question could be asked of us. Why are we so afraid? Do we still lack faith? The peace of God can never live in us while we still hold tightly to our doubts. To embrace our fears means that we reject the peace God offers. But, if we stand in the storm and proclaim His will be done, then we can live in His peace. That's what Mary did. She chose to believe the impossible message of the angel, step into the chaos that would come with an unexplainable pregnancy, and rest in the peace of God. Does the manger prove His power? Is God becoming man so He can save us proof enough of His love? What will it take for us to believe He cares and rest in His peace?

ADVENT REFLECTION:

Christ's desire was for His disciples to believe in Him. He knew their fears and doubts would leave no room for peace in the storms they would face. Are your fears and doubts choking out the peace of God in your life? Spend time in prayer laying those before God. Trust Him with your fears, because He already knows them and loves you just the same. In Him, we are meant to have peace.



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12

PEACE IN HIS PRESENCE

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. - Isaiah 26:1-5

Peace didn't reign in the time of Isaiah. Prophecy after prophecy confirmed that war and pain would mark the land, because of the sin of the Children of Israel. Yet, there would be a day when all would be made new. We, too, are waiting for a land at peace. But how do we have peace now?

READ: Isaiah 26:1-8

The words of Isaiah 26 are meant to be a song of hope in the midst of dark times. War and need filled the lives of the Children of Israel. They would suffer for their sin. Only God knew what their future would hold and what His people would look like after they faced discipline. Through Isaiah, God gave the promise of a coming day, a day where things would be made right and a song of celebration would return to the people of God. But they didn't have to wait for peace until the world around them was made right. Peace was waiting for them in the middle of it all, and it could be found in the presence of God. Verse 4 gives us the words "perfect peace". In Hebrew, that reads as "Shalom Shalom". It means peace intensified, a double portion of peace. God was reminding them of the abundance and completeness of the peace that only He can give. But that perfect peace isn't just handed out to everyone. It is a peace that is found only by those whose mind is set on God. What fills your mind lately? Is your mind consumed with worry over current circumstances? Is anger or bitterness taking over your thoughts? Has depression and loneliness robbed you from the peace of God? What consumes our mind is what will dictate our peace. But the offer of perfect peace can be ours when we spend time in the presence of God. Christ's coming made the presence of God available to all who believe in Him. We have an audience with the King of Glory, and through prayer and time in His Word, we are able to reorient our minds to God. In His presence, we are able to cast off doubt, proclaim His promises, and worship God for all of the ways He has shown Himself faithful. When our minds and hearts are set fully on God we are able to have Shalom Shalom because we believe who He is and what He says.

ADVENT REFLECTION:

James 4:8 tells us to draw near to God and He will draw near to us. Spend time drawing near to God through prayer. What burdens do you need to hand to him? What are you grateful for? Rest in His presence, filling your mind and heart with Him.



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13

HIS WORD BRINGS PEACE

Those who love your instructions have great peace and do not stumble.

Psalm 119:165 (NLT)

Peace can feel like such an elusive concept. Who really has it? And who has time to think about peace when there are so many things to get done. In the midst of this busy season, we have been given a place to find peace; in the Word of God.

READ: Psalm 119:165-168

The poet who authored Psalm 119 had a deep love for the Word of God. He wrote a section to match each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, all to celebrate God and His holy Word. In the words of God, he had found guidance, wisdom, law, promises, and truth. As he comes to the end of his song of honor for the Word of God, the poet makes a strong proclamation, "those who love your instructions have great peace and do not stumble". Peace from Word, that seems too simple. We crave peace in the middle of our business. Just the demands of our day to day lives make peace feel impossible, but maybe that's because we are seeking peace from the wrong areas. Peace won't come brokered by world leaders. It won't be found in larger bank balances, or in healthy medical check ups. Those things can ease worry for a moment, but circumstances will change, upending this tentative rest. The Word of God gives us peace because it is unchanging and based on the character of God, not the circumstances around us. Scripture gives us peace because it gives clear directions, not differing opinions. Through it, we are reminded of the countless ways God has been faithful in the past, strengthening our trust in Him. Lastly, the Word of God gives us peace because it takes us into the presence of God. It is a time and place we can rest in Him. Through the Word of God, we can be still and know that He is God. (Ps 46:10) When the hecticness of life causes us to spend less time with God, we will know it as we feel less at peace. Consider feelings of worry and anxiety an invitation to spend time in the Word of God. There, we will be kept at peace.

