

Seeking God's Face

Praying with the Bible
through the Year

Written and compiled by Philip F. Reinders

Foreword by Eugene H. Peterson

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Seeking God's Face: Praying with the Bible through the Year
(compact version)

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For Owen and Lily—
answers to prayer and sources of many more—
may the gladness of the gospel make your lives a living prayer

There are many to thank for making *Seeking God's Face* a reality—some identified here, the majority unnamed but not unnoticed or unappreciated. Special thanks to Dr. John Witvliet, of the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship, who grabbed hold of the idea from our first conversation together, and to Rev. Leonard Vander Zee, at Faith Alive, whose commitment to the project and generous editorial help made the book better every step of the way. There are all those who showed me the way of Jesus and taught me to pray: my parents, Fred and Jane; pastors, teachers, and friends; others who helped me see how a big Reformed faith makes all of life a living prayer; many, like Jim, Pearl, John, and Geoff, who simply kept me encouraged and on track. And, of course, Betty, my companion along the way, who continues to believe in me and lets me know I'm loved—no sweeter gift.

FOREWORD



“Wendy, do you ever pray?”

She shook her head negatively. “No. Never.” Then a shy, self-deprecating smile played at the edges of her lips. “Sometimes I wish upwards.”

I didn’t know Wendy very well. I had married her and Jacob, a young man who was a member of my congregation, six months earlier. I met with them three or four times for conversations about marriage and their understanding and expectations of it. I remembered that Wendy was quite open about having no Christian commitment and only the sketchiest acquaintance with church. They were both immature. I asked them if and when they found difficulties in their relationship that they come back and talk with me.

Now she was back. I hadn’t seen her or Jacob since the day of the wedding. Things were not going well with their marriage; I wasn’t surprised. I suggested a marriage counselor that I trusted.

“Wendy, marriage is wonderful but complex, and being human is complex—a lot of things can go wrong. You and Jacob aren’t doing too well on your own. Dr. Shelly would be a good companion with you as you learn how to understand and give yourselves to one another. You probably ought to think in terms of several months.”

She wanted me to tell her what she could do on her own. She wasn’t interested in “several months.” I never saw her again.

But her sentence, “Sometimes I wish upwards,” stayed with me. It burrowed into my imagination and has lodged there ever since as a wonderful naming of what I began to think of as “pre-prayer”—a spontaneous response “upwards” out of the self-enclosed nature to meaning or fulfillment, or, who knows, God?

“Sometimes I wish upwards” is a nudge towards prayer, an opening crack of a door into mystery, a seed that if nurtured could soon

become prayer. I am convinced that everyone wishes upwards sometimes, maybe even often. The wish upwards is evidence, I've come to think, that everyone has the stuff within them, the capacity, even the longing, to be a person of prayer. But also, more often than not, nothing comes of it. The wish has no root in relationship, in language, in love, in God.

The life of prayer doesn't start from scratch. The wish upwards is evidence of a readiness to pray. But how do we get from wish to prayer? How do we get the elusive, wispy, insubstantial wish embodied into actual prayer?

This book, *Seeking God's Face*, is one way. The Christian community in every generation has written and published daily prayer books to accomplish this transition among men and women, followers of Jesus, who want their relation with God and their family and friends and neighbors to be something more than a wish upwards.

Daily prayer books take different forms and enter into different cultures and times, but most of them share certain essential characteristics that provide congenial conditions for developing a life of mature prayer, no longer praying by fits and starts, "clouds without rain . . . autumn trees, without fruit . . . wild waves of the sea . . . wandering stars . . ." (Jude 12-13).

Seeking God's Face melds prayer and Scripture into a companionable guide for becoming a participant—both listening and speaking—in the great salvation conversation that is the Christian gospel.

Prayer. Prayer is as natural and simple as language itself. The only difference between prayer and our mother tongue as we commonly use it is that in prayer God is a major voice. We all learn language without formal instruction. We are wondrously created with all the bodily parts in throat and mouth and ears that are necessary to speak and listen. A prayer book respects this basic and elementary at-home-ness, this aptitude that we all have for prayer. A prayer book is not a book about prayer, not an explanation of prayer, not a theological essay on prayer. It is prayers, usually brief, to be prayed.

Prayer is a natural and authentic substratum of language. But there is irony here: prayer, language at its most honest, is also the easiest form of language to fake. We discover early on that we can pretend to pray, use the words of prayer, practice the forms of prayer, assume postures of prayer, acquire a reputation for prayer, and never pray. Our “prayers,” so called, become a camouflage to cover up a life of nonprayer.

Set prayers are prayers provided for us to keep our praying in company with our ancestors, prayers of others so that we stay in touch with the authentic world of prayer revealed in our Scriptures. They are prayers that we can use to distinguish prayer from prayer impostors, fantasy, and magic. They are prayers that do not depend on our own initiative, prayers that don't wax and wane according to the phases of our moods.

