



GOD *with* US

Week 3: Daily Advent Devotionals

THE *Vine* ^{ATX}

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Day 15

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IN JOY.

READ | JOHN 15:9-11

- What has Jesus told the disciples and why?

REFLECT

Joy is defined as a feeling of great pleasure and happiness. Here Jesus says that he wants his joy to be in us and make our joy complete.

- What is the closest you have come to feeling complete joy? What moment comes to mind when you think about complete joy?
- Are there experiences of pleasure or delight that you feel weird about including Jesus in?
- Is it easier for you to connect with Jesus in times of sorrow or times of joy? Why do you think that is?

PRACTICE | LISTEN TO JESUS

Jesus felt joy in his life. In fact, here he seems to imply that the feeling of complete joy is what it feels like to feel his joy.

- Ask Jesus what his joy feels like - and ask him to give you an experience of his joy in you.
- Share with one another what kinds of things bring you joy. Tell Jesus about your experiences with joy, and ask him about his experiences with joy.

Jesus wants to share in our experiences of joy. He knows what it feels like to feel joy as a human, and one of the reasons he came was to bring more joy to us. Jesus has felt the pleasure of a good meal, and the delight of an amazing conversation with a friend, and the joy of being fully loved. Today, as you experience joy, let Jesus share in these experiences with you.

Day sixteen

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WHEN WE NEED MORE TIME.

The mom whose son turned four this week feels it. As happy as she is to celebrate her child's life, there's this tugging sense that it's all going too fast. The single woman longing for a family watching the birthdays go by feels it — the helpless sense that she doesn't have enough time. We feel it when another week ends, when our loved ones are sick, and even when we're enjoying a vacation.

Despite all the moments we wish time to pass more quickly, despite all the seasons we try to scramble to get ahead of where we are, there are just as many seasons when we long for time to slow down

We feel that panic and anxiety over the fact that we can't quite keep up with the pace of life, and time is like sand, slipping between our grasping fingers.

What a burden it is to be immortal beings trapped in temporal bodies. We are trapped in a world that is decaying and we wake each day to the reality that time is running out. Yet, our souls cannot shake the sense that we were made to sing songs forever.

How could a God who is outside of time understand this panic-filled sense of running out of time that is part of the human experience?

READ | ISAIAH 61:1-3

- What are the tasks outlined in Isaiah for Jesus to fulfill?
- Jesus began his ministry at age 30 and most historians believe it lasted one to three years. Consider Jesus' heart and compassion. Consider his wisdom and knowledge. How many years do you think he could have spent healing and teaching?

REFLECT

- Where are the places you want time to slow down? Think about your to-do list today, your people, your dreams, and your life overall.
- Why do you think it is so painful, and yet somehow freeing, to know that time is limited?

PRACTICE | LISTEN TO JESUS

Fight the temptation to just think about Jesus' life, and instead, try to become aware of him as a real person. Imagine him telling you:

- What it was like to have only three years to do “ministry” in this world?
- What it was like to not have time to care for all the people he wanted to?
- Ask him what those final weeks felt like, knowing his time was running out.

This is the only life we have ever known — this temporal one — so you would think this fleeting sense of time would feel normal to us. But it does not. It feels uncomfortable at best and horrific at worst.

It's hard to imagine what it felt like for Jesus, who existed eternally outside of time before He wrapped Himself in temporal flesh so that He could suffer like us in all things.

Jesus had both the compassion and the power to touch and change all the people in the world, and yet, he did not have the time in his human life to do so. He surely knows how it feels to sit here today feeling time slipping away.

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When you feel that panic set in, take a moment, put your head down and draw near to your great high priest. Let him slip his hand in yours and ask him to tell you again what this life was like for him.

Hear him say to you today that he understands, and let him gently encourage you that he who came at exactly the right time has given you the exact time you need to complete the exact work he has for you.

Day seventeen

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WHEN WE FEEL UNWANTED.