ADVENT REFLECTION:

When was the last time you chose to be still and know God? The irony of the Christmas season is that we tend to spend more time celebrating God and less time spent in His presence. Take time to be in His Word today. Find peace in His promises.



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14

GUARDED BY PEACE

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. - Philippians 4:7

The Advent season is a call to rejoice. The long awaited Messiah came to bring peace on earth. But to Christ-followers, who live in the messy middle of this world as we wait for the second Advent, we can struggle to rejoice always. That is why God provides a way to guard our joy with His peace.

READ: Philippians 4:4-7

Paul's instruction to rejoice in the Lord was a call to action not to feeling. Believers weren't to pretend all was good and life wasn't hard. God is never glorified by our false joy. They were called to live out joy, despite their struggles. Often, we get this order confused. We reject joy until our circumstances are to our preference. While we wait for our ideal life, we carry the burden of our disappointments and anxieties, wishing things were different. God means for us to have a different pattern. First, we are to choose joy in the Lord because we have set our hope and trust in Him. Then, we are to hand off our worries and cares to God because He cares for us. Through prayer, we are able to systematically unburden our minds and hearts, leaving room for joy to reign. Those prayers should be full with thanksgiving, not because we love the struggle, but because we are loved by a Savior who cares enough to lean in and listen to us. By leaning in to our Lord, we are guarded by His peace, a peace we can never understand. It's a peace that will never make sense and yet, is promised. His peace will guard our hearts and minds from anxiety, worry, anger, and hopelessness. In God's peace, we can live!

ADVENT REFLECTION:

Think about Mary and Joseph. What anxieties and fears could they have faced over those 9 months? And yet, before the manger, they were able to worship the newborn King. What is stealing your joy this season? God is ready to guard you with His peace, as you lift your needs to Him.



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15

INHERITANCE OF PEACE

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. - John 14:27

A danger of the Christmas season is manufactured joy. The expectation of a smiling face and good cheer cause many people to slap on a smile and suffer silently. The joy of Advent is that God never flinched from the darkness of this world, but moved all people towards the light of peace, a peace given by His Son.

READ: John 14:27-28, 15:5,11

What would peace look like for you today? What do you think you need to have the kind of peace that leads to joy? Would it be to change your location, job, health, or current circumstance? Nothing that is subject to change can give us the peace that anchors us in joy. Jesus understood that. As He walked with His disciples closer to the Garden of Gethsemane, He carried the knowledge of all that these men would face. Jesus knew that there would be no joy for them if their peace was based on His presence or their circumstances. So instead of giving them a pep talk, He gave them an inheritance: His peace. Jesus was called the Prince of Peace, because peace belonged to Him. It was anchored to Him, and could only be given by Him. Any peace the world offers is fleeting and up to us to maintain. You will need more money, more youth, better health, a higher position, certain titles, and the power to keep everything in control. The peace of Christ is different. It is a promised certainty to all who call Him Lord. It is maintained by the Holy Spirit, not our own power. And the peace of Christ leads to the joy of Christ, as we abide close to Him. That joy, the joy of the Lord, then gives us strength. The cycle of peace, joy, and strength continues in our lives, no matter what the day holds, as long as we stay close to Him.

ADVENT REFLECTION:

Peace is not a possibility, but a promised inheritance. It is our choice to accept that inheritance and let it anchor our hearts to Christ. Think of the peace Jesus showed in His life. He had a peace that gave joy in hard moments and strength even on the road to the cross. That is the peace He has offered to us. Spend time thanking Christ for the inheritance He has offered to us, and confessing the empty peace of the world that we have been seeking.