In my home, a great deal of our common life is integrated into preparing meals, considering the tastes and circumstances of those who will be present, setting the table, eating the meal, cleaning up after the meal. No single meal is quite like another. They are many variables: the kinds of food that make up the meal, which members of the family will be there, guests that we anticipate. We enjoy the work. But occasionally we run out of energy and imagination. When that happens, we drive a few miles to a favorite restaurant in order to have someone else do it for us: shop for the food and prepare it, set the table, serve the meal, clear the table, and wash the dishes. A “set” meal: someone else whom we trust does it all for us. All we have to do is pick up the fork that has been set before us, eat the meal that has been set in place, and leave the cleanup to others.

When we are young children, all our meals are set meals, set before us without thought or preparation on our part. Gradually we learn to do it for ourselves and for others as we grow up. But it is still nice to have someone do the work for us when we are tired or without appetite. The analogy to prayer is not exact but it is close enough in this context.

The classic set prayers for Christians and Jews are the psalms. And the most prayed prayer in the church is a set prayer, the Lord's Prayer: “Pray then like this . . .”

Scripture. All prayer is language—language in conversation, conversation between God and us. The most frequent distortion of prayer takes place when we fail to listen to God’s Word to us. We do all the talking, demanding that God do all the listening.

Scripture provides the major way in which God speaks to us. Scripture is a huge story with many voices, but the primary voice is God’s voice. God has the first word. If we are going to get the story straight, it is important that we let God have the first word, and really listen; I mean *really* listen. Jesus’ story of the soils is a story about prayer: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

So if listening is required, silence is indispensable. Silence is a commonly overlooked element of language in general, but it must not be. Especially it must not be overlooked in the language of prayer. It is not as if the Old Testament prophets and poets and the New Testament apostles and Jesus—mainly Jesus, “the Word made flesh”—speak the revelation of God to us, and now in prayer we get to say our piece. Silence in prayer, which consists mostly in attentive listening, is nonnegotiable. Listening, which necessarily requires silence on our part, is as much a part of language as words. The colon and the semicolon, the comma and the period—all of which insist on silence as part and parcel of speech—are as essential to language as nouns and verbs. But more often than not, silence gets short shrift in our prayers. Yet if there is no silence, our speech degenerates into babble.

“But God doesn’t answer. Why don’t I get any answer?” It is the most frequent complaint regarding prayer. The obvious response is “Are you listening? Have you spent as much time listening as you have speaking?”

Only out of disciplined, quiet, attentive listening is it possible then to answer God’s speech in free prayers, unscripted—not “set” this time—prayers responding to the story. We can respond as participants, as we experience our story being assimilated into God’s story. “Let your Bibles become all autobiographical” is the way one pastor, Alexander Whyte, put it.

For Scripture is not basically a book of information in which we learn about “the furniture of heaven and the temperature of hell.” It is not for the most part a history book in which we learn all about

the cultures of the ancient East. And it certainly is not a science text in which we are instructed in the Second Law of Thermodynamics. It is a conversation between God and God's people—us. God creating us and God saving us, while we are given generous time to speak our belief and doubt, our praise and pain—whatever—and while we take our place in this marvelous story that comes together in the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

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INTRODUCTION



We are creatures of habit. Knowingly, perhaps mostly instinctively, we crave and create meaningful patterns to our living. It's so mundane we miss it—three religiously observed square meals, meticulous hygiene rhythms, the morning ritual of making and savoring the first cup of coffee, a kiss to loved ones as you head out the door, habitual email checks, the exercise regimen or daily walk, watching the evening news or catching up online. All are pieces to the daily puzzle of ordering our days, and we notice when one is missing.

Like the God who created us, we nail down the disorder of our day into a framework of meaning. We simply can't enjoy the freedom of life without a form, some skeletal structure on which to hang the flesh of our days. This dynamic operates not only in everyday living but also as we walk out our faith in Jesus Christ.

Prayer is an essential part of that faith, communing with the God we love. But a frustrated prayer life has to rank as one of the more universal Christian experiences. What's behind this struggle? We're not opposed to prayer; we have plenty of need to pray to God; we're interested. Yet so few of us pray well.

Part of our struggle is that we lack a suitable form for praying. Many of us have picked up the idea that only spontaneous prayers are authentic, that we can't use the words of someone else to honestly pray to God. We figure prayer should be like musical improvisation, something spontaneous and free. Of course, only the most accomplished musicians can improvise, after mastering the musical forms and structures that set in place the foundation for improvisation. Likewise in prayer, we find a freedom and depth in our communion with God as we learn the words and forms that help us commune with God. For beginners in prayer (including most of us), we need to develop an adequate way to carry our prayers to God.