Feeling unwanted is such a distinct pain. It's different from rejection, which we'll dive into tomorrow. It's an invisible ache, almost like a yearning whereas feeling rejected is sharp, like a slice with a knife. To be unwanted is passive thing; it is a lack of want, a lack of desire; it's the burden of someone not wanting to know you.

We were made for someone to want to know us. And the pain of being unwanted is an invisible loss, often invalidated even by ourselves. We know we are loved by God and led by God, but we do we know we are wanted?

READ | ISAIAH 52:14; 53:1-3

- What are some moments you have felt overlooked, undesirable, invisible or not chosen?
- What seasons or circumstances have made you feel like this?
- Now that you've thought about this, talk to Jesus about it.

REFLECT

- What are some moments you have felt unwanted? Try to table the moments you experienced active rejection, and hone in on the times when you felt overlooked, undesirable or not chosen. While no one was actively rejecting something you offered, no one was reaching out to pick you. You were invisible.
- What seasons or circumstances have made you feel like this?
- Now that you've thought about this, talk to Jesus about it.
- Tell Him the things you noticed while you were processing.

PRACTICE | LISTEN TO JESUS

Now listen to Jesus as He tells you what it was like for Him:

- Ask Jesus how it felt to be in a body that was deemed undesirable in this world.
- Ask Jesus if he was ever tempted to compare himself to others, ever tempted to resent his body, ever tempted to attribute his singleness to his appearance or another trait or feature about his personhood that might not have been culturally appealing.

Jesus, the most beautiful, the most majestic being in existence opted to become a human without recognizable beauty or majesty. He who belongs at the center of it all has let Himself be overlooked and unchosen. Why? Because he wants to sit with you today and be able to empathize with the experience of being unwanted.

His eyes range throughout the world, and they land on you, even now in this very moment. And he wants you, so fiercely, so tenderly.

Let Jesus in today. Receive his desire for you. And hear Jesus whisper the truth: Every hour of every day, for all eternity, you are wanted, chosen, picked.

Find the proof in Advent. He wanted intimacy with you so much that he bound himself to this painful life so that he could sit with you this very moment, this very day.

Feel as wanted as you are.

Day eighteen

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WHEN YOU FEEL REJECTED.

Being unwanted is about someone not wanting to know you, being rejected is about someone who knows you not wanting you. We can feel unwanted when we sit on the sidelines and are passively overlooked, but rejection is active. It begins with an act of vulnerability.

There is hope, fear, and anticipation in the vulnerability of that moment. Rejection is what we experience when it feels like someone sees what we are offering and specifically and actively states they do not want it.

Many of us despise the feeling of rejection so much that we no longer take that risk of vulnerability. We are able to save ourselves from the terrible feeling of rejection, and tragically, we also save ourselves from the essential experience of intimacy.

God built us to experience intimacy on the other side of vulnerability. He does this because intimacy is not simply about knowing something about someone; it's the experience of them courageously and vulnerably sharing that part of themselves with you.

The problem is, we run around handing ourselves — these divine magnificent works of art — to people who are woefully unqualified to assess the value of what they hold in their hands. Then we treat their appraisal as if it determines our value. We give their rejection too much weight.

Thus rejection — which was always painful — becomes dangerous when it holds the power to make us feel worthless.

READ | ISAIAH 53:1-3 | 1 PETER 2:4 | LUKE 4: 28-30

- Consider yesterday's Isaiah passage again, what words or phrases do you see that emphasize the rejection of Jesus?
- In 1 Peter, consider that when we see the word 'but' it means two things are being introduced that are opposed. What two things are being contrasted here?

REFLECT

- What are some moments you have put yourself out there? Was it for a job, a relationship, or deeper intimacy with a spouse or friend? Was it with God? What did that vulnerability feel like?
- What reactions did you receive that felt to you like rejection?
- Take a few minutes to be vulnerable with Jesus. Tell him all that you just processed. He knows it all, but he longs for you to share it with him too.

