



# GOD *with* US

Week 2: Daily Advent Devotionals

THE *Vine* <sup>ATX</sup>

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# Day eight

## GOD *with* US

### WHEN WE FEEL NEEDY.

God says this to us a lot: I need nothing from you. Maybe this is one of the most amazing things about God — that God is without need. It is incommunicable of course. The rest of us are needy.

People need. Maybe nothing is more distinctly human. Every inhale is a demand for Him to push air in our lungs, a cry for Him to sustain us.

Being weak and in need is not a result of being broken, it's our design. The brokenness is that we have to endure being weak needy in a cruel, starving world.

And it is into this world that Jesus has come, helpless and hungry. He, who had never known weakness, became fragile and dependent; He became needy.

#### READ | LUKE 2:6-21

- What does Mary do with Jesus when he is born?
- Consider for a second the fragility of Jesus — a newborn baby — the firstborn child of an impoverished teenager, far from family and friends, sleeping in a barn.

#### REFLECT

Take some time to reflect on your needs.

- What makes you feel needy? Where are you aware of your dependence?
- Practice telling Jesus — not necessarily asking for what you need, but just for this moment, sharing with him — how it feels to be needy.

## PRACTICE | LISTEN TO JESUS

- Let Jesus tell you about his needs, both the ones that were provided for and the ones that imperfect parents failed to meet.
- Ask Jesus if he was ever tempted to feel like a burden because of his needs, like when he asked his friends multiple times to stay awake with him the night before going to the cross.

Jesus didn't just enter into the world as a needy human. He entered into *this* world as a needy human. Could the Father not have picked a family with more resources to make sure his Son was safe? After all, the Father's cosmic plan would still have been accomplished without sending a baby to be born in a barn bundled up by a teenage girl far from home. But, Jesus is Emmanuel – God with us, God made like us. So that you and I can feel confident that, in our neediness, we have a person to go to who understands what it feels like to be a weak and frail human dependent on others to survive.

Go to Jesus now. You will find a great High Priest who needs nothing from you. He never needed you to be anything other than what he made you to be: gloriously weak and unapologetically needy.

# Day nine

## GOD *with* US

### WHEN WE ARE GRIEVING.

It's a strange feeling when something we love is taken from us and grief is God's gift to survive it. Grief is the indicator of a brain and body working healthily in a broken world. It helps us heal and ensures that false narratives don't convince us to live in a way that isn't in line with the people we want to be.

And yet it sure is an unpleasant sensation.

When it hits you — when it washes over you in waves and catches you off guard with the soul, anguishing awareness of what has been lost — in those moments it makes sense that we would seek to escape it.

Yet, Jesus — who could have avoided this whole mess — chose to become like us. He became human not just in suffering loss, but in subjecting Himself to the painful process of healing from suffering: the process we call grieving.

#### READ | JOHN 11:30-37

- What do these verses reveal about how Jesus felt in this circumstance?
- Why is that surprising in light of the events that are about to occur? (read a little further if you aren't sure what's next!)

#### REFLECT

Jesus gets it: there's glory to be had on the other side of suffering. If anyone had a reason to not grieve a loss it was Jesus. He was about to resurrect the guy, He knew God had a plan, he had the power to fix it all, and yet, he takes time to grieve. Because loss is sad, death is broken, and real faith in the restoration of God does not cannibalize grief.

Jesus' actions prove that there is faithful courage to be found in slowing down and feeling the pain of today, even as we firmly believe in the hope of tomorrow.

Take a few minutes to think through:

- What losses have you experienced over the past few months or years? Don't just think of people – think of dreams, plans, relationships, jobs, homes, health, and possessions.
- What is keeping you from experiencing the pain of those losses today?

## PRACTICE | LISTEN TO JESUS

Today, ask Jesus to tell you what it was like to live that day when his friend died:

- Ask Jesus what it felt like to hear that Lazarus was sick, what it felt like when he heard he had died, what it felt like when Mary blamed him for the death, and what it felt like to watch his friends grieve.
- Pick one thing on the list you made a few minutes ago and spend a few minutes telling Jesus about that loss. What was it? What does it feel like? How has it affected you?
- Now practice experiencing Jesus respond to your pain. If you're not sure what that might look like, re-read John 11:33-35.

Emmanuel means *God with us*. We know that is the gift of Christmas – we say it, we sing it. Yet, often when it comes to grief, we think God is 'with us' like a coach on the sidelines, yelling tips and motivational speeches to get us out of the pain. But our God does not stand far away. Our God has come to us now. Jesus has come to experience our pain with us so that he might weep with us and so he might comfort us with the comfort that he himself has received.

Link arms with your dearest friend in the losses of this life, and grieve together.

# Day ten

## GOD *with* US

### WHEN WE FEEL MISREPRESENTED.

There are few things that make us feel more helpless than watching someone give a misleading account of our words or feelings. None of us get to control how we are summed up by others; how they choose to tell our story. We entrust ourselves to those around us, we give them our stories, and our souls but once the conversation is over, and they leave, our story goes with them.