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16

REFEECT AND REJOICE

Use this day to read the truth of Scripture, and reflect on the joy we have, because of the peace God provides. When our trust in God allows us to live in His peace, then we can have joy no matter the circumstance.

Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the Lord.

Many, Lord, are asking, "Who will bring us prosperity?" Let the light of your face shine on us.

Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound.

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.

Psalms 4:5-8 (NIV)



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17

BECAUSE OF HIS LOVE

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 3:16

Jesus came to make peace between God and man. The motivation that led to the manger was love. Christ loved us so much, that He willingly took the form of humanity to ransom all who would believe.

LIGHT THE FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD CANDLES.

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4:9-11

God was not required to save mankind after Adam and Eve sinned. He didn't have to make a way for us to be restored to Him. God could have left us to our sin, but He didn't. His unfailing love compelled Him to write His own Son into the story of history, sending Him to be the payment for our sins. The manger is proof of God's love, because He sent His Son to die for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). He is not waiting for you to be good enough to love, or to get your act together. His love for you is now, and forever.

REFLECT AND PRAY:

Ponder how God has shown you love. What mercy and grace have you seen displayed in your life? 1 John 4:11 reminds us that the love of God should flow through us as we love others. How are you showing the love of God to those around you? Thank God today for His great love for you, and pray for a heart that is willing to show love to others.





MONDAY, DECEMBER 18

SEEK PEACE WITH OTHERS

Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.
- 1 Peter 3:11

The coming of Christ made peace with God and the peace of God in our lives possible. That peace is not meant to stop with us. Because we are benefactors of Christ's peace, we are to be ambassadors of peace to those around us, so that the goodness of God is displayed through our lives.

READ: 1 Peter 3:8-12

Jesus had prepared Peter and the other disciples for the trouble that they would face. Through Him, they could live in peace and do the work God had set for them. As believers faced more persecution and struggle, Peter worked to prepare the Church for how to live in peace in a world that would reject them. His words were a guide for peace and wisdom for the early church, and they are our guide now. All people who believe in Christ have been called to unity, tender hearts, humility, and sympathy. We are called to reject revenge, using our words as weapons, and acting with deception. God has not called His Church to defeat the world by our words and actions. He has called us to pursue peace and righteousness, because it is a reflection of who He is to a world that does not know Him. None of this is easy while we live in a world that hates the things of God. When we struggle to pursue peace and act in love, verse 12 should be our hope. The Lord has His eyes on us, and His ears are open to our prayers. Through Him, we can seek peace.

ADVENT REFLECTION:

It is impossible to live at peace with God, if we are embracing animosity with others. God cares how we treat others, even those who wrong us. What would it look like for you to pursue peace within your family or with those you work with? Because we know God hears our prayers, take time to pray for the people with whom you don't have peace.



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19

LET PEACE RULE

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. - Colossians 3:15 (NIV)

Christ came as the Prince of Peace, and His coming points to the second coming, when He comes as King. But for all who believe in Christ, His lordship is meant to start now, when we let Him rule our hearts with peace.

READ: Colossians 3:12-17

Living at peace with others may not be high on your holiday priority list. Isn't it enough for us to believe in Jesus and try to live in His peace? Why does living at peace with others matter? Because of who we are! In verse 12, Paul calls us God's chosen ones. He calls us holy, and he says we are dearly loved. This is meant to be the identity every believer lives in. That is who you are today. Because of this true identity, we are meant to live differently. We are called to pursue holiness in the middle of the difficulty of this life. If we have been saved by Christ, then we are to live ruled by Him. Letting Christ rule our hearts means letting the truth of all He has done determine our actions. If Christ came to make peace for all, then we don't have the right to pursue conflict. If love led Christ to come as Messiah, then we don't have the right to embrace hate. If we are letting Christ rule our hearts, then our lives should reflect Him. We are His. That is who we are.

