

5-SESSION
BIBLE STUDY

advent

THE WEARY WORLD REJOICES

LIFEWAY WOMEN

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NATIVITY

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Welcome! This Advent study may vary from others you've done. We know many Bible study groups don't meet during the Advent season, so we wanted to provide a study you can do alone, with family, or with your friends! Along with daily personal study, we provided activities each week you may choose to do by yourself, with your kids, or with friends. Each week you'll find:

- an introduction;
- five days of personal study;
- activities to do individually, with kids and teens, or with your friends and family;
- group discussion questions in the Group Guide.

Use the five days of personal study to reflect, allowing God's Word and truth to nourish your soul. This study is designed to help you remember the hope, peace, joy, and love of Jesus during the Christmas season.

GROUP DISCUSSION

If you decide to do this study with others, use the Group Guide discussion questions and the personal study each week to guide your conversation. In addition to answering the questions in the Group Guide, invite women to share the things they learned from each day or to share Scripture and anything that really impacted them during the week. During a group meeting you may want to invite women to share how they've incorporated the kids, teens, and adult activities into the season of Advent. If you choose, your group may want to bring the supplies needed and do one of the activities in a group setting as you discuss the Group Guide questions and personal study.

Because Advent can be a busy season, we hope the activities in the study provide a time of rest and reflection. We hope you'll enjoy sharing the love of Jesus with your family, friends, and neighbors this season.

A GROUP TIME MIGHT LOOK SOMETHING LIKE THIS:

- Welcome (This might also be a time to light a candle if you choose to include an Advent wreath each week.)
- Ask the questions on the Group Guide page for that week.
- Review the five days of personal study.
- Ask women to share any special activities they added to their week as they focused on Advent.
- Read Scripture related to the week's theme (hope, peace, joy, love). You can find a list of Scriptures for each week of Advent on page 142.
- Close in prayer.

SHARE WITH OTHERS

There may be those in your neighborhood or community who don't understand Advent. Consider inviting others to join you, using the Group Guide questions and hosting a group in your home. Explain the Advent wreath, what the Bible says about Jesus, and how your celebration of the Christmas season is different because of Christ.

INTRODUCTION

We want to celebrate the birth of Christ. We know it's important to remember the "reason for the season," both in our hearts and in our actions. But perhaps Christmas has lost a bit of its wonder and beauty. It can be easy to look at gift giving as an obligation, and our calendars become so full of parties and concerts and entertaining that we wonder if we'll have a moment to breathe. We struggle to remember why we're doing all of this. What are we celebrating? How can we keep our focus on Christ, the One whose birth and love we celebrate this season?

We hope this study will help. Advent may not be a word you're used to using when it comes to this season. Advent, by definition, means "the arrival." During Advent, we remember what it was like to wait for Jesus' first Advent on earth—Christmas.

Advent, officially, is a season on the church calendar leading up to Christmas. Traditionally, it begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas and goes until Christmas day. The rituals and traditions associated with Advent are both ancient and fluid. Churches have observed Advent for centuries, but each congregation and individual may participate in different ways. Many light candles each Sunday, telling a different part of the Christmas story leading up to Christ's birth. We've included a quick guide for you on page 142.

Advent is important in many ways. Here are some you might consider.

ADVENT CHALLENGES US TO FOCUS ON JESUS IN THE WEEKS LEADING UP TO CHRISTMAS.

Amidst the hustle and bustle and jingle bells, taking time to observe Advent invites us to remember the hope, peace, joy, and love Jesus offers. We are challenged to keep the other holiday festivities centered on who Jesus is and what His coming means for us.

ADVENT BUILDS ANTICIPATION.

When we think and read about the prophets predicting Jesus' birth, it makes us thankful for the hope of Jesus. When we're reminded of the Israelites enslaved and then in exile, we become grateful for the God who is with us—Immanuel. We anticipate celebrating Jesus' first coming, but Advent also points us to His second. We still long for hope, for peace, for joy, for God With Us. In Jesus' second coming, we will have perfect hope, peace, joy, and love, and we will be with God for eternity.

