

o come, o come,
emmanuel

AN ADVENT STUDY

LIFEWAY WOMEN

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EDITORIAL TEAM, LIFEWAY WOMEN PUBLISHING

Becky Loyd
Director, LifeWay
Women

Tina Boesch
Manager, LifeWay
Women Bible Studies

Sarah Doss
Team Leader, LifeWay
Women Bible Studies

Erin Davis
Content Editor

Emily Chadwell
Production Editor

Chelsea Waack
Graphic Designer

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How to Use This Study

Welcome! We are eager to celebrate the season of Advent alongside you.

Since many Bible study groups don't meet during this busy season, we've created 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 or with others. 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.

This study is designed to help you shift your focus toward Emmanuel—God with us. Use the five days of personal study to reflect, allowing God's Word to nourish your soul.

GROUP DISCUSSION

If you decide to do this study with others, use the Group Guide discussion questions found at the end of 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 of study and share how each week's Scriptures impacted them.

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. Enjoy sharing the love of Jesus with your family, friends, and neighbors this season.

A GROUP TIME MIGHT LOOK SOMETHING LIKE THIS:

- Welcome (Use this 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. 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

"Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel."¹

This year, we've experienced sorrow on a global scale. Perhaps you're reading these words years after they were originally written, but you no doubt remember the coronavirus pandemic that swept our world into a season of fear, death, and heartache.

Every year, no matter the scale, we all experience sorrow—individually and communally. Every year holds its share of loneliness, hurt, and tragedy—of *brokenness*. This year, and every year, as the days on our calendar dwindle, our hearts cry out with some of the last words in the Bible, "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20b).

Advent is a season set aside to celebrate that Christ came to us as a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, and to look forward with anticipation to the moment when He will return as our triumphant King. It's a season to rejoice!

We've chosen the hymn "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" as the theme for this Bible study. It's a song that has been sung by Christ's followers for more than 150 years. I love the verbs found in the chorus. (Hang with me.) *The call to rejoice is present tense.*

"REJOICE! REJOICE!"

This is a call to action. *Rejoice now, O Israel!* Sing praise! Be full of joy! Celebrate!

The second sentence of the chorus is future tense.

"EMMANUEL SHALL COME TO THEE, O ISRAEL" (EMPHASIS ADDED).

These familiar lyrics emphasize the past, the time before Christ's first coming. They help us remember that Israel, God's chosen people, once longed for Him to come and rescue them. God's children have been united by the same heart cry throughout the years, "Come, Lord Jesus!" Come be with us.

While they lived in loneliness, in sorrow, in hurt, in tragedy, in the sheer brokenness of our world, Israel begged God to send a savior. *But even as they pleaded for rescue, they rejoiced.*

Though it's a precious piece of church history, this song isn't Scripture. Though it wasn't God-breathed, it accurately reflects the stories of God's people recorded in the Old Testament, as well as the longings of our hearts today.

Israel could rejoice as they cried out for a savior because they believed in the promises of God. Our God is faithful, and we know He will fulfill every word He has spoken. Jesus Christ fulfilled all the promises of God (2 Cor. 1:20). So His people can rejoice in what's to come.

In the same way, even in seasons of uncertainty when the brokenness of our world weighs heavily upon us, we can rejoice too. We can be a people full of joy even now. Emmanuel will come to us again. We can trust it because He said it. He promised, "Yes, I am coming soon" (Rev. 22:20a).

As we look back at the stable where Jesus arrived that first Christmas, we can rejoice, celebrating another promise kept. As we look forward, longing for the day of Christ's second coming, we can celebrate with singing. Though we mourn in lonely exile here, we celebrate with great hope that the Son of God will soon appear.

Now, and always, "Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel."

emmanuel

WEEK 1



O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL

by Elizabeth Hyndman

Before we go any further, the grammarian in me wants to address the spelling issue we have in this study. In the title, we've spelled Emmanuel like the hymn. But you'll see Christ often referenced as "Immanuel" as well. Why the discrepancy?"

The explanation is simple—in Hebrew, the original word looks more like "Immanuel," while in Greek, the transliteration of the word is typically spelled "Emmanuel." The New Testament, largely written in Greek originally, therefore sometimes translates the name with an E, while the Old Testament, originally written in Hebrew, translates it with an I.