But there's more to our struggle with the practice of prayer. The simple truth is we've oriented our lives around other practices. We've already created a form for our lives and have conformed our living to work deadlines, the pace of parenting, school schedules, media rhythms, and soccer practices. These can be good, and yet the pattern of this world can sabotage a life of prayer—and to live without prayer is to be deformed, no longer conformed to Christ.

But all is not lost. We've at least shown the capacity to form some habits, to practice regular routines. The beginnings of a healthy life of prayer are sometimes found in understanding the habit or practice-nature of much of the Christian life.

Part of God's salvation work in us is to conform our lives to the likeness of Jesus Christ (see Rom. 8:29). Following Jesus, the Way, involves finding and living a new way of life. Conversion is a change of mind as well as practice, a new direction and new habit of being.

Living as a disciple of Jesus is nothing less than a new way of thinking and believing, and yet it is so much more. Christian beliefs open up a whole new world, the kingdom of God. How do we step into and inhabit the kingdom of God? We need a *habitus*, a Jesus way of being, a Christ way of life. And that *habitus*, or way, is composed of regular habits and practices that give intentional and embodied shape to our living.

One of the most basic Christian practices as we live into God's kingdom and live out the way of Jesus is that of a regular prayer rhythm. *Seeking God's Face* is a guide to developing and practicing the habit of daily prayer through a fixed, common prayer.

Let me explain that a bit, because it might be new to some. For many of us, prayer is a clearly defined activity—it's what you do when you close your eyes, fold your hands, and silently speak to God. But Christian prayer can be a far richer conversation with God, a back-and-forth exchange of speaking and listening, through Scripture, quiet listening, and personal address.

For centuries, Christians have practiced a form of prayer called a "daily office." The office is the practice of praying at fixed times throughout the day, most fully developed in Benedictine monas-

teries as a way to structure the day around prayer. There were seven separate times of prayer, centered on Scripture and set prayers. Variations of these offices have been developed over the years, including vesper services, books of common prayer, or even mealtime prayers or devotions. All are forms of this prayer office, a way to get prayer into the rhythm of our daily lives.

This book flows out of that practice, but in a much simplified form, using a fixed and common prayer meant to be prayed once per day at a time of your choosing (more on how to use this prayer book later). But let's think about this practice—a fixed and common conversation with God—and how it might shape our lives.

Fixed—that the prayers are fixed means they are to be prayed at a certain time of the day (that's yours to figure out). At some time in our heavily scheduled lives, we choose to set aside time from our activity to commune with God. We are so shaped by our clocks and calendars that we're easily persuaded our days are measured by the physics of planetary revolutions and rotations around the sun. By setting aside a fixed time to pray, we interrupt our regular rhythms, reminding ourselves that our lives are oriented around the Son, Jesus Christ, that life is measured by grace and shaped by the life of Jesus.

“Fixed” also refers to set Scriptures and prayers. Many of us are not familiar with using set prayers, preferring extemporaneous praying. But sometimes we just feel flat, like there is nothing flowing in our hearts. Does that mean we can't pray? Is our relationship with God dictated by our feelings? No. We can allow Scripture passages we didn't choose and the words of others to lead us deeper into communion with God.

Common—our culture is so deeply formed by an individualistic ethos, which has imprinted our faith as well. We're pretty much convinced we can follow Jesus solo, that our individual spiritual experience is paramount to our faith. A practice of common prayer, sharing words with other Jesus followers (who may not be physically present but are praying the same Scripture and prayers on the same day) begins to root us more deeply in Christian community. Common prayer interrupts our privatized faith and reminds us

that we can't do this alone, that we find ourselves in the company of others who share this journey with Jesus.

Conversation with God—how often do we fly through the day without a thought towards God or how faith might intersect our living? A practice of intentionally setting aside time and space presses the pause button on the blur of busyness to open a space and time to seek God's face. It expresses, in an embodied way, our intention to live life in the presence of God. In our prayers we bring our lives to God and pay attention to God's Word, listening for the living voice of God in the Bible, allowing it to read our lives.

This is all for a larger purpose. You don't practice scales simply for the joy of hearing them; you practice to play beautiful music. We practice prayer so that we might know and follow Jesus, which is, of course, to be out in the world, engaged in God's mission. That task is sometimes difficult and demanding, and a regular practice of prayer keeps us alive and well while we serve the world in the name of Jesus.

My secret hope is for this prayer book to be part of a resurgence in God's mission, to help catalyze a new order of sent Jesus-people, shaped by God and living out the good news of the kingdom in their local communities. I'm praying and hoping that a renewed practice of prayer, along with many other of the Christian spiritual practices, will be conduits for the explosive power of the gospel, for a renewed commitment and energy for Christ and his cause.

