

Advent and Christmas Devotions

Preface

The Preface is the part of the book that tells the reader why and how the book was written. To tell why this devotion was written, let's first start with who Project Transformation is. Project Transformation, or as our friends call us, PT, is an organization committed to transforming communities by engaging CHILDREN, COLLEGE students, and CHURCHES in purposeful relationships. We do this by literacy focused summer camps for children that provide books and reading buddies, healthy meals and snacks, art, chapel, recreation, and relationships with college students. Those college students are working toward their education goals just like the children. They are trained to run a children's camp and to improve literacy, but they also are invited to build relationships with each other and God and to ask what their calling is in their life. Or, as poet Mary Oliver says, "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" All this happens at and in partnership with churches.

And books? Well, books are the secret ingredient. Reading does so much more than make you a better student. Reading books allows you to travel and explore and laugh and cry. Books can be both an escape from your present circumstances and a vision of your future. Books introduce you to people who are very different than you and then allow you to realize that you are not so different after all.

The cultivated PT book lists help build libraries at site churches, where summer camp happens, in which children see themselves, their families, their neighbors and their futures through books. PT hopes that you will consider donating books from this list so that you can play a role in providing these opportunities to our PT children.

Introduction

The Advent and Christmas Devotions are designed to help you focus a bit on the gift of a Child and the gift of literacy. Jesus was a good reader. Did you know that His Bible, called the Torah, had no vowels or punctuations? He would have to be a good reader to read that. PT thinks reading is a gift everyone should receive, from the tiniest to biggest, in laps and in quiet nooks, in fiction and non-fiction.

Reading the Bible can feel challenging, and not just like “What does this mean?” or “How do I live by this?” We can get confused by the fact that the Bible is not put together in chronological order or that some books are history while others are poetry, letters or law. Each week in the devotion we will tackle one of the potentially challenging aspects of reading the Bible. If this is new to you, we hope it helps you dig deeper into your Bible reading. And if this is not new to you, perhaps you can use this to help a younger reader.

The weekly Bible readings are from the lectionary. Choose one of the reading choices to focus on for the week. A great way to do this is in the order the readings are given: Old Testament, Psalm (or a concern of the season), Epistle (which means it is a letter), and a Gospel. The week of Christmas, try to read them all.

1st Sunday in Advent, November 28, 2021

The Bible is a collection of books and these books, like many of the books we read today, are divided into chapters. But unlike the chapter books we often read, in the Bible, the chapters are then divided into numbered verses. This gives us an easy way to locate specific sentences, quotes and teachings but is visually different than other books we read. In the Focus Verse below, we know to look in the book of Jeremiah for chapter 33 and then for verse 14.

Focus Verse: Jeremiah 33:14 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

What does the fulfillment of a promise mean to you? How does Advent help you get ready for the future and what God has in store for you?

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Psalm 25:1-10

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Luke 21:25-36

2nd Sunday in Advent, December 5, 2021

The Bible is not organized in chronological order. Stories are repeated and timelines cross, as seen in books like Deuteronomy and Chronicles. It is important to remember that, unlike the book an author writes today, the Bible was written over a thousand years and some parts were not found until hundreds of years later. More modern authors such as Wangerin have written the Bible in a chronological narrative format that can be a helpful supplement to your Bible reading, but support materials like this should not replace the primacy of the Bible.

Focus Verse: Luke 1:78-79 "By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

What do mercy and peace look like for you? How are you practicing it for yourself, your family and your faith community during Advent?

Baruch 5:1-9 or Malachi 3:1-4

Luke 1:68-79

Philippians 1:3-11

Luke 3:1-6

3rd Sunday in Advent, December 12, 2021

The Bible was written in several different languages and now either gets translated or interpreted. In translations, scholars work from the original language to find the right word and its meanings and this is considered a “word for word” translation. With interpretations, a scholar takes a more “thought by thought” approach .

Focus Verse Philippians 4:6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

What are you worried about? How much are you able to impact that concern? During the remainder of Advent are there worries you can practice giving to God? Are there worries that you can work to resolve through working for justice?

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Isaiah 12:2-6

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:7-18

4th Sunday in Advent, December 19, 2021

The Bible has a lot of metaphors. Metaphors help us find ourselves in the story, but they can be hard when what we want is an answer, plain and simple. Parables are a great example of metaphors that Jesus used often. Parables help us understand hard things in a way that can change and grow as we do.

Focus Verse Luke 1:46-47 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

What does your spirit rejoice in? How can use the remainder of Advent to magnify the Lord?

Micah 5:2-5a

Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 80:1-7

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)

1st Sunday in Christmas, December 26, 2021

Don't put Christmas away. There are 12 days in Christmas because it is a way too big to be contained in just one day.

Hebrews 4:12 tells us, "For the Word of God is alive and active," which explains why multiple readings of scripture continue to teach and guide us over the years with fresh revelations. The Bible often has footnotes that are designed to help us understand a passage, learn multiple definitions of a word or make connections with other verses. Footnotes can be helpful but reading for yourself and making your own footnotes may help you see the way you have changed and grown over the years.

Focus Verse Psalm 148:1-4 Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host! Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

How has the gift of the Christ child renewed your ability to praise God? How can you hold on to the joy and the wonder of Christmas long after the decorations are put away?

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

Psalm 148

Colossians 3:12-17

Luke 2:41-52