The name Emmanuel carries great significance in the life of God's people. Emmanuel means "God is with us" (Matt. 1:23). No matter how you spell it, Emmanuel is a promise.

In the holiday season, we remember the value of time together—physical presence. Joy shared.

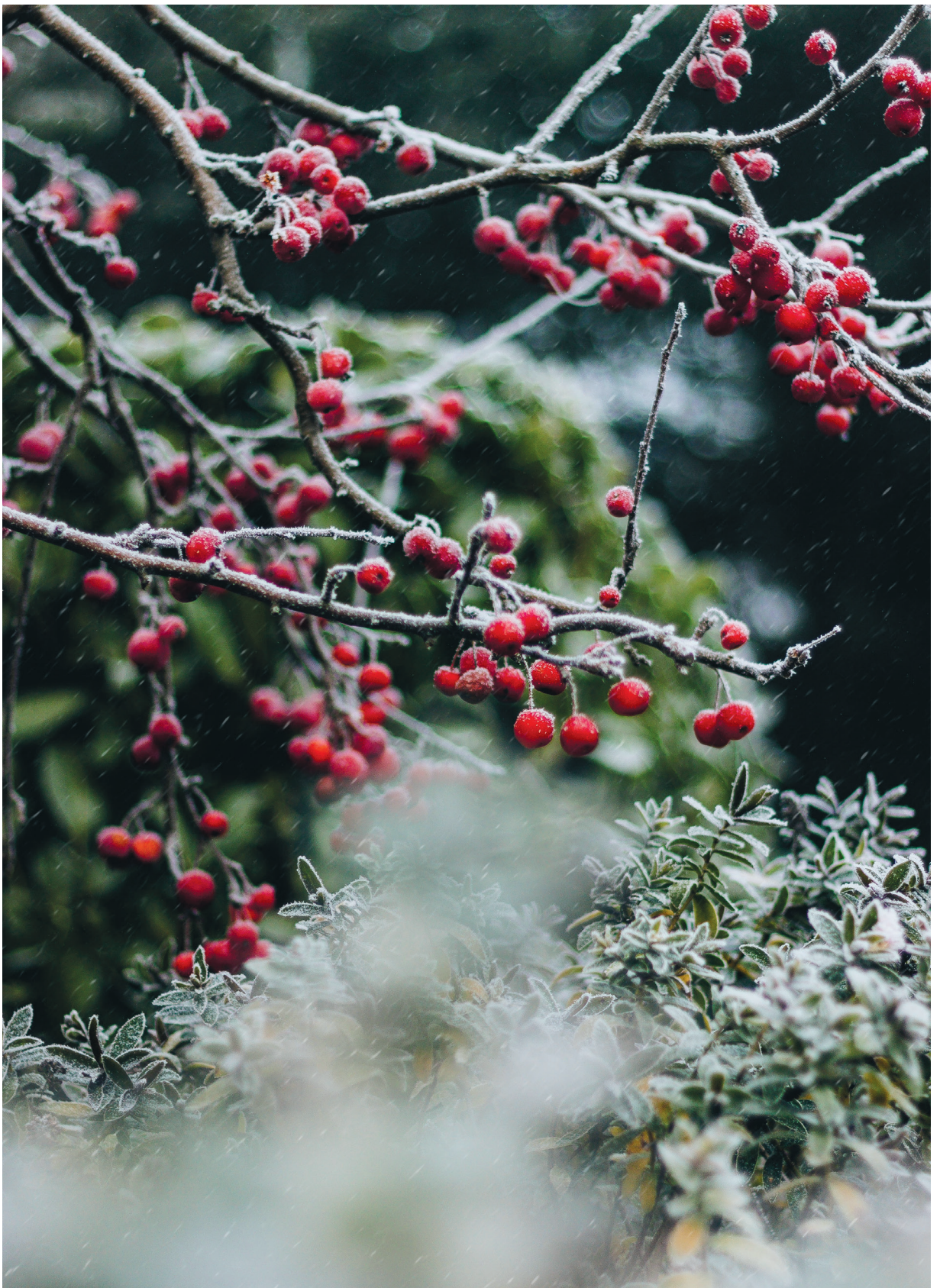
Throughout Scripture, God displays a desire to be with His people. He fellowshiped with Adam and Eve in the garden. He went with the nation of

Israel as they fled Egypt, leading them through the wilderness with fire and cloud. He tabernacled with His people in the desert. He dwelt among them in the temple in Jerusalem.

