A 4-Week Bible Study to

BUILD YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST THIS Advent

By: Cindi McMenamin



Crosswalk PLUS



It's easy to start dreading the holidays when we think about all we have to do to prepare for and enjoy Christmas. But what if we focused this season on preparing our hearts to celebrate and enjoy our relationship with Christ? He is, after all, the reason for the season, the greatest gift we'll ever receive, and the constant hope of our hearts. Rather than running yourself ragged on the externals—like decorating, gift-buying, and a myriad of plans, all aimed at perfection—here is a chance for you to focus on your interior life and build a stronger relationship with Christ, the Perfect One.

The word advent refers to Christ's arrival or appearance. It's also the first part of the word adventure. Think about it, every adventure on this earth truly worth having is one in which Christ "appears" or shows up. While He is ever-present with us when we are in relationship with Him, inviting His presence more deeply into your everyday life will help make this Advent season more memorable as it draws you closer to Him.

With each of these four readings, commit yourself to the One who committed Himself to you by coming to this earth, living a sinless life, suffering on the cross to pay the penalty for your sin, and rising from the grave so you can live with Him eternally. I invite you to slow down, center your heart on Him, and join in the longing and anticipation for not just Christmas, but for Christ Himself.

Week 1:
Long for Jesus as Your Ultimate Hope

In the first week of Advent, the Prophet's Candle is lit, reminding us of the long yearning of God's people for their Messiah. Their hope was based on God's promises in Scripture to send the One who would heal and restore them and their land.

Isaiah prophesied Jesus' coming with these words: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone…" (Isaiah 92:2).

Every one of us has walked in darkness and needs the great light of hope and salvation through Christ alone (Romans 3:23). Jesus proclaimed: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6 ESV). Because He has come, we now have a living hope (1 Peter 1:3). And just as God promised Christ's first coming, and that promise was fulfilled, Jesus promised to come again and receive us to Himself so that we will always be with Him (John 14:3).

Prayer:

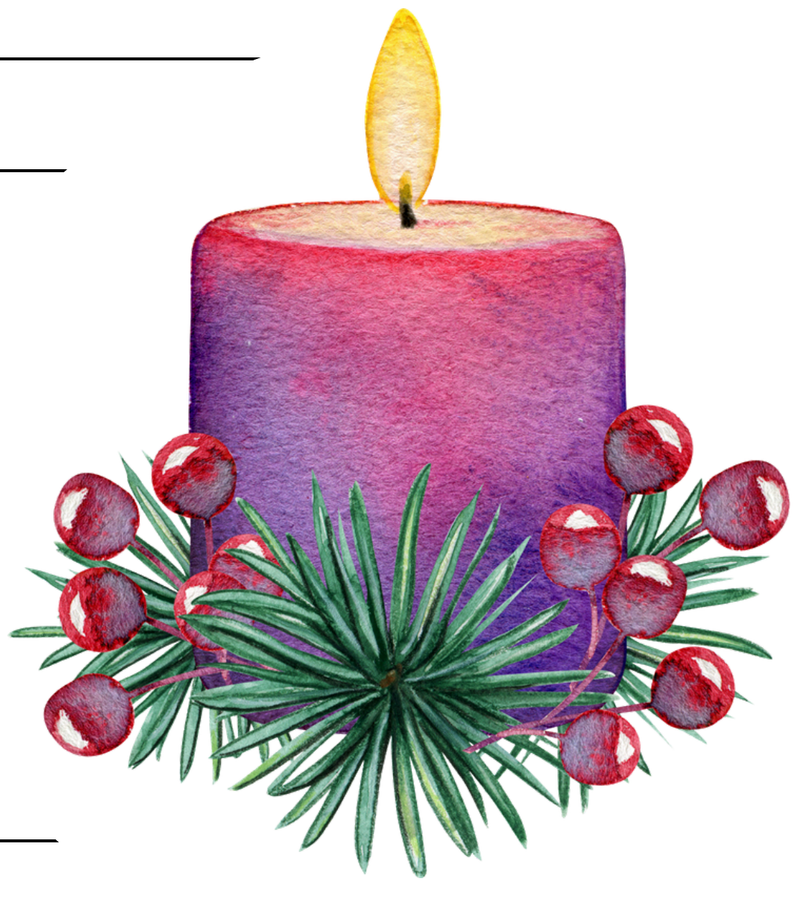
Lord, thank You that this season is a time to celebrate Your coming and the fact that You are—and always will be—the fulfillment of hope. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides You (Psalm 73:25). Increase my longing for Your presence and help me to continually see You as my ultimate source of hope.