ADVENT REFLECTION:

What rules you? Living like Christ requires our actions to match who He has said we are. Reread Colossians 3:12-14. This is what it looks like to be ruled by the peace of Christ. Pray for a heart of surrender that reflects who we belong to: Jesus.





WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20

WISDOM THAT BRINGS PEACE

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. - James 3:18

The wisdom of this world tells us to love others on our own terms. Make sure we love ourselves first, and make sure to love people that are like us. But Scripture gives us a different perspective on wisdom. The wisdom of the Word calls us to live for God and serve others. One wisdom brings strife, and one brings peace.

READ: James 3:13-18

How can we know which wisdom we are seeking? James gives us the test. The world's wisdom leads us to bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. Are we living in disorder and chaos because of our own thoughts and actions? Then we have chosen worthless wisdom. When we live with a "love yourself first" mentality, we have set ourselves up to look like the world, instead of our Lord. Our other option is to pursue wisdom from above. That wisdom is holy, seeking the well-being of others, considerate, and full of mercy. When we seek to love others like we love ourselves, which is the second commandment Jesus gave, then our lives promote peace. Make no mistake, God's wisdom will never call us to sacrifice godliness to make others happy. Wisdom from above is meant to change us into people of peace, because we have set our hope in Him.

ADVENT REFLECTION:

Read through James 3:17 again. What is wisdom supposed to look like for those who follow Christ? What characteristics does your wisdom reflect? If we are called to be people of peace, then we need to follow the wisdom that brings peace.



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21

UNITY THROUGH PEACE

"... eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." - Ephesians 4:3

While most of the world around us will celebrate Christmas, only those who know the Messiah has come, will embrace Advent. Advent belongs to those who call Christ Lord, and our belonging to the Prince of Peace requires us to walk worthy of Him.

READ: Ephesians 4:1-6

There is a privilege and purpose that every believer carries. Because of Christ, we have a belonging and salvation that we would never have without His blood and righteousness. We have been given the Holy Spirit as our helper while we live on this earth. And we have been given the inheritance of peace from Christ, Himself. Because of who we are, in Him, we have been called to pursue unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Greek word Paul uses for unity describes a unity that can only exist between fellow believers. It is a family bond, since we are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are called to be one body, and our unity is held together by peace. It's the peace of being reconciled to God. It is the peace that fills our life through the Holy Spirit. It is a peace that leads us to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, like we love ourselves.

ADVENT REFLECTION:

As we wait for the second Advent, we do not wait alone, and we don't walk alone. Every believer is a part of one family; one body that is led by one Holy Spirit. The peace in our lives should flow through the church, displaying for the world that we stand united. Spend time today praying for the churches in our area and around the world. Pray for unity and a love for one another. Pray that each church would impact their communities for the gospel this Christmas.





FRIDAY, DECEMBER 22

READY FOR PEACE

... and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.
- Ephesians 6:15 (NIV)

We are surrounded by a desire for peace in this season. As the days move closer to Christmas, the world will sing about it, hope for it, and look for it. But true peace can only be found in the person of Christ. As the darkness of sin gives way to the light of Christ' Advent, are we prepared to proclaim the gospel of peace?

READ: Ephesians 6:10-18

Peace in the middle of war stands out. There was one such moment that happened during WWI. For a single Christmas Day, along the Western battlefields of Europe, weary soldiers laid down their weapons and fighting paused. It didn't cease entirely, but for a brief moment, there was peace. That is the empty hope of peace on this earth. Fighting is never truly over. That is because we have an enemy. Satan never wants us to stand in peace, so he comes at us with weapons meant to rob us of our inheritance. But we have not been left to battle on our own. God has given us armor to stand firm in peace. We stand firm in the truth of the peace we have with God. We are no longer separated from Him. We are no longer slaves to our sin. We are no longer defined by our pasts. Also, we stand firm in the peace of God. We can be free from the doubt and anxiety that fill our minds. We can rest in peace, even in the middle of turmoil. When we live in the peace of God, we stand out from the world. Lastly, we stand firm in the pursuit of peace with others. And this message of peace is meant to be a gospel of peace that we share with the world around us. What better way to celebrate Christmas, than to share our own story of advent, when Christ came to us, bringing us out of the darkness and bringing us into the light of peace? We are not meant to keep the message of peace to ourselves. The good news proclaimed by the angels when Christ was born is the same good news that we are meant to proclaim now.