HOW TO USE THIS PRAYER BOOK



Each day of prayer contains a number of different elements—an invitation into God’s presence, times of quiet, Scripture, free prayer, a set prayer, and a closing blessing. All of this is meant to be experienced as prayer. We may not be used to this way of praying, but think of it as an extended conversation with God—God invites you to be with him; you quietly enjoy his presence, listen to his Word, and respond to him with the reality of your life; and God sends you with his blessing.

Of course, there is freedom within this form. Centuries ago English cleric William Law captured the right balance between our need of a form for prayer and yet the freedom we can enjoy in prayer to follow promptings from the Holy Spirit. His helpful direction is that most “Christians ought to use forms of prayer at all the regular times of prayer. It seems right for every one to begin with a form of prayer. If, in the midst of his devotions, he finds his heart ready to break forth into new and higher strains of devotions, he should leave his form for a while and follow those fervors of his heart, till it again wants the assistance of his usual petitions.”¹

I’ve attempted to make daily prayer simple. That doesn’t mean easy, just uncomplicated. I’ve often been frustrated with more complex and liturgical prayer books that require flipping pages, finding the right dates, and hunting down portions of Scripture. The mechanics of such over-involved praying became a barrier to actual prayer for me. I’ve tried to avoid that in this book and have everything you need for one day’s prayer on one page.

I’m assuming that most of us don’t have the luxury of stopping several times a day for fixed prayer. Instead, I’ve tried to create a simple office that can be prayed in one session. The time you take can vary, but I hope that you’ll leisurely enjoy God’s presence;

¹ William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press 1948), p. 91.

don't race through it, but linger with God. I'd suggest you start by carving out twenty minutes for each day. But see how you might expand that time, enjoying the quiet, dwelling in God's Word. And do think about setting up a regular time to pray. Pick out the time of day when you are most alert and available to God.

I imagine you will do this privately, on your own. Find a quiet and comfortable place where you won't be distracted. But consider this hopeful thought—there may be many others who will be praying with you. If we all pray this daily office together, we may do so privately and yet be connected as a wide community of prayer. Perhaps it might be good to find a local group of people to form a small community centered on praying this office together. You can pray it on your own and yet know that each person is also praying the same prayers and meditating on the same Scriptures—that might help shape coffee conversations or online chats you have throughout the week.

On a macro level, the prayer book follows the seasons and celebrations of the Christian calendar—Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, and Ordinary Time (there's a brief introduction to each season at the beginning of that particular section). The intention in following this calendar is to mark our time with Jesus, taking our lives and placing them in the story of Jesus, allowing the shape and rhythm of his life to shape our days.

You'll notice a box near the beginning of each prayer entry. Since Christian seasons and holidays are not bound to our calendar, they move around from year to year. The box is a simple way for you to find the corresponding calendar date on which to pray your daily prayer.

Within each of the seasons, each day of prayer is a complete “office” to pray. Each day contains a number of elements for you to pray with, either quietly or aloud. Again, consider the whole time as prayer, a gentle conversation with the God who loves you.

Invitation: we begin our prayers invited into God's presence, welcomed into all the reality of the kingdom, of which we are so often unaware. The invitation is a way to open ourselves to the greater gospel reality, to become mindful of God's presence.

Quiet: there are two specific places where you're encouraged to quiet your heart and mind, to enjoy stillness before God. We hardly know what to do with silence in our wired world, with constant communications intruding into our lives. For us to hear God's voice, we must regularly practice silence. Cultivating a stilled, attentive heart before God and quieting down actual noise and internal noise is a vital step in preparing to hear God's voice. You can start with a brief period of silence, but experiment and challenge yourself with longer times of quiet.

Bible Song: each day there will be a psalm to pray. The Psalms have always been the prayer book of God's people—the “school of prayer,” as Augustine called them, teaching us to respond to God. We'll be praying a different psalm each day, working our way through the 150 psalms twice in one year. During some seasons, however, we'll focus on a few specific psalms for the season.

Allow the psalm to speak for you or expand your worship of God. There will be times when a psalm does not match or connect with your immediate experience—you may hit a psalm of praise during a difficult time, a lament on a spring day bursting with life. Allow the psalm to move you beyond your immediate reality and experience, deeper into God's reality. And remember you are praying with a wide community of Christians—a specific day's psalm may not fit your circumstance, but it is expressing someone else's experience. Perhaps someone in your church or neighborhood is going through what the psalm is expressing. And it's likely something you'll go through one day, so go to school now and learn how to respond to God with a full range of emotion.

Bible Reading: every day has a further reading from the Bible, a word from God. The Bible readings will follow the particular season, allowing us to read through the story of God's salvation. This is not a time to exegete the text or to read it for information, but to listen for God's voice for you, to allow God's Word to address your life.