Only it is no longer ours. Now it is their representation of our story. And by the time you hear it again, like a disturbing game of telephone, it may be so distorted you can scarcely find yourself in it.

Meet Jesus. He entered into humanity, and like the rest of us — learned to entrust His actions and His message to the unreliable storytellers around Him.

#### READ | LUKE 22:66 - 23:10

- List out everything you observe about how Jesus is represented.
- Which parts seem like Jesus's words are being twisted or misrepresentations?
- Why do you think Jesus stayed silent?

#### REFLECT

- What are some times in your life that you have felt misrepresented or had a fear of being misrepresented? Consider not just the ways you individually have been represented, but the ways you've felt your race, gender, ethnicity, personality, habits or choices were misrepresented corporately in our culture. What have been the consequences of these misrepresentations; how have they affected your life?
- Tell Jesus how it feels to be misrepresented. Explain to him what has made it feel so painful

#### PRACTICE | LISTEN TO JESUS

Practice becoming aware that Jesus is a real person, sitting with you. Ask him to tell you directly about his experiences and story:

- Ask Jesus what it felt like to have come with such a glorious message and yet be so misrepresented.

- Ask him what it felt like to be misrepresented to the degree that it led to his death. Ask Jesus to tell you how it felt to stay silent knowing that being misrepresented had such dire consequences.
- Ask Jesus to tell you about how he is still misrepresented around this world; ask him about how it feels for his name to be used as justification for certain things that are incredibly counter to his mission.
- Ask him now — to tell you the hard truth about how you too have misrepresented his intentions, his personality, and his promises in your own mind.

Have an honest conversation with Jesus, keeping in mind that he is not a theology you need to correct. He is a person who has been misrepresented.

Jesus subjected Himself to being misrepresented so He could be a high priest who is able to advocate for you before the Father. He is your advocate, interceding for you even now, and because of Advent He is able to explain to the Father what being human is like in a broken world. He is able to represent you perfectly because He Himself has experienced all the fullness of humanity.

Draw near to Him to find grace. For you are not talking to some great high priest who is unable to sympathize with your weaknesses, you are talking to your Jesus. Who chose to allow Himself to be misrepresented so that He could sit with you when you are misrepresented and tell you *He knows how it feels*.

# Day eleven

## **GOD** *with* **US**

### IN THE EVERY DAY.

Much of life isn't dramatic – either bad or good. Much of life is sleeping, or eating, or commuting, or watching a show, or working. Sometimes it feels like the magic is waiting on the other side of whatever task you have to get through.

We can find ourselves looking forward to experiencing the magic of Jesus at Christmas Eve services or looking forward to being present with our families as we open gifts on Christmas Day, but if we're not careful we can miss the magic of Jesus with us in the everyday moments.

#### READ | LUKE 2:42-52 & 3:21-23

- Write down every observation about Jesus' life between ages 12 and 30 in these passages
- Why do you think practically none of these writers (who were disciples of Jesus) would have written about his life before he was 30?
- What do you think those years were like for Jesus? What are some things you imagine him doing in those years?

#### REFLECT

- What is on your to-do list today? What mundane things do you have to do today (e.g. shower, commute...)?
- Is there a season or circumstance you are waiting for, when you believe life will feel exciting or magical? It may be a small thing, (e.g. get through work today so you can be with friends tonight) or it might be a larger goal (e.g. get married so you can start a family).



## PRACTICE | LISTEN TO JESUS

- Ask Jesus about the missing years. What was it like to know his destiny, to have the anticipation of that and still patiently wait to begin that specific ministry?
- Ask Jesus how he found meaning in those years of waiting for “ministry” to begin.

In his death, Jesus fulfilled his eternal “purpose,” but every unrecorded mundane minute of his life had purpose in it too. Every bruise, every sleepy morning, every minute getting dressed, every year lived in waiting for the cross was purposed so that he could sit here with you this exact day and tell you — not only does he know how it feels, but he can assure you — there is purpose and meaning in it all.

Listen as Jesus tells you today, I understand. All those years I too was tempted to feel like I was in a holding pattern. But it was for this. It was so that I could have this very moment between the two of us where I tell you I know how it feels.

# Day twelve

## GOD *with* US

### WHEN WE FEEL FORGOTTEN.

We all have a universal fear of being unnoticed, overlooked, and invisible.

It's the limit of the human mind. We cannot hold people in our minds constantly, no matter how much we love them. Even if we try, sooner or later, sleep claims us, and we lose them again.

We belong to a God whose mind is magnificent enough to hold us constantly in view.

We never slip from His attention. Sleep never cannibalizes His ability to think of us. As His image bearers, we subconsciously expect people to do that too if they care.

And when they are unable to do it perfectly, it hurts.