Week 1 Challenge:

Increase your longing for God's presence by setting your mind this week "on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1-3).

Journal Prompt:

As God's people waited with hope and anticipation for their Messiah's first coming, how can you express a daily hope and longing for your Savior's second coming?



Week 2:
Enjoy Peace in Christ's Presence

The second week of Advent is a time to dwell on the preparation of God's coming, and what it means in our lives, personally, that He came. The Bethlehem Candle is lit, reminding us that God, in the form of a child, entered the world and brought with Him peace—in every way that we need it.

At the announcement of Jesus' birth, angels proclaimed: "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:14). Jesus is the Prince of peace (Isaiah 9:6). Yet, the peace He brings is not just the absence of war or conflict.

He brings a peaceful assurance to our hearts that—because of our faith in Jesus alone for our salvation—if we were to die today, we would be with Him in heaven for eternity. He provides a "peace which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7) because no matter what comes our way today or tomorrow, His presence is enough to get us through it and grow us through it. Through Him, we have the assurance that we are accepted by God, not because of who we are or what we've done, but because of who He is and what He has done. Ephesians 2:14 says that He Himself is our peace.

Prayer:

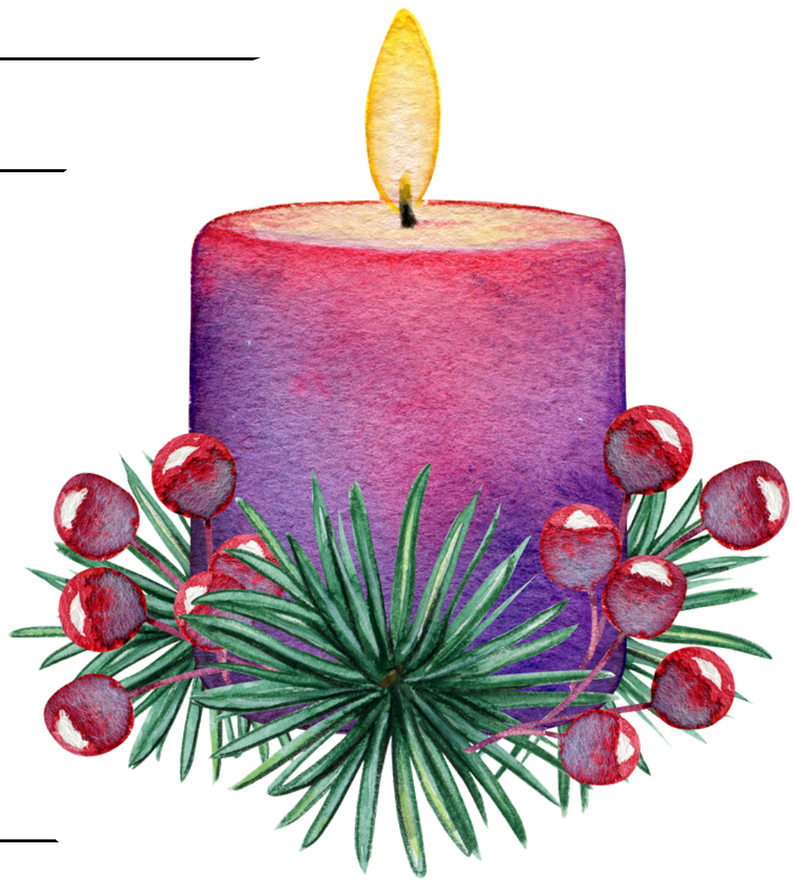
Thank You, Lord Jesus, for being the Prince of peace and my personal peace as well. You are the One who calms my heart and brings me peace through Your indwelling Holy Spirit. Help me to grow in my understanding of and reliance on Your peace.