Dwelling: this part of the prayer time may be a new way for you to encounter God's Word and listen for his voice. It's rooted in the ancient Christian tradition called *lectio divina*, which is simply a way to read the Bible, slowly, contemplatively, and leisurely, not

seeking information but to hear the personal address of God. *Lectio divina* assumes that prayer is a two-way conversation and enables us to dialogue with Jesus by hearing and responding to the Word of God.

We're used to studying the Bible, analyzing it for truths to understand or mining it for lessons to live out, but we are mostly unschooled in listening to it. The goal of *lectio divina* is to grow in companionship with God, to be a personal participant in the story of God, lovingly listening for God's Word, allowing the text to get into us and read our lives.

How does that happen? Each day there are a series of brief instructions to lead you through this way of listening to Scripture. But let me offer a quick overview.

First, quiet yourself so that you can hear God. Then simply read the Scripture, preferably aloud and slowly. As you do this, listen for the word that addresses you—a word, thought, phrase, or image that grabs your attention, that jumps off the page for you. Don't analyze it or study it, but simply receive this word. (Turn aside any doubts about whether this is God or your imagination; trust that God desires to be in conversation with you and is addressing you.) Then read through the same passage again and listen for the way this word connects with your life. Reflect on how God is addressing your life. Next, enter into conversation with God. Honestly offer to him any feelings this text has surfaced in you, any resistance you feel, any comfort you sense. Ask Jesus, "Why did you give me this word today?" And then, finally, let this word sink deep into your life. Yield yourself to God's direction and leading; rest in his presence.

Free Prayer: as a part of the prayer time, there's opportunity for you to speak your heart to God in a time of free prayer, bringing to God the needs and concerns of your life, family, work, and church. It may seem like an oxymoron, but I've added a few suggested prayer items for the free prayer, in case you are stuck or would like to pray for something in addition to your personal needs.²

² I'm indebted to David Adam's *The Rhythm of Life*. (Harrisburg, Penn.: Morehouse Publishing, 1996) for the idea, and to *The Worship Sourcebook* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2004) for some of the prayer requests.

The suggested free prayer items are focused in a weekly flow of seven daily groupings—Sunday: the resurrection of Jesus and our experience of the risen Jesus; Monday: the created world and our stewardship of it; Tuesday: the incarnation of Jesus and our living out the faith; Wednesday: the world and our local communities; Thursday: the Holy Spirit and spiritual renewal; Friday: the cross of Christ and those who suffer; and Saturday: the Church and our local church family. Each week (usually Sunday) we'll also pray the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer: following the free prayer is a set prayer. Each of these prayers is rooted in a Reformed confession of faith.³ The Reformed confessions are a full and rich theological foundation for the Christian life—thoughtful and soul-nourishing. This is God-reality named clearly. They remain a convincing testimony, deep wisdom to be cherished and absorbed.

But for many people I've met in my pastoral work, both Christians and non-Christians, these confessions seem to have a diminished capacity to connect. The theology remains as relevant as ever, but whether it's the catechetical format, the historical distance, or the language, the confessions seem removed from people's experience and daily lives.

So why not take the living theology that feels remote and bring it close by folding it into the most basic Christian activity of prayer? In these prayers, the content of faith is turned God-ward; it is Christian theology in a kneeling posture. Like honest prayer, sometimes the confessions question or lament, and other times they confess and praise, bringing all of our lives before the face of God.

These historical confessions have provided Christians with a place to stand firm, but they also give us a place to humbly kneel. In fact, those two postures are deeply connected; our personal creed, what we believe, is found and formed in what and how we pray (the Latin motto *lex orandi, lex credendi*). If we can begin to weave these core Christian beliefs into our prayers, most likely we'll find

³ The set prayers flow out of the Belgic Confession, Canons of Dort, Heidelberg Catechism, Westminster Confession, or Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms. Some are word for word renditions, others a prayerful paraphrase, and still others a riff on a phrase or thought from the confessions.

them trickling into our minds, embedded in our hearts, and lived out in our lives.

For some of us, this form of set prayer may be foreign and feel a little stiff. Accept those feelings and yet try to stick with it, allowing the prayers to give a larger voice to your spirit and to grow a fuller prayer life.

Blessing: The time of prayer closes with a final blessing, reminding us of God's good intentions for our lives, sending us out knowing we live in the context of grace.

Enough talk about prayer; now go and seek God's face in prayer. Commune with Father, Son, and Spirit, and give my greetings to God.

