# Advent Meditations

PEACE ON EARTH

Hello friends,

We are so glad you're making space this Advent to join us in reflecting on Jesus, the prince of peace.

Each part of this four-week guide contains a reading from Scripture, followed by a simple reflection, a few questions, and a guided prayer. At the end of each section, we've also included optional resources if you wish to reflect further.

If you'd like, gather a few friends or family and walk through it together. We suggest printing it off and sitting somewhere quiet so that you can focus.

We pray this guide will help you engage the presence and peace of Jesus this Christmas and in the year ahead.

Peace,
Practicing the Way

WEEK ONE

# Peace Is Being Present

My heart is not proud, Lord,
my eyes are not haughty;

I do not concern myself with great matters
or things too wonderful for me.

But I have calmed and quieted myself,
I am like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child I am content.

Israel, put your hope in the Lord
both now and forevermore.

—Psalm 131

## READ

When we're consumed by future plans, fret about hardships to come, or, to borrow the words of the Psalmist, when we concern ourselves with "great matters or things too wonderful," we risk becoming people who can't be present.

Some of us fixate on future goals because it helps us escape present pain and confusion. As one pastor shared, "Even in ministry, I've become comfortable with a farsightedness — of looking ahead to 'things too great for me' — to avoid the difficulty of facing a blurry near-term."

Others of us compulsively look ahead out of fear and a desire to control. Some clinicians define anxiety as "the anticipation of evil." We're scanning the horizon, trying to predict what may come and bracing ourselves against future pain.

Both types of fixation can steal our peace and make it difficult to be present to Jesus and to those around us.

With Jesus, we don't need to avoid what's right in front of us. We can face the pain, confusion, or chaos today brings, because he is waiting to meet us in it.

And Jesus teaches us to release the fantasy that we control future plans. He helps us "abandon outcomes to God," in the words of Jan Johnson. We plan as best we can for the future, and then we let go, consciously placing whatever comes at the feet of Jesus.

The sooner we turn to Jesus and accept our contingence, our dependence, and our limitations, the sooner we become more "like a weaned child with its mother" — deeply content and calm. And with that peace, we become more present to God, to ourselves, and to those we love.

## REFLECT

What is stealing your peace in this season of your life? Take a moment to offer to Jesus anything that comes to mind.

What is your typical go-to response when feelings of anxiety or confusion surface? How might Psalm 131 inform your response?

How have you seen Jesus meet you in your confusion or pain? How did you create space for him to meet you there?

Father, when I'm turning from others
and from my own heart;

when I'm lost in uncertainty and fear
and fleeing what I should face;

when I'm anxious for the future,
for matters beyond my reach;

calm and quiet my heart.

Keep me present to you,
to your peace,
and to those I love.

Amen.

# For Further Reflection

## READ

Matthew 6v25-34; Psalm 46

## LISTEN

Jesus on Becoming a Non-Anxious Presence | Gospel of Matthew

## WATCH

Caleb's Story

WEEK TWO

# Peace Is Slowing Down

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.

—Psalm 23

## READ

Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama describes love as having a speed, and it's slow, not fast. In the same way, peace has a speed. It's a measured pace, hand-in-hand with Jesus, letting him lead us and restore us.

One reason we don't experience the *peace* of Jesus is because we don't move at the *pace* of Jesus. Dallas Willard said the best way to describe Jesus' posture was "relaxed." We need to slow down, often quite literally, to embrace his peace.

Theologically, you don't *have* a body, you *are* a body. And much of our anxiety is bodily — it's the result of hurry, stress, and noise pollution on our central nervous systems. The movement and busyness of modern life is like a war of attrition on our peace.

It's been said, "The soul often is reeducated by the body." So yielding to Jesus and experiencing his peace includes submitting our *bodies* to his wisdom — getting good sleep, driving slower, getting out in nature, and practicing Sabbath.

We slow down using our minds too, by meditating on Scripture and letting God's words fill our imaginations and quiet our bodies. Through the language of Psalm 23, we can picture the Good Shepherd leading us, unhurried, beside quiet waters — his hand keeping us close and directing our attention to the beauty all around.

## REFLECT

What is your body communicating to you about your current pace of life? What might be driving that pace?

What are some simple practices (driving slower, putting your phone away, going to bed earlier) you could adopt to slow your body down?

How does Psalm 23 open your imagination to the ways Jesus seeks to lead you? If you'd like, take a moment to close your eyes and walk in the presence of the Good Shepherd, letting the steps of Jesus dictate your pace.

Father, you are my shepherd —
providing for all that I need,
bringing me rest,
quieting my heart.

No matter where I go,
you comfort me with your presence
and calm my fears with your peace.

When I start to worry,
when the valley is deep,
slow me down
so I can see your goodness.

Amen.