ADVENT REFLECTION:

Christ's coming is the only good news that can bring peace and joy to this earth. C.S. Lewis said, "God can not give peace and happiness apart from Himself because there is no such thing." Apart from the message of the good news of Christ, no one can know peace. We have been tasked with advancing the message of true peace. Who will you share the good news of Jesus with?



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 23

REFLECT AND REJOICE

Use this day to read the truth of Scripture and reflect on the opportunity that we have been given, to show the love of God to the world. Because we have been made right with God and live in His peace, we are called to model that peace to those around us.

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.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Romans 12:9-18 (NIV)





SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24

IN HIM. WE HAVE PEACE

For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father,

Prince of Peace. - Isaiah 9:6

Isaiah prophesied about the one whose rule would bring peace. For generations, kings and kingdoms had failed to restore shalom to earth. Each man was unable to make peace between God, man, and others. But, in God's perfect time, the true Prince of Peace came.

LIGHT THE FIRST, SECOND, THIRD, AND FOURTH CANDLES.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Isaiah 9:6-7

For he himself is our peace... And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

Ephesians 2:14a, 17

God didn't leave peace up to us. He sent His Son to restore peace with us and make peace possible with others. Christ came to be our peace. It is only through Him that we can be at peace with God through His righteousness. Because of Him, we no longer have to strive through works to be made right with God. We live in God's kingdom here and now, and we are called to participate in bringing peace to our broken world. In Matthew 5:9, Jesus called His children to be peacemakers. It can seem impossible to live in peace with those around us, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, we should pursue peace.

REFLECT AND PRAY:

On this Christmas Eve, remember that God made a way for us to live in shalom with Him. The world may seem lost to chaos, but we have the promise that there will be a day when Jesus will come again as King, bringing peace and perfect shalom. While we wait, we pray. We pray for peace to be in our homes, within our family, and in our community. Pray by name for those with whom you are not at peace. Pray for those ravaged by war. Pray for God's kingdom to come here on earth even now. If you are an enemy of peace by your words and actions, confess these areas to God. Thank God that, because of Jesus, we no longer have to strive to be at peace with Him. Ask for His strength to live at peace with those around you.



MONDAY, DECEMBER 25

CHRISTMAS DAY PROCEAIMING THE COMING OF PEACE

"For unto you has been born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." -Luke 2:11

On that night in Bethlehem, to an unlikely group of men, the angels proclaimed peace on earth to all who believe. Christ willingly came to do what no one else could do - restore shalom. At His coming, heaven rejoiced, and so should we.

LIGHT ALL FIVE CANDLES.

READ: Luke 2:1-20

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" - Luke 2:13-14

The eternal Son of God entered this world as a baby. This child called "Messiah" fulfilled the prophecies given to God's people. Jesus is good news of great joy, for all of the people. Rejoice, your King has come to restore peace.

REFLECT AND PRAY:

Today is a day for praise. Because of Jesus, we have been given life and peace. God has proven Himself trustworthy and true. Our Messiah came to restore peace with God, and there will be a day when He comes again!





TUESDAY, DECEMBER 26

THE PROMISE OF PEACE

We do not pack away the promise of peace with our Christmas decorations. The message of Advent is one that lives all year long. In the fullness of time, God sent His Son to redeem the world. And there will be a day when our King will return and He will restore perfect shalom. While we wait for Him, we are to be people who live in His peace and proclaim the hope of His coming peace forever.

He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. On that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation." - Isaiah 25:8-9

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." - Revelations 21:1-5