Different churches tell the story in different ways. We've chosen to focus on an attribute of Jesus' coming each week, along with someone in the Christmas story. The first week, we'll talk about the prophets who foretold Jesus' birth with hope. The second week, we'll look at how the angels declared peace had come to earth. The third week, we'll talk about the joy of the shepherds. Finally, on Christmas week, we'll celebrate the love of Christ Himself.

Advent helps remind us, as the familiar Christmas carol says, of when "He appeared, and the soul felt its worth." We pray as you study the story of Immanuel this Advent season, that your soul will feel its worth—that you will be filled with the hope, peace, joy, and love of Christ. We pray this Christmas you'll remember that one holy night long ago with gratitude and wonder and look forward to the second Advent when Christ returns victorious.



HOPE

WEEK 1



THE WEARY WORLD

by Elizabeth Hyndman

The subtitle for this study on Advent most likely sounds familiar to you. We borrowed the line from one of our favorite Christmas hymns, “O Holy Night!” The full line sings, “A thrill of hope—the weary world rejoices.”¹

Today, we identify with the last part of that line, even though it was written in 1847 and translated into English in 1855.² The truth is, our world has been weary since Genesis 3. You feel it. I feel it. The writers of the hymn and the writers of the Old Testament felt it. We’re weary of the darkness, the pain, the doubt, the fear. We stand waiting.

The writers of the Old Testament knew, though, that the wait would not last forever. Even in the midst of waiting, the thrill of hope sustained them. They could rejoice because they trusted in their hope of a promise—the promise of the Messiah, the Light of the world.

They waited with hope. The weary world waited while brothers killed one another, while men walked on the earth for hundreds of years, while generation after generation died. They waited as they witnessed the entire earth covered in water, wiping out every living creature except a handful of the faithful. They waited, however impatiently, while trying to take matters into their own hands—they attempted to become their own saviors, building towers into heaven.

The world nodded along hearing a promise tinged with familiarity as God vowed to make Abraham into a great nation. Our forefathers waited as they

obeyed God's commands to go to unfamiliar lands. They waited through famine, through slavery, through wandering, through wars.

While the wars raged and seemed never-ending, God's people looked to heaven and asked, "How long? How long must we wait for your promise to be fulfilled?" God granted them kings in their waiting, pointing to the King who was coming. He gave words to their prophets, promising again and again: the Light will come.

And they waited. They waited as the darkness grew, as the light seemed to flicker out. They waited in darkness, in silence.

And they hoped.

Here and now, we stand waiting and hoping as well. We stand on the other side of the time line. We look back at the first Advent, toward the second one. We are waiting on the Messiah to return, to defeat the enemy, to drive back the darkness once and for all. We are waiting for all things to be made new. We are waiting on the hope of the promise to be fulfilled.

We have the privilege of knowing the full story. We know the promised Messiah came to earth, He died for the sins of the world, and He is risen, conquering death and darkness, pain, doubt, and fear. He is our "thrill of hope." He is the reason this "weary world rejoices."



What’s your favorite Christmas tradition?

Are you familiar with Advent? Did you celebrate Advent growing up?
Do you celebrate it now?

During Advent we remember how God’s people waited for the promise of the coming Messiah. When have you experienced a long season of waiting? What emotions did you feel during that time? Anticipation? Impatience?

Proverbs 13:12 says, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick” (NIV). Describe a time when your hope was deferred. What did God teach you through that experience?

Close your time with prayer, asking God to prepare your heart for the season of Advent. Pray for those who are in a painful season of waiting, that God would renew their hope and faith in Him.

DAY 1

WAITING WITH HOPE

by Sarah Doss

First, read Genesis 3.

As we dive into our study of Advent, we need to understand the *why* behind it all—the reason Jesus came to earth to save us.

Though Genesis 3 includes a story that is likely familiar to you, take a few moments to consider the passage anew. Write at least one insight you glean in the space provided below.