Key to Abbreviations

<i>Example</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
BC 2	Belgic Confession, Article 2
CD 1.9	Canons of Dort, First Point, Article 9
HC 5	Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 5
WC 8.2	Westminster Confession, Chapter 8, Point 2
WLC 6	Westminster Larger Catechism, Q&A 6
WSC 7	Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q&A 7

ADVENT



Introduction

Advent (from the Latin *adventus*, meaning “coming” or “arrival”) is the four-week season of preparation for the coming of Jesus at Christmas. A good celebration requires proper preparation for us to fully enjoy it. During December, however, we mostly confuse helpful readiness for the hustle of Christmas shopping, parties, and preparations. The Advent season, more reflective in nature, can feel out of sync with all this noise and busyness.

John the Baptist has always felt like the right person to get me ready for Christmas—he’s the anti-Santa needed for our day. Trade the jolly laugh for an in-your-face intensity, the twinkle in the eye for a wildness about to interrupt your life, commanding our attention but always redirecting it towards Jesus. “Prepare the way for the Lord” is the Advent call to get ready for the coming Messiah.

But how do you prepare for a surprise? More than just remembering Christ’s first arrival, Advent hopes for Christ’s second coming. Advent is a season of expectant waiting, tapping into the sense we have that all is not well, the longing for the world to be made right again. It’s a season for restless hearts and people weary of a broken world who want, with all our being, to know there’s more than this.

Advent cultivates in us a discerning eye, helping us to spot the sin that clutters our lives and notice all the ways we need to be saved. By helping us to hope intensely for restoration, to feel our own need to be saved, Advent prepares us for genuine Christmas joy and faith in the One who saves us from our sin, Jesus.

During the Advent season we’ll use a selection of seven psalms connected with Advent themes, praying with portions of these same psalms each week of Advent.

Since Advent has a movable starting date, it is of variable length. Watch the dates column signaling when to move to Christmas Eve.

11/28/2010
11/27/2011
12/2/2012
12/1/2013
11/30/2014
11/29/2015
11/27/2016
12/3/2017
12/2/2018
12/1/2019
11/29/2020
11/28/2021
11/27/2022
12/3/2023
12/1/2024
11/30/2025

Week 1 of Advent—First Sunday of Advent

ADVENT—DAY 1



INVITATION

*“I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.” (Ps. 130:5)*

Quiet

BIBLE SONG: PSALM 25:1-7

In you, LORD my God,
I put my trust.

I trust in you;
do not let me be put to shame,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.
No one who hopes in you
will ever be put to shame,
but shame will come on those
who are treacherous without cause.

Show me your ways, LORD,
teach me your paths.
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long.
Remember, LORD, your great mercy and love,
for they are from of old.
Do not remember the sins of my youth
and my rebellious ways;
according to your love remember me,
for you, LORD, are good.

BIBLE READING: JEREMIAH 33:14-16

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.

“In those days and at that time
I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line;
he will do what is just and right in the land.
In those days Judah will be saved
and Jerusalem will live in safety.
This is the name by which it will be called:
The Lord Our Righteous Savior.”

Quiet

DWELLING

Read again slowly...find a word or phrase that catches your eye or moves your heart...slowly repeat it...pray your thoughts, desires, needs, and feelings from your meditation...enjoy the presence of your Lord and Savior.

FREE PRAYER

- ❖ for fellowship with the coming Jesus
- ❖ for spiritual renewal and refreshment

THE LORD’S PRAYER

PRAYER

Living God, I confess the slant of my heart to hate you and my neighbor. But that sounds so harsh—I’m not that bad, am I God? Yet if I am brutally honest I see that I’m in deeper than I dare admit, unless I am born again by your Spirit. Fill me with the greater hope this Advent season that in Christ’s love I am on my way to new life. In the Savior’s name, amen. (HC 5 & 8)

BLESSING

“Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people.” (Rev. 22:20-21)

11/29/2010
11/28/2011
12/3/2012
12/2/2013
12/1/2014
11/30/2015
11/28/2016
12/4/2017
12/3/2018
12/2/2019
11/30/2020
11/29/2021
11/28/2022
12/4/2023
12/2/2024
12/1/2025

ADVENT—DAY 2



INVITATION

*“I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.” (Ps. 130:5)*

Quiet

BIBLE SONG: PSALM 72:1-7

Endow the king with your justice, O God,
the royal son with your righteousness.

May he judge your people in righteousness,
your afflicted ones with justice.

May the mountains bring prosperity to the people,
the hills the fruit of righteousness.

May he defend the afflicted among the people
and save the children of the needy;
may he crush the oppressor.

May he endure as long as the sun,
as long as the moon, through all generations.

May he be like rain falling on a mown field,
like showers watering the earth.

In his days may the righteous flourish
and prosperity abound till the moon is no more.

BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 24:36-42

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the

other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your LORD will come.”

Quiet

DWELLING

Leisurely read again...is there a word or idea that stirred within you? Linger over it and give it your attention...is there something about the reading you'd like to ask God about? Pray your life to God...take a moment to rest in God's presence.