Week 2 Challenge:

Thank God every day this week at noon for being your peace with this short breath prayer: *Jesus, You are my peace. Make me ever aware of Your presence.*

Journal Prompt:

Prayerfully reflect on Philippians 4:6-7. What are you anxious about today? Ask God to quiet your anxious heart and bring you to a place of peace as you rest in Him alone.



Week 3: Discover Joy in Jesus

During the third week of Advent, the Shepherd's Candle is lit, representing the joy that Christ brought into this world. The angel proclaimed to the shepherds the night Jesus was born: "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy" (Luke 2:10). After finding the babe in a nearby stable and worshipping him, "the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them" (Luke 2:20).

Does joy emanate from your life, as it did from the shepherds, just from knowing Jesus is near? It can, as you grow closer to Him daily.

James 4:8 tells us: "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." Therein is the recipe for joy: Drawing near to God's presence and living in the abundance of His love. Psalm 16:11 says, "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

Joy isn't just happiness. It is a deep abiding joy that results from the assurance that God has come near. It is an ever grateful heart for Who God is and all He has done. Think about it! The infinite God wants to be intimate with you. Now that is a reason for joy.

Prayer:

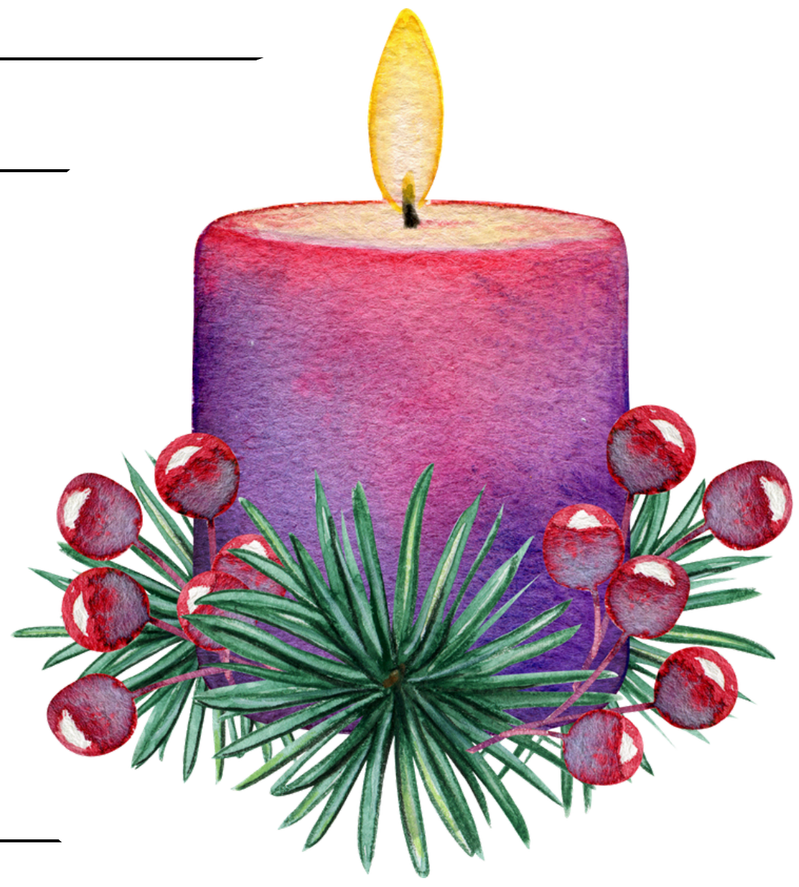
Lord Jesus, You truly are the source of all joy—in my life and in the lives of anyone who will surrender to You. Make my joy complete by helping me be of the same mind with others in the body of Christ, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose (Philippians 2:2).

Week 3 Challenge:

Make a list of the many ways Christ has brought you joy. (Think of His attributes, His gifts, the way He has shown Himself strong on your behalf.) Present your list as a Christmas gift to your Savior.

Journal Prompt:

We can best spell joy by prioritizing *Jesus*, then *Others*, then *You*. How can you put this formula for joy into action this week?



