



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. The 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 dollars (to support the work beyond just giving someone a book) and books from this list so that you can play a role in providing these opportunities to PT children.

Thank you allowing Project Transformation to be a part of your Advent preparation!

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 or read one per day. 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.

There is a different book list highlighted each week to help you think about the way you and Project Transformation support literacy, especially for struggling readers.

1st Sunday in Advent, November 27, 2022

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: Isaiah 2:4 He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

Is this scripture merely aspirational? Or can you imagine a world where there is war no more? What emotions does this passage stir in you concerning safety and power? How does the coming of God as an infant inform this scripture? What is our role in making this reality?

Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalms 122

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:36-44



Read Together Booklist: The We Both Read series is designed for grown-ups and children to sit together and share reading responsibilities. The grown-up reading pages contain high interest content while the child reading pages support vocabulary building and comprehensions skills.

2nd Sunday in Advent, December 4, 2022

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: Romans 15:4-6 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What brings you hope right now? Is Advent lending itself to harmony or stress? How can you buy less, pray more and

Isaiah 11:1-10
Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19
Romans 15:4-13
Matthew 3:1-12



High/Low Booklist: High/Low books are books that have an interest level that is for older kids, while the reading skill level is lower for growing readers. These books help support and engage older children as they build their reading skills.

3rd Sunday in Advent, December 11, 2022

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 Matthew 11:4-5 Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.



How is the Matthew passage “good news” to you? How are you blind, lame, deaf or poor? What does the annual “new beginning” of Advent mean to becoming less of any of those? As Christmas approaches think of ways you can help others be less as well. Maybe it is metaphorical or maybe it is a literal helping the blind, lame, deaf or poor.

Isaiah 35:1-10

Psalm 146:5-10 or Luke 1:46b-55

James 5:7-10

Matthew 11:2-11

Phonics Booklist: Phonics books are written intentionally to build specific beginning reading skills for new readers. These books support emerging readers as they learn to decode and make meaning while reading.

1st Sunday in Christmas, December 25, 2022

Don't put Christmas away. There are 12 days in Christmas because it is 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: John 1 1-5 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. 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?

Isaiah 52:7-10

Psalm 98

Hebrews 1:1-4, (5-12)

John 1:1-14