FREE PRAYER

- ❖ for the wonder of creation
- ❖ for the care of all creation
- ❖ for our capacity to see God in all things, every creature a word or book from God

PRAYER

Coming Savior, you are the Word, the wisdom, and the very image of the Father. Ready my ears to hear your word of truth, my heart to learn the ways of your wisdom, and my eyes to see the beauty of your likeness. Amen. (BC 8)

BLESSING

“Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people.” (Rev. 22:20-21)

11/30/2010
11/29/2011
12/4/2012
12/3/2013
12/2/2014
12/1/2015
11/29/2016
12/5/2017
12/4/2018
12/3/2019
12/1/2020
11/30/2021
11/29/2022
12/5/2023
12/3/2024
12/2/2025

ADVENT—DAY 3



INVITATION

*“I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.” (Ps. 130:5)*

Quiet

BIBLE SONG: PSALM 80:1-3, 17-19

Hear us, Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.

You who sit enthroned between the cherubim,
shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.
Awaken your might;
come and save us.

Restore us, O God;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved. . . .

Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand,
the son of man you have raised up for yourself.
Then we will not turn away from you;
revive us, and we will call on your name.

Restore us, LORD God Almighty;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.

BIBLE READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 1:3-9

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you

do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Quiet

DWELLING

Read again, perhaps out loud...how has God's Word moved you? Ponder and meditate what has connected with your heart or mind...pray to God what it is that has moved you today...turn your thoughts to God and quietly enjoy being with him.

FREE PRAYER

- ❖ for the call to follow Christ as disciples in this world
- ❖ for a love of and commitment to the communities in which God has placed us
- ❖ for those who work in business and industry

PRAYER

Everlasting God, it's Advent once again. We've eagerly waited for change, but it appears little has happened. Expand in me the great hope that one day I will be raised from this broken earth—changed in the blink of an eye—and that everything bent and bruised, curdled and corrupted, in me and this world, will be transformed into lasting goodness, righteousness, and truth. In Jesus' name, amen. (BC 37)

BLESSING

“Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people.” (Rev. 22:20-21)

12/1/2010

11/30/2011

12/5/2012

12/4/2013

12/3/2014

12/2/2015

11/30/2016

12/6/2017

12/5/2018

12/4/2019

12/2/2020

12/1/2021

11/30/2022

12/6/2023

12/4/2024

12/3/2025

ADVENT—DAY 4



INVITATION

*“I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.” (Ps. 130:5)*

Quiet

BIBLE SONG: PSALM 85:1-2, 8-13

You, LORD, showed favor to your land;
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
You forgave the iniquity of your people
and covered all their sins. . . .

I will listen to what God the LORD says;
he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants—
but let them not turn to folly.
Surely his salvation is near those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.

Love and faithfulness meet together;
righteousness and peace kiss each other.
Faithfulness springs forth from the earth,
and righteousness looks down from heaven.
The LORD will indeed give what is good,
and our land will yield its harvest.
Righteousness goes before him
and prepares the way for his steps.

BIBLE READING: MARK 13:32-37

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

“Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

Quiet

DWELLING

Remind yourself you are in God’s presence and read again...notice how God might be speaking to you through his Word—dwell on a word or phrase that jumps out at you...let your heart respond to God in prayer...take refreshment in God’s presence.

FREE PRAYER

- ❖ for our national and local communities
- ❖ for the continent of Africa
- ❖ for areas of war and strife

PRAYER

Unexpected Savior, you are coming again, but this date, already marked down by the Father, isn’t for me to know. But I’m curious, Lord, desiring a timeline or diagram, wanting to nail down a future that’s out of my hands. In place of my faithless need to control, give me a watchful heart full of expectation and wonder. Amen. (BC 37)

BLESSING

“Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people.” (Rev. 22:20-21)

12/2/2010
12/1/2011
12/6/2012
12/5/2013
12/4/2014
12/3/2015
12/1/2016
12/7/2017
12/6/2018
12/5/2019
12/3/2020
12/2/2021
12/1/2022
12/7/2023
12/5/2024
12/4/2025

ADVENT—DAY 5



INVITATION

*“I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.” (Ps. 130:5)*

Quiet

BIBLE SONG: PSALM 89:1-4

I will sing of the LORD's great love forever;
with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known
through all generations.
I will declare that your love stands firm forever,
that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself.
You said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to David my servant,
‘I will establish your line forever
and make your throne firm through all generations.’”

BIBLE READING: ISAIAH 63:16; 64:1, 6-9

But you are our Father,
though Abraham does not know us
or Israel acknowledge us;
you, LORD, are our Father,
our Redeemer from of old is your name. . . .