PRACTICE | LISTEN TO JESUS

- Ask Jesus about the vulnerability of offering himself to the world.
- Ask Jesus about that day in his hometown described in Luke. Listen to him tell you the story of that day, even if it simply means re-reading it, and changing the pronouns so that you can grasp that Jesus is speaking to you.

Jesus risked much in the vulnerability of offering himself to us. He was rejected at every painful turn. He was rejected to the point of death. But one thing Jesus never put in human hands was the power to determine his value.

Humans are not qualified appraisers of God's work. We have been given many responsibilities by God, but none of them is to determine the value of God's creation, let alone God's Son.

As you listen to Jesus today, ask him — as a qualified appraiser — to tell you the value of God's artwork that is you. Ask Jesus to teach you what it would mean to hand yourself to others in vulnerability, without giving them the power or right to determine worth.

Day nineteen

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WHEN WE ARE IN PAIN.

We live in a broken world, and sometimes our bodies hurt in ways that can't be avoided. Too many of us face chronic illness, crippling pain, or the daily aches and groans of our bodies growing older, no longer working as they were designed to.

One terribly tragic part of this human experience is not just that it physically hurts but that God asks us to be faithful in the pain. And he knows what he's asking of us.

Jesus was tested spiritually beyond any imagining, and that spiritual test took place as physical pain beyond comprehension was wracking his human body. He had to keep going through that physical pain, clinging to truth and trusting God no matter how much it hurt.

When God grips our faces in his hands, and calls us to keep going even in our pain, he does so as a being who knows exactly what he is asking of us. That's the gift of Advent.

READ | MARK 15:15-37

- Write down every mention of pain or discomfort that Jesus faced in these passages.

REFLECT

- When is a time or season you have experienced pain or discomfort?
- Is physical pain or discomfort a thing you fear? In what ways does avoiding pain or discomfort steer your decisions?

Being a Christian doesn't mean that we no longer consider our comfort in our decisions, it just means that we no longer consider only our physical comfort. See, we are no longer merely human. We are now new creations, divinely infused with the Holy Spirit. We consider what makes our bodies uncomfortable and we now also consider what makes the Spirit inside us uncomfortable.

PRACTICE | LISTEN TO JESUS

Ask Jesus about the physical pain in the passage you read today:

- Ask him about the pain of the flogging, of the crown of thorns in his face, about the carrying of the cross on top of his fresh wounds.
- Ask Jesus about doing all this after a sleepless night.
- Ask him about the crucifixion; ask him how it felt to face his greatest spiritual trial when he was in the greatest physical pain.

I'm sure Jesus was tempted to pray for God to make him completely numb to the pain. And why not? Surely there would still have been enough emotional pain to prove to the world his love for them. But Jesus was about more in his time on this earth than just saving the world. He longed to be made like his brothers and sisters in every respect — to suffer like a human, not a God — so that he could help us in times of trouble.

He longed to be more than a Savior. He longed to be a friend to us, to be someone you could trust in times of trouble because he knows how it feels.

He felt all the pain a human can feel so that humans who are hurting most today don't have to be alone in that pain.

Let your Spirit be made comfortable in Jesus' companionship this Advent season, even as your body groans for him to come again.

Day twenty

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WHEN WE EXPERIENCE COMFORT.

Comfort enters the scene when we are experiencing pain or distress, so it can be easily upstaged. If we do notice it, we might associate it with a lessening or easing of our discomfort. But comfort is also its own sensation, not just the diminishing of another sensation. It is a kinship, an intimacy, a warmth that leaves us feeling safe and secure and seen.

READ | LUKE 2:1-12

- What does Mary do when Jesus is born? What is the sign the angel tells the shepherds to look for? What do you notice is repeated in these two verses? Why do you think that is?
- What do you know about swaddling clothes? (Feel free to Google.)
- What would be the purpose of wrapping the baby Jesus in swaddling clothes?