Adam and Eve entered into a perfect world. They had an intimate relationship with God and a harmonious relationship with one another—no strife, no miscommunication, no competition or judgment. (Doesn't that sound nice?) But, as we know, this wholeness—this perfect communion with God and one another—was shattered by an act of disobedience on the part of Adam and Eve. They ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in effect telling God that they thought they knew better than He did. And, we know now, this act of disobedience would forever change the nature of humanity, as each of us inherits a sin nature from Adam and Eve. We are born separated from God because of our sin. Our innate desire is to go our own way and to live contrary to God.

Let's focus for a few minutes on Genesis 3:14-15. What do you think verse 15 means?

The serpent's judgment would involve defeat by the woman's offspring. In His pronouncement of judgment on Adam, Eve, and the serpent, God showed grace to Adam and Eve in promising them a way to defeat the serpent and a way to be restored to right relationship with Him, which was the biggest grace of all.

READ GENESIS 4:1.

In Genesis 4:1, we find the account of the first human birth in the history of humanity. Though it's such a small, matter-of-fact mention, can you imagine what might have been going through Adam and Eve's minds as she was laboring and eventually gave birth? It's nerve-wracking enough to be a first-time mom, let alone the first person in the history of the world to give birth. But surely their joy and wonder overshadowed those fears. Scholar James Boice says Adam and Eve likely thought Cain was the deliverer who would defeat the serpent that God promised in Genesis 3:15. It's even reflected in the name they gave him.³ Boice says, "In view of the promise of a deliverer, [Cain's] name probably means 'Here he is' or 'I've gotten him.' Eve called her son 'Here he is' because she thought the deliverer had been sent by God."⁴

Adam and Eve thought their deliverance was coming soon, but Cain wasn't the deliverer. Instead, he seemed to be a tortured soul who murdered his brother and walked in disobedience to God all of his days. I wonder how disappointed Adam and Eve were to realize their deliverance wasn't coming through Cain; their hope was deferred. Adam and Eve had no idea what their deliverance would look like, but there was still hope in God's promise.

That thread of hope continued throughout the Old Testament as God sent prophecies of the coming Deliverer—Jesus, who would ultimately defeat Satan, sin, and death in His sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection three days later. For years and years, people lived in anticipation, trusting that God would send their Deliverer, waiting for every new glimpse of hope as God revealed more about who the Deliverer would be and when He would come.

That's where we find ourselves in this season of Advent. Though we are on this side of Jesus' ministry on earth, during Advent we spend intentional time considering the years of waiting that God's people endured in the Old Testament, and we allow it to fuel our praise and gratitude for Jesus' coming.

Take a moment to write a short prayer of praise to God for Jesus' coming to earth to rescue us and to give us a right relationship with Him.

We also take time during Advent to consider our own seasons of waiting. We are still waiting for the Savior's ultimate return, waiting for the fulfillment of His kingdom on earth. We're in the already but not yet. We've been given a taste of the kingdom of God, as we see seeds of redemption sown on the earth, as we are taught and led in sanctification by the Holy Spirit, as people come to a saving knowledge of Christ, and as God teaches us to love one another. But, in a very real sense, we are still waiting for the final redemption of all things.

Read Romans 8:18-25. Below, write a paraphrase of each verse in your own words.	
verse 18	
verse 19	
verse 20	
verse 21	
verse 22	
verse 23	
verse 24	
verse 25	

Which of these verses was encouraging to you? Explain.

WE, ALONG WITH ALL OF CREATION, ARE STILL GROANING, LOOKING IN HOPE TO OUR SAVIOR, LOOKING IN HOPE TOWARD THE DAY WHEN HE WILL COME AND MAKE ALL THINGS NEW AND GOD WILL BE GIVEN THE GLORY HE IS DUE.

We are waiting for Christ's second return, and we are also waiting on specific things in our lives.

Are you waiting on the Lord for something in particular? It can be something small or big, a longstanding hope and desire or a fly-by-night prayer. Describe the situation below.

When you consider the waiting that God's people endured for centuries, does it help you in your waiting? Or make it harder? Explain.