Throughout history, God's people have also had glimpses of life when they felt without His presence—the temple was destroyed; the people were in exile; the prophets fell silent.

A verse of the beloved carol speaks to these moments: "And ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear."² They waited in mourning, in captivity—literally and figuratively. Yet they did not wait without hope. They held on to the promise of Emmanuel. Surely they whispered, "God will be with us again." And He is! Jesus Christ, God with us, came in physical form to dwell among us.

Today we rest in a new promise—the promise of a second coming. Because He lives within us, we never have to know life without God's presence. Even so, our hearts long for Emmanuel. We look forward with great anticipation to the day when we will once again experience His physical presence—God with us, *forever*.



Consider the specific ways the word *Emmanuel* has been a part of your Christmas traditions. Include favorite carols, decorations, and holiday festivities.

Do you sense God’s presence more or less during the Christmas season, compared with the rest of the year? Explain.

How does God’s desire to be with His people comfort you in this season?

Consider Psalm 16:11. According to this verse, where is joy truly found in this—and every—season?

If you want the Advent season to be one of enjoying the Lord’s presence, tell Him so. Close your time with prayer, asking God to give you a greater awareness of His presence and thanking Him that He is Emmanuel, God with us.

Day 1

GOD WITH US IN THE GARDEN

by Faith C. Whatley

First, read Genesis 3:1-7.

I'll never forget April 20, 1999. My memory takes me back there in the blink of an eye. I can recall the moment I landed on the island of Oahu, Hawaii, like it was yesterday. It was my first visit to Hawaii, and I was overtaken by the island's beauty. It truly is paradise. My host for the weekend picked me up from the airport and drove me to the apartment where I would be staying. There I was, on the sixteenth floor in a corner apartment with floor-to-ceiling windows, overlooking Waikiki Beach. I was mesmerized by the beautiful view. My mind could hardly take it in.

As I started to unpack, I turned on the TV to catch up on the news. I heard something that I could not believe—there had been a shooting at Columbine High School and students had been killed. What we didn't know in 1999 was that many more school shootings would happen in the years to come. On that day, it was the most horrific thing I had ever heard. I was thirty-five years old at the time and had two small children. I sat down in disbelief and thought, *How can I be in this beautiful, majestic place when something so terrible has happened?* It felt like a bad dream. I wanted to wake up and realize the tragedy didn't really happen. But it did happen.

When I read Genesis 1–3, I wonder if Adam and Eve felt the same way. Did they want to believe they were in a bad dream and wake up to discover they hadn't really chosen to listen to the evil one and disobey the God who made them? Those times when I've missed the mark God has set for me, I've felt my stomach drop. I imagine Adam and Eve must have wanted to close their eyes and forget the fact that their sin had fractured their perfect relationship with God. But they couldn't—because of their rebellion against God's command, sin entered paradise. I wonder if they thought, *How could we have been given such a beautiful place to live in and experience something so terrible?* It must have felt surreal.

Have you ever experienced a moment like this, when the consequences of your sin felt like a bad dream? Write about it below.

The garden of Eden may feel like a strange place to begin this Advent season. We want the warm fuzzies of the season, not the angst of the fall of man. Yet when we read the first chapters of Genesis we see that God created a beautiful place for humanity to flourish. This is a love story, not just between man and woman, but between the God of the universe and His creation. As we enter this season of giving, consider God's elaborate gifts:

- He created the heavens and the earth and everything that would live there.
- He created humankind in His image.
- He placed Adam in a beautiful, perfect garden, free of all sin and shame.
- He created Eve so Adam would not be alone.
- He created marriage, the first family.
- Everything He created was a good and perfect gift (Jas. 1:17).

And perhaps the most elaborate gift of all—from the dawn of humanity, God has given us His presence. He did not separate Himself from all that He made. He walked and talked with Adam on the footpaths of Eden.

We all know what happened next. Because of Adam and Eve's disobedience, God administered painful consequences. The first image bearers were banished from the perfect home God had created for them. I wonder if they looked around after in disbelief, shell-shocked by what happened.

