

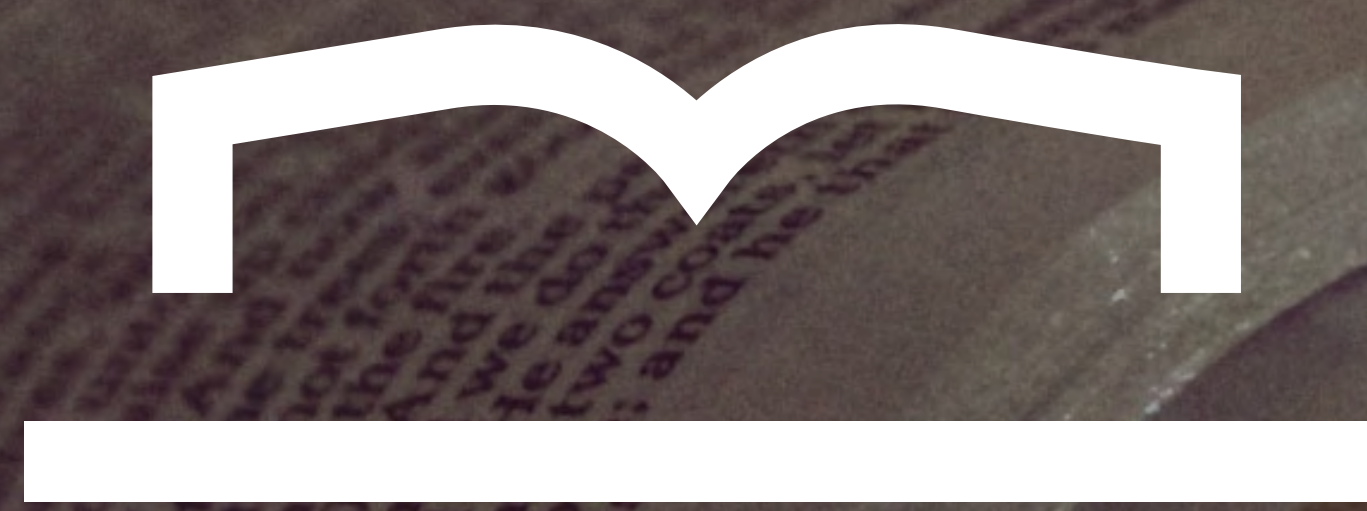
DECEMBER 2022

# ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

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FOR PASTORS AND THEIR FAMILY

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## PREACHING COACH

BROUGHT TO YOU BY DAVID L. ALLEN MINISTRIES



Dr. David L. Allen is founder and editor-in-chief of PreachingCoach ([preachingcoach.com](https://preachingcoach.com)), a ministry dedicated to equipping pastors and ministry leaders to communicate with clarity, competence, and confidence. Through personal and group coaching, podcasts, webinars, eBooks, Ministry classes, and other resources, PreachingCoach trains and mentors those who desire to communicate more effectively.

In 2022, Dr. Allen became the Distinguished Professor of Practical Theology and Dean of the Adrian Rogers Center for Biblical Preaching at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Memphis, Tennessee.

He began preaching at age 16 and has taught preaching from the bachelor to the doctoral level since the late 1980s. He earned his MDIV from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, where he became Dean of the School of Theology in 2004, and the founding Dean of the School of Preaching in 2016. He served as the Distinguished Professor of Preaching, Director of the Center for Expository Preaching, and held the George W. Truett Chair of Pastoral Ministry.

Dr. Allen is also a graduate of The Criswell College, Dallas, Texas, where he taught and held the W.A. Criswell Chair of Preaching from 1998-2004. He earned his PhD in Humanities from the University of Texas at Arlington where he majored in Linguistics with the goal of using the principles of linguistics in exegesis and expository preaching.

He has been senior pastor of two churches in Texas from 1982-2004 and served as interim pastor of 14 churches for almost 20 years.

Over the past 40 years, Dr. Allen has led or participated in more than 400 preaching workshops, conferences, revivals, and other events in the US and in more than a dozen countries abroad.

This extensive background equips him to champion, teach, and model “text-driven” preaching, and he co-edited a book by that title, as well as numerous other books and articles on preaching, Old Testament, New Testament, and theology. His books have been translated into Spanish, Korean, and Portuguese.



**DAVID ALLEN**

Preaching Coach, Pastor, Speaker, and Author.





## INTRODUCTION

Advent has long been considered the first season of the Christian church year, leading up to Christmas and including the four preceding Sundays. The word “Advent,” comes from the Latin word meaning “coming.” Advent celebrates the coming of Jesus into our world.

There are traditionally four key words associated with Advent: Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace. At the beginning of each week before Christmas the Advent candle representing these words is lit.

As a pastor, you are preparing to lead your people in worship during this Advent season. During the Christmas season, the pastor and his family are busy ministering to others. But who ministers to the shepherd? Who encourages him in the daily grind of ministry?

You and your family need the hope, love, joy, and peace that Advent brings just like everybody else. That is the purpose of this weekly Advent devotional. These are designed to be read privately or to be used in family worship once a week leading up to Christmas. My prayer for you, and for every pastor and family is that you may experience renewal from the Holy Spirit who long ago overshadowed Mary and gave us His indescribable gift of a Savior!

## WEEK ONE - HOPE

Week one of Advent begins with anticipation—we light the candle of hope. The first noel was an announcement of hope. That hope was realized when Jesus was born! Our hope this Christmas is not only the fact that Jesus came, but that he is coming again! The first noel will one day give way to the last noel!

The word “hope” itself is used 85 times in the New Testament. A relationship with God through Christ is the ground of our hope in this messed up world. The author of Hebrews reminds us we have “an anchor of hope” who is Jesus himself.

Look! Do you see it? Yonder on the margin of the ocean near the shore, a storm-tossed ship riding the angry waves. The wind has driven her dangerously close to the rocks. Should her hull be dashed upon those rocks, it would be splintered into a thousand pieces. There she lies, dancing upon the waves. Look on her through the blown spume and the drifting spray. She appears to be a helpless plaything of the elements. Wind and waves combine in a deadly tag team effort to send her to the murky bottom. One moment she is tossed aloft on the crest of the waves, the next she sinks into the hollow. Her prow disappears beneath an advancing breaker and she is lost to view. Suddenly she emerges again.

Strangely, she is not overcome. With confident perseverance she survives the strength of the storm. What is the secret of her safety? What is the source of her security? Her security is her anchor - a massive piece of iron that is fastened sure and steadfast to the bottom of the ocean floor. Because of the anchor, she is secure. She has hope.



We all live on the heaving sea of life. Like an ocean, life is always uncertain, deceptive, dangerous. Currents of circumstances crisscross one another in endless complications. You need an anchor of hope.

Listen! Do you hear it? From the clickity-clack of countless computer keyboards come thousands of documents and millions of words, but they all seem to spell out the same four- word question: “Is there any hope?” Who will answer? The cynic said, “He who lives by hope will die starving.” The poet said, “Hope is the most hopeless thing of all