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains would tremble before you! . . .
All of us have become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;
we all shrivel up like a leaf,
and like the wind our sins sweep us away.
No one calls on your name
or strives to lay hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us
and have given us over to our sins.

Yet you, LORD, are our Father.
We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD;
do not remember our sins forever.
Oh, look on us, we pray,
for we are all your people.

Quiet

DWELLING

Read again slowly...find a word or phrase that catches your eye or moves your heart...slowly repeat it...pray your thoughts, desires, needs, and feelings from your meditation...enjoy the presence of your Lord and Savior.

FREE PRAYER

- ❖ for spiritual renewal and a deep sense of repentance
- ❖ for the gifts and fruit of the Spirit in us
- ❖ for a gentle witness and a readiness to give a reason for the hope within us

PRAYER

God of all hope, in Jesus your salvation broke into our world, and his return gives purpose to our living in this broken world. Make me ready for that day when he comes again with great glory and majesty to judge the living and the dead, renewing and cleansing this tired world, making everything new. Make me ready for that future day by living hopefully today. In the name of our soon arriving Savior, amen. (BC 37)

BLESSING

“Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people.” (Rev. 22:20-21)

12/3/2010
12/2/2011
12/7/2012
12/6/2013
12/5/2014
12/4/2015
12/2/2016
12/8/2017
12/7/2018
12/6/2019
12/4/2020
12/3/2021
12/2/2022
12/8/2023
12/6/2024
12/5/2025

ADVENT—DAY 6



INVITATION

*“I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.” (Ps. 130:5)*

Quiet

BIBLE SONG: PSALM 126

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dreamed.

Our mouths were filled with laughter,
our tongues with songs of joy.

Then it was said among the nations,

“The LORD has done great things for them.”

The LORD has done great things for us,
and we are filled with joy.

Restore our fortunes, LORD,
like streams in the Negev.

Those who sow with tears
will reap with songs of joy.

Those who go out weeping,
carrying seed to sow,

will return with songs of joy,
carrying sheaves with them.

BIBLE READING: ROMANS 13:11-14

Do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe

yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Quiet

DWELLING

Leisurely read again...is there a word or idea that stirred within you? Linger over it and give it your attention...is there something about the reading you'd like to ask God about? Pray your life to God...take a moment to rest in God's presence.

FREE PRAYER

- ❖ for those living in poverty and suffering injustice
- ❖ for our capacity to suffer with others
- ❖ for those who are refugees

PRAYER

Sovereign God, on the coming judgment day the book on my life will be opened and a verdict will be given. Knowing that every idle work, every well-guarded secret and shadowed hypocrisy will be uncovered makes me want to run for cover. Remind me that just as you gave Adam and Eve garments to cover their shame, you dress me up in Christ-clothes that I might stand before you. Amen. (BC 37)

BLESSING

“Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people.” (Rev. 22:20-21)

12/4/2010
12/3/2011
12/8/2012
12/7/2013
12/6/2014
12/5/2015
12/3/2016
12/9/2017
12/8/2018
12/7/2019
12/5/2020
12/4/2021
12/3/2022
12/9/2023
12/7/2024
12/6/2025

ADVENT—DAY 7



INVITATION

*“I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.” (Ps. 130:5)*

Quiet

BIBLE SONG: PSALM 146

Praise the LORD.

Praise the LORD, my soul.

I will praise the LORD all my life;

I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

Do not put your trust in princes,
in human beings, who cannot save.

When their spirit departs, they return to the ground;
on that very day their plans come to nothing.

Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD their God.

He is the Maker of heaven and earth,
the sea, and everything in them—
he remains faithful forever.

He upholds the cause of the oppressed
and gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets prisoners free,
the LORD gives sight to the blind,
the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down,
the LORD loves the righteous.

The LORD watches over the foreigner
and sustains the fatherless and the widow,
but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

The LORD reigns forever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Praise the LORD.

BIBLE READING: 1 THESSALONIANS 3:12-13

May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

Quiet

DWELLING

Read again, perhaps out loud...how has God's Word moved you? Ponder and meditate what has connected with your heart or mind...pray to God what it is that has moved you today...turn your thoughts to God and quietly enjoy being with him.

FREE PRAYER

- ❖ for the flourishing of Christ's church everywhere
- ❖ for worship that glorifies God and gathers, unites, and blesses his people
- ❖ for new church plants and church planters

PRAYER

Almighty God, this coming judgment day stretches my imagination with strange wonders. Every man, woman, and child—anyone who has lived from the beginning until the end of the world—will be summoned by the voice of the archangel and the sound of your trumpet. Where will we all fit? Will we recognize others? Today, rest me in the greatest wonder—hearing the voice of Jesus confessing my name before the Father. Amen. (BC 37)

BLESSING

“Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people.” (Rev. 22:20-21)