# For Further Reflection

## READ

Matthew 11v28-30; Lamentations 3v25-26

## LISTEN

Hope (ft. Ken Shigematsu) | Advent E1 (Releases December 13)

## WATCH

Katy's Story

WEEK THREE

# Peace Is Walking by the Spirit

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

—John 20v19-27

## READ

What are Jesus' first words to his followers after he's back from the dead?

"Peace be with you."

Jesus repeats it two verses later: "Peace be with you." And a little further in the story, when Jesus appears again, this time with Thomas present, he says it a third time.

Three times in a row. That's Jesus and John's way of making sure we don't miss how important this line is.

In the resurrection stories, the throughline is: the disciples are afraid, hiding in an upper room, racked by anxiety; and Jesus comes, and the first thing he offers is peace. And in John's version, right after Jesus says, "Peace be with you" for the second time, we read that "... he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"

This isn't just a greeting; it's a blessing. It's a gift of the Spirit of Jesus to his followers — the same Spirit that empowers us today, moment-by-moment, to live in the peace of Jesus.

Just before his arrest, Jesus comforts his troubled followers with a promise: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever — the Spirit of truth. ... I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14v16-18).

The same comfort holds true for his followers today. When we're in a tense conversation or responding to a rebellious child or navigating a major life change or moving toward a hurting friend with no words to say — we're never abandoned as orphans. The Spirit of truth is with us.

And in all situations, at all times, the fruit of the Spirit is peace.

## REFLECT

In what types of situations do you find it most difficult to maintain peace?

How have you experienced the Spirit enabling inner peace in the midst of turmoil or tension? What might our role be in giving the Spirit space to form us into people of non-anxious presence?

How might entrusting yourself to the Spirit of peace change the way you relate to others, even during periods of stress?

Father, thank you for the gift of the Spirit.
Thank you that we are not left as orphans.

Thank you that the Spirit of Jesus is in us,
comforting us, strengthening us,
giving all that we need;

so that in every situation
and in every moment,
we may love courageously
and walk in peace.

Amen

# For Further Reflection

## READ

John 14v15-27; Galatians 5v22-25

## LISTEN

Peace (ft. Ken Shigematsu) | Advent E2 (Releases December 20)

## WATCH

Brian + Amanda Kannel

WEEK FOUR

# Peace Is a Person

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.

You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.

For as in the day of Midian's defeat,
you have shattered the yoke that burdens them,
the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.
Every warrior's boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

—Isaiah 9v2-6

## READ

Peace in the biblical story is a person, not a thing.

The Father is called "the God of peace." Jesus is called "the Prince of Peace." The Spirit is called "the Spirit of peace." The Trinity is pervaded by peacefulness.

In the book of Revelation, we see behind the curtain of the universe into God's throne room, and we read that around the throne was a "sea of glass, clear as crystal" (4v6).

The sea in Ancient Near Eastern mythology was the place of chaos, not peace. It was the home of the chaos dragon, Leviathan; it was always churning and never at rest. But in the throne room, the sea is like glass. It has been calmed by God's presence. The atmosphere around God is perfectly calm and still.

That's why enjoying the peace that Jesus brings is ultimately about enjoying his presence. It's about asking, in moments throughout your day, "How do I practice the presence of Jesus right now? How do I enjoy him?" We need to habitually sit before God, with his loving gaze upon us, attuned to his presence and peace.

When we're turned up by waves of anxiety and fear, we can pause — if only for a few minutes — and awaken our souls to Jesus. We can lean on the one who overcomes chaos with a single word and who brings our hearts to perfect rest, like a sea of glass.

And in this Advent season, we are especially invited to ponder the names given by the prophet Isaiah: Jesus, the prince of peace. Jesus, called *Immanue*l, God with us.

## REFLECT

What stirs in your heart when you read that God's throne room is surrounded by a "sea of glass" — an environment of perfect calm and stillness? Is this typically how you view God's presence?

Why might it be hard for us to simply enjoy the presence of Jesus? What barriers do we have?

What is one way you sense God is inviting you to embody the peace of Jesus in your family, in your workplace, or in your neighborhood? Take a moment to invite the Spirit to help you carry his peace in the coming year.

Jesus, Immanuel,

Thank you for coming.
Thank you for being with us.

We need and embrace and love
all that you are:

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Thank you, Jesus, that you will never forsake us.

May we carry your Kingdom of peace in this season
and in the year to come.

Amen.

# For Further Reflection

## READ

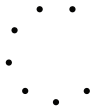
Matthew 1v23; Hebrews 13v5-6

## LISTEN

Joy (ft. Ken Shigematsu) | Advent E3 (Releases December 27)

## WATCH

Ger's Story



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**Practicing the Way** is a nonprofit that creates spiritual formation resources for churches and small groups learning how to become apprentices of the Way of Jesus. We believe one of the greatest needs of our time is for people to discover how to become lifelong disciples of Jesus. To that end, we help people learn how to be with Jesus, become like him, and do as he did through the practices and rhythms he and his earliest followers lived by.

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