Their rebellion was real. So were the consequences. We still feel the impact today. Yet even in their sin, God never abandoned them. Not for a second. They went on to create a family "with the LORD's help" (Gen. 4:1). God never turned His back on Adam and Eve. He never stopped loving them. The rest of the Bible reveals that God did not withdraw the gift of His presence from humankind. From the garden to the Gospels and beyond, we find God walking and talking with the children He made in His image.

What other evidence do you find in Scripture that God did not withdraw His presence from humankind because of the fall?

Have you ever paused to consider what a mercy it is that God still invites us into His presence, even though we are sinners (Heb. 10:19-22)?

Yes, intimacy with God changed when sin entered the picture, but we still serve a God who offers His presence. The love story continued when Christ went to the cross to pay the penalty for sin, making a way for us to come back to the perfect relationship God intended all along.

End today's devotional by writing out a prayer expressing your desire to experience more of God's presence in this Advent season.

A close-up photograph of a lit candle in a clear glass jar. The candle is a warm, yellowish-orange color and is lit, with a bright flame. A string of small, warm-toned lights is draped around the jar. The background is dark with out-of-focus bokeh lights in shades of blue, green, and yellow.

ADULTS

MAKE SLOW COOKER

Candles

by Larissa Arnault Roach

In John 9:5, Jesus tells us He is the Light of the world. Create slow cooker candles in warm holiday scents to remind yourself each time you burn one that Jesus brings light into your life. He is hope in literal and spiritual darkness.

GATHER

- 4 pounds of soy wax
- 10 (4-ounce) mason jars
- Slow cooker
- Boiling water
- Canning tongs or tongs wrapped with rubber bands*
- Essential oils of your choice
- 10 cotton wicks
- Skewer
- 10 clothes pins

DIRECTIONS

1. Supplies can easily be ordered online. Gather items and get everything set up to begin.
2. Fill each mason jar to the top with wax pieces. Place the jars in the bottom of an empty slow cooker and slowly pour boiling water around the jars until about halfway up the sides, being careful not to get water into the jars. Place the lid on the slow cooker and set the temperature to high.
3. After two hours, the wax will have melted to about half the volume. Add more wax and stir. Place the lid back on the slow cooker and

let sit on high for another hour.

4. Once all the wax has melted, carefully remove the jars from the slow cooker with tongs and let sit at room temperature for ten minutes.

*Note: If you do not have canning tongs, wrap a few rubber bands around each grabbing end of a regular pair of tongs to create a stronger grip.

5. Add a generous amount of essential oils (about forty drops) to each candle.
6. When the wax just starts to set, use a skewer to create a hole in the wax and insert the wicks. To keep each wick upright while the wax cools completely, insert the wick through the hole in the center of a wooden clothespin, then rest it on top of the upper rim of the jar while the wax sets.
7. Let your candles cool for several hours before trimming the wicks and screwing on the lids. Decorate each finished candle with twine and a gift tag.



KIDS

A LANTERN

Testimony

by Shelly D. Harris

Photo by Lauren Ervin

In the Bible, sin is compared to darkness, and God is described as light. One night in the small town of Bethlehem, our Dayspring—the Light of the world—was born and placed in a small manger. This baby would change the world forever.

Explain that the name Dayspring is a name for Jesus that reminds us He is our hope and light.

READ ISAIAH 9:2 AND LUKE 2:30-32.

Point out that Jesus is the light. In the Gospel of John, Jesus explained to everyone that He is the Light of the world. He came to earth to show us how to have a relationship with God. Jesus pointed everyone from the darkness of sin to the light of God.

DIRECTIONS

Create a lantern to remind everyone that Jesus is our hope and light. Gather a mason jar (or recycle an empty pickle jar); red, yellow, and green tissue paper; a battery-operated tea light; a bottle of decoupage glue; and a paintbrush. Invite kids to tear or cut the tissue paper into small squares. Then help kids use decoupage glue to attach the tissue paper squares all around the jar. After the glue dries, turn on the tea light and place it inside the jar.

Remind everyone that one day Jesus will return and make all things new. Darkness will no longer exist. No one will need a lamp or a flashlight because Jesus will be our light—forever.

Conclude with prayer: *We praise You, Lord, for being our light and our hope. Help us to remember to live in ways that bring You honor and glory. We thank You for defeating sin and death by dying on the cross and rising again. Amen.*