We all have hopes and desires that seem unfulfilled now. Everyone is waiting for something. It can be hard to perceive God's love and care for us when we aren't always able to see His work in our lives. It's difficult to live in the tension of knowing God's love for us and what looks to us at times to be His inactivity in our waiting or suffering. The people of God have bumped up against this reality for centuries; in fact, God gives us many biblical texts, especially the Psalms, to show us how to dialogue with Him in these moments of seeming incongruity.

I love what A. W. Pink says about seasons when we're not sure what exactly God is doing in our lives:

Though you cannot now harmonize God's mysterious dealings with the avowals of His love, wait on Him for more light. In His own good time He will make it plain to you.⁵

In seasons of waiting, even if you can't see it, God is working on your behalf. He is forming you into His image. He loves you, and He wants you to know Him more intimately. Though it's challenging, let's allow these seasons of waiting to strengthen our faith and fuel our hope in the coming Savior.

Take a few minutes to journal a prayer to God about something you're waiting on Him to answer. Tell Him about the places where your faith feels frail and ask Him to strengthen it. Praise Him for His faithfulness, how He cares for you, and how He's coming back to make all things new.

ADULTS



MAKE A CHRISTMAS *SPICE WREATH*

by Larissa Arnault Roach

Set the tone for the Christmas season by creating a lovely aromatic wreath (or garland or ornaments) you can enjoy all month long. Usher in holiday scents by using dried oranges, bay leaves, and cinnamon sticks. Do this activity on your own or make it a festive craft night with friends or family! If you have enough supplies, encourage everyone to make two—one to keep and one to deliver to a neighbor who might need a little Christmas cheer.

GATHER

- Oranges
- Apples
- Large embroidery needle
- Twine
- Cinnamon sticks
- Whole bay leaves

DIRECTIONS

Prepare the oranges and apples a day ahead. Preheat the oven to 200°F. Slice fruit ¼-inch thick with a serrated knife and arrange them in a single layer on a wire rack on a baking sheet. Or, place the slices directly on the oven rack. (If using this method, place a baking sheet on the lower rack to catch any that fall.) Bake for 4 hours, turning a few times. Allow slices to sit overnight to continue the drying process.

Assemble the wreath or garland. Start by threading a large needle with twine. Tightly wrap the twine around a cinnamon stick (or drill holes in cinnamon sticks to string them), then add an orange slice and an apple slice, several bay leaves, and another orange slice. Repeat until you reach the end of the twine. Tie up the ends, hang, and enjoy!

As you breathe in the wintry scents of orange, bay leaves, and cinnamon, consider Mary's anticipation of Christ taking His first breath. Meditate on the hope Jesus embodies for all people—friends, family, enemies, coworkers, strangers—even as a helpless Babe.



MAKE A *PAPER CHAIN*

by Bekah Stoneking

God created everything—including you and me—and everything God created was good and perfect.

Until something terrible happened.

When the first people chose to follow their way instead of God's way, sin entered the world. Everything was broken. People were separated from God. And since then, the whole world has become desperate for a Rescuer to come and make all things new.

Everyone is waiting and wanting. The things that hurt you or make you wish for something better may be different than the things your friends or parents or neighbors long for, but we're all hoping and waiting together. As you wait and pray, trust that God is good, He has a plan, and He always keeps His promises.

During Christmas we celebrate and remember that God kept His promise to send Jesus to earth to rescue us. Because of the Christmas promise, we can have hope that Jesus will return for us. God has not left us hopeless. He sent Jesus, and He has promised that Jesus will come again and make everything new. The anticipation you have waiting for Christmas day should remind you of the anticipation you have waiting for Jesus' return.

DIRECTIONS

To help you count down the days until Christmas, make a paper chain. Cut strips of colorful construction paper (or any kind of fun paper)—one for each day until December 25th. Work with your family to write encouraging words, Bible verses, and evidences of God's grace on each strip. Tape or staple the strips together to make a chain. Every day, remove one link and read what's written on it. Remember God's faithfulness and talk about the hope you have in Him. Pray and thank God for sending Jesus to be our Savior.