REFLECT

- None of us are able to remember our first moments in this world, but we can all visualize them.
- Take a moment and imagine yourself as a newborn baby. Imagine the feeling of helplessness and confusion, and then imagine your mom or dad or a caregiver wrapping you up tightly. What does that kind of comfort feel like?
- When was the last time you received comfort? What did it feel like? How did that comfort impact your sense of intimacy with that person?
- What are the internal or external obstacles that get in the way of experiencing comfort for you?

PRACTICE | LISTEN TO JESUS

God is called the God of all comfort in Scripture. But how could a God who has never experienced need or pain know what it feels like to receive comfort that steadies and secures us? How could God know how it feels to receive comfort from humans? Enter Advent.

Imagine the nativity scene, and notice Jesus – God – having his very first experience of distress being eased, receiving the security of comfort.

- Imagine hearing from Jesus about the first night of his life. Maybe he recounts it to you as he heard his parents tell the story. Imagine him describing the feel of the air and the wail of his first cry, and then describing what Mary's arms felt like as she bundled him up tightly.
- Let Jesus tell you about the bond that was formed between him and his mother that first night as she held and comforted the Savior of the world.
- Thinking about the obstacles you reflected upon that get in the way of you receiving comfort, ask Jesus if he can understand those obstacles.

Jesus could have entered the world in a billion different ways, but he chose to share in our experience of entering the world helpless and confused. The first sound the Savior made was the same sound you first made: a cry of distress. And his first experience of comfort wasn't supernatural power from Heaven or an angel speaking over him – it was a teenage girl performing an ancient practice of wrapping a blanket around his tiny body to help him feel safe and secure. Something similar was likely done as you were born thousands of years later.

Today, may you receive comfort from a God who knows how it feels to receive the gift of comfort.

Day 21

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WHEN FAITH FEELS FUTILE.

There are those specific moments when you clearly make the choice to trust God. Like a trust fall, we let our bodies fall into pain and suffering and wait for God to cushion the blow. But then we hit the floor. It's like some cosmic misunderstanding that takes time and tears to settle afterward.

We think that trusting God is the hard part, not what comes after. It never crosses our mind that maybe God is asking for the trust because we'll need it for what comes after.

Sometimes when we obey God and walk in faith, we find ourselves in a land of pain and death. And sometimes others choose their own way, not his, and seem to find themselves in a land of life and peace.

And into this confusing world came a King, who would live a perfect life, trust God without a flicker of failure, and His faith would lead Him right onto the Cross.

READ | MATTHEW 27:39-44

- In verse 43 what is the taunt made? Look up the cross-reference (Psalm 22).
- What was the theology of those mocking Jesus? How did they think trust in God would play out?

REFLECT

- Has there been a time when you walked into something hard because you trusted God, and you found yourself in a painful situation?
- How was that time confusing for you? How did you make sense of it with God?
- Tell Jesus about how all this has felt for you.

PRACTICE | LISTEN TO JESUS

Think about the confusion you've experienced in the moments you've trusted God and felt like he failed you. Share those experiences with Jesus and then ask him to tell you his story:

- Ask Jesus about how it felt on the cross as the people taunted him with Psalm 22:8. "He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him."
- Ask Jesus if he was tempted to doubt God's love for him and desire for him because of his suffering.

We trust God to keep us safe. We trust Him to deliver us. We trust Him to bring us joy and peace and happiness. We are not crazy for that. We are not selfish or ungodly. We know who our God is, and we know how He loves us.

Our concepts of trust aren't wrong. Trust is about banking on the hope that something magical waits for us on the other side of the door. It is about believing that joy and peace and pleasure lurk down the path of faithfulness. We just can't forget that Act Three, the resolution and glory you ache for, was never supposed to be found here in this broken world.

Let Jesus tell you about his Act Two, about how it ended in death and pain and ultimate suffering. Then let him tell you about his Act Three, and set your hope fully on the grace to be brought to you at the day of the return of Christ Jesus.

Trust Jesus. He will not fail.