

WEEK 4: LOVE

I will sing for ever of your love, O Lord. Psalm 89:1

BE TRANSFORMED BY LOVE

As we prepare to open our hearts anew to Christ this Christmas, let us hold a deep sense of the infinite and unconditional love that God is offering to each of us. May we also come to understand better that accepting the love of God calls us to see his face in everyone we meet and to love them as He loves them.

Loving is always risky, because we cannot enter into it without being changed. Altered. Transformed. Loving is never just about opening our heart. It is about being willing to have our heart become larger as we make room for people and stories and experiences we never imagined holding. It is about being willing to have our heart become deeper as we move beyond the surface layers of our assumptions, prejudices, and habits in order to truly see and receive what – and who – is before us. It is about being willing to have our heart remade as we take in not only the brokenness of the world but also the beauty of it, the astounding wonder that will not allow us to remain the same.

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LET YOUR GOD LOVE YOU

Be silent. Be still.
Alone, empty before your God.
Say nothing. Ask nothing.
Be silent. Be still.
Let your God Look upon you – that is all.
God knows and understands.
God loves you with an enormous love,
wanting only to look upon you with love.
Quiet. Still. Be.
Let your God Love you.

© Edwina Gateley from *There Was No Path So I Trod One*

PRAYER

Lord, fill my heart with your goodness.
Dwell in me and let me know your peace.
Enter into the dark places of my life
that I may overflow with your love
and reflect your forgiveness,
bringing forth the fruits of love, hope, joy and peace.

Henri Nouwen from *The Little Book of Advent*



PRAY AND REFLECT ADVENT: HOPE, PEACE, JOY AND LOVE

WEEK 1: HOPE

*Let us see, O Lord, your mercy
and show us your saving help.*
Psalm 85:7



WAITING AND WATCHING

Advent is about two comings. It's about waiting and watching for the coming of the Christ child – new life, new birth, new hope coming into our world and into our lives. It is the fulfilment of God's promises. But it's also about waiting and watching for the end times when the fullness of God's kingdom will be revealed. Both these advents are about the coming together of humanity and divinity.

We are called to prepare the way of the Lord. We watch and reflect on who we are. We live with expectancy and anticipation of God's presence in our lives. We wait for the angelic messenger that promises us that the womb of our humanity will bear a child named Jesus. Advent reminds us that waiting and watching are holy work. So how do we do this? Silence is the key. Silence is a way of waiting, a way of watching, and a way of listening to what is going on within and around us. We come to self-knowledge through stillness and silence, through attentiveness and watchfulness.

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from *The Season of Advent – Holy Waiting and Watching*

SLOW DOWN AND LISTEN

In our busy, stressful world, we have to consciously seek out silence and stillness. God speaks in all sorts of ways – through scripture, through nature, through other people. However, unless we slow down and listen, we miss his promptings and his voice. Only then can we truly appreciate the value of the journey, as well as the destination; the value of slowing down, looking and listening; learning from the rhythms of nature; from the formation of community along the way, and from times of stillness and rest.

So often we rush through life at breakneck speed, never pausing to reflect and be still. It is only when we slow down and look that we really see. By slowing down, and being more present to each moment, all sorts of lessons are learned. For some people, this might involve the healing of painful memories. For others, it could be time to discern the next stage in life. For many, it is a chance to really get away and listen to God. For me, it is an invitation to a whole way of being – one that recognises that God is not 'out there' to be sought, but already 'in here' to be found.

© Annie O'Connor from *The Camino: Finding Stillness and Presence*

THE SILENCE OF LOVE

Be still and know. Be still and look.
Abandon yourself to God in longing love, simply,
holding on to nothing but God.
God's silence is the silence of love.
It is good to wait in silence for God's coming.

Source unknown

WEEK 2: PEACE

*I will hear what the Lord God has to say;
a voice that speaks of peace, peace for his people. Psalm 85:8*

THE IN-BETWEEN TIMES

Advent is about the in-between times and Advent is where God will meet us. We have on one hand, a world in disarray and it doesn't seem like there is much hope. On the other hand, we have a vision of something better.

That's the struggle of Advent. A new born baby in a stable announcing: 'Peace on earth' or a man on a cross crying: 'Forgive them, Father'. It is a bridge. The Jesus who does not solve all the problems or remove all the pain and suffering, but who says that fear can be met with faith and that history and hope do rhyme.

Source unknown

TO BRING PEACE AMONGST PEOPLE

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and the princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost, to heal the broken, to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner, to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace amongst people,
to make music in the heart.

Howard Thurman

PRAYER

God of reconciliation and grace,
you promise us a world where all is new,
where love is born when hope is gone,
where broken relationships are restored to wholeness.
May we live as people who know your story of love,
and have the vision to imagine what could be possible
if we dared to live this story.
God of abundant life,
may we be witnesses of love, hope and peace,
and co-creators of your life in the world. Amen.



Christian Aid

WEEK 3: JOY

I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God. Isaiah 61:10

A BLESSING WE MAKE TOGETHER

The joy that animates the characters of Advent and Christmas is something distinctly other than a personal joy they have kept for themselves. This is the joy that infuses creation. They know that joy is what becomes possible when we turn toward one another; that it is a blessing we make together.

When Elizabeth calls out in welcome to Mary, and the child she is carrying leaps with joy; when Mary raises her voice in the Magnificat; when Zechariah sings his canticle; when Mary and Joseph bring the infant Jesus to the temple, and the prophets Anna and Simeon cry out in recognition and delight – each one radiates the joy that courses through them; something they have embraced, not by resisting the world but by entering more deeply into it, so that they can welcome the God who shows up in the midst of it.

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A GIFT FROM GOD, TO BE LIVED TO THE FULL

When I look at Jesus' life and ministry, I'm struck by how totally present he was to everyone and in everything. Whether in prayer to the Father, in conversation with the people he encountered, in proclaiming the kingdom, in ministering to people's needs, in listening to their concerns, in suffering, in dying and in rising, Jesus was fully present in each particular moment.

I wonder if this year we can practise being fully present in this particular moment, to these particular people in this particular place, without thinking of what comes next? Can we accept this moment as a gift from God, to be lived to the full?

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PRAYER

Come, Lord, source of joy.
Move us to be good news in our world
and to stand alongside our sisters and
brothers in need.

Come, Lord, source of joy,
lead us in your ways
as together we make a change
so all people may rejoice and be glad.
Come, Lord, source of joy.

CAFOD Advent prayers