Week 4:
Grow in Love and Adoration for the Lord

The fourth week of Advent, as the Angel candle is lit, is a time to remember the love of God displayed through Christ's birth. The white candle lit on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day represents Christ and the truth that every theme of Advent finds its fulfillment in Jesus. He is our Hope, our Peace, our Joy, and our Love.

John 3:16 tells us "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son..." Romans 8:38-39 assures us that "neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

What will you do with this kind of sacrificial love that was demonstrated to you by the God of the Universe? All He asks is for your surrender and that you "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). As a gift to Him this Advent season and every day of your life, show your love for Him by loving others as He has loved you, and by striving to love Him more. Draw closer to Him now more than ever, for He has surely done everything possible—and impossible—to draw closer to You.

Prayer:

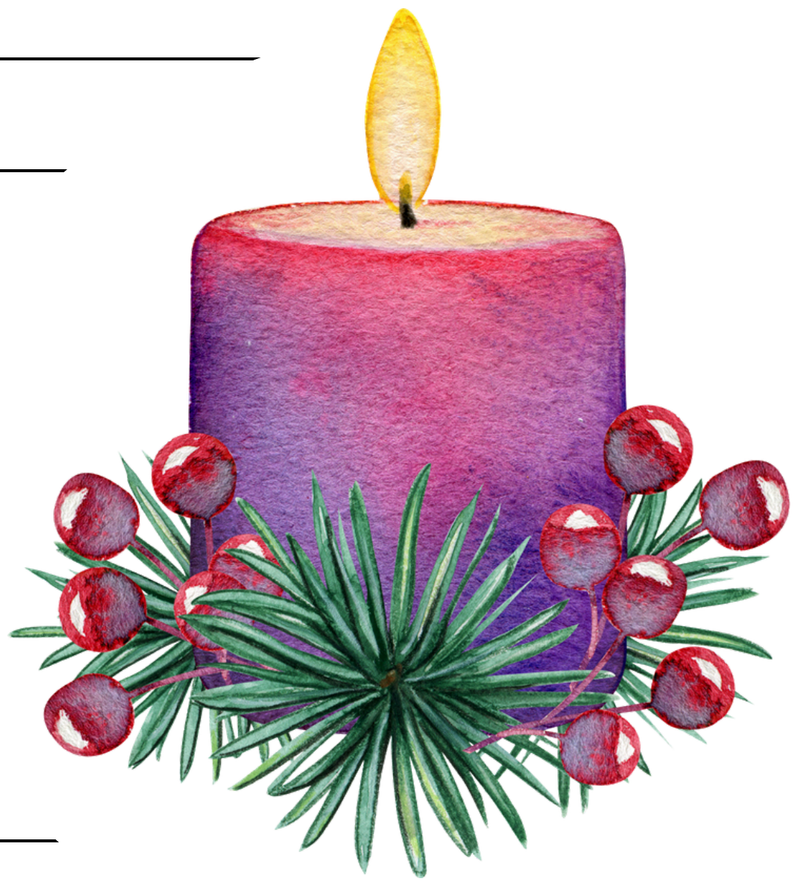
Lord, thank you for being our Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Help us to draw closer to you in this Advent season, and always remember the sacrificial love you poured out on us, this season and every season.

Week 4 Challenge:

Enter into the joy of the season by not just receiving God's love, but sharing it with those around you. Ask God to bring at least one person into your circle of influence this week that you can share Jesus with.

Journal Prompt:

1 John 4:8 tells us "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." How can you demonstrate God's love to someone else both in and outside your home this week?



AUTHOR BIO:

Cindi McMenamin is a national speaker, Bible teacher, certified writing coach, and award-winning writer who helps women and couples strengthen their relationship with God and others. She is also a mother, a pastor's wife who has been married 37 years, and the author of 19 books, including When Women Walk Alone (more than 160,000 copies sold), The New Loneliness: Nurturing Meaningful Connections When You Feel Isolated, and The New Loneliness Devotional: 50 Days to a Closer Connection with God. For more on her speaking ministry, coaching services for writers, and books to strengthen your soul, marriage, and parenting, see her website: www.StrengthForTheSoul.com.

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