Spoiler alert: Jesus knows how that feels.

#### READ | LUKE 2:41-46

- How old is Jesus at the time of this story?
- How long does it take to notice Jesus is missing?
- How does the writer explain Mary and Joseph's thinking?
- What does the passage say about how they were feeling?
- How long does it take to find Jesus?

#### REFLECT

It is no small thing to lose your 12-year-old for three days. Can you imagine? It is also no small thing, as a 12-year-old, for it to take a day for your parents to notice you are gone and three days to find you.

Jesus' family wasn't negligent. They assumed he was with other family members; they had a lot going on. And isn't that always the case? Often, when you and I feel forgotten, it isn't that people don't care; it's that they assume we're taken care of, or their limited human brains simply cannot consider us constantly.

- What are some times in your life you have felt forgotten or invisible? When have you been left off the text or invite?
- What conclusions has your brain drawn because of this? (That you are undervalued? People are not trustworthy? You are less valuable?) What are other possible explanations?
- Tell Jesus what this has felt like.

## PRACTICE | LISTEN TO JESUS

- Ask Jesus about the journey home after his parents found him. Was he tempted to dwell on how long it took for his parents to realize he was missing?
- Ask Jesus how it feels each day when you and I go about our days as if he is not even there.

Without hearing accusation from Jesus, without feeling blamed or shamed, let your own experiences of feeling forgotten help you grieve together with Jesus over the ways you treat him as if he's not present, even when he's in the room.

Draw near to one another and share the pain that is caused by the limitations of human brains. Then worship together the Father who never sleeps, never forgets you, and whose mind is magnificent enough to hold us constantly in view.

# Day thirteen

## GOD *with* US

### WHEN WE FEEL LOVE.

#### READ | JOHN 13:1-5 ; JOHN 19:25-27

- How does Jesus display love in these two passages?
- What stands out to you about his love of his friends and family?

#### REFLECT

- Who are the people in your life that you love?
- Sit for a moment in that feeling of love, and let it bubble up inside of you. Meditate on good memories or moments when you have noticed their unique qualities or personality.
- Talk to Jesus about these people, just reflecting on what you love about how they are made.

#### PRACTICE | LISTEN TO JESUS

- Ask Jesus about the different people mentioned in these passages: John (the disciple whom he loved), his friend Mary, his aunt, and his mother. Ask Jesus to tell you about his love and affection for them.
- Ask Jesus to tell you about his unique love and affection for you. What does he say when you ask him? What does his face look like as he tells you of his love? What does his love feel like?

Jesus knows how it feels to love people – deeply and uniquely. He knows how it feels to want closeness with those around us, to long for provision for them. He has had that feeling of bubbling love that overflows in care and tenderness. Jesus is with you in that shared experience.

# Day fourteen

## GOD *with* US

### WHEN WE FEEL HUMILIATED.

When we think about how far we'll go to avoid the feeling of humiliation, it makes us realize how powerful that experience is for humans. Fear of humiliation causes us to say no to learning new things, to growth in relationships and in ourselves, to speaking up, and to vulnerability or risk.

Humiliation is about the loss of dignity. It's the feeling of abasement, of being forced into a lower position. Humiliation is so different from humility.

Humility is when you lower yourself, willingly and freely. Humiliation is when someone else is doing that for you. One of those is the most empowering feelings in the world, and one of them is the most disempowering, dignity stripping sensations we can have as humans.

And this is the time of year when we remember, as challenging as it is to navigate this sensation, we do not have to do it alone.

#### READ | MATTHEW 27:27-43 | PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8

- How is the humility we read about in Philippians different from what we read about in the passage in Matthew? How is the humility of Christ different from his humiliation?

#### REFLECT

- What is a moment you have felt most vulnerable and exposed in a way that felt humiliating? What happened and how did it feel?
- How have these experiences felt distinct from moments when you have felt humility?
- Tell Jesus about the moments you thought of above.

## PRACTICE | LISTEN TO JESUS

- Ask Jesus to tell you about how it felt to be mocked – for his words and God’s words to be used to belittle him and his faith.
- Ask Jesus to tell you about what it felt like to have his clothes stripped from him and be helpless and naked before his family and friends and people who hated him.

Jesus humbled Himself beyond reason. He lowered Himself to being found in a mortal body. He lowered Himself to the point of being a newborn baby, weak, dependent on human beings to keep Him alive. He humbled Himself further still by being willing to die, not just die but die in a humiliating way.

Jesus could have accomplished salvation without being mocked by mortal man, without being rebuked by foolish friends and Pharisees, without being stripped naked and exposed in front of His mother and her friends.

This is the miracle of Advent. Not just a God who restores all things, but the God who is with you before the restoration is complete. Not just the God who has declared your dignity once and for all, but a God who has experienced and validates the pain of earthly humiliation in this life.

Advent: Mild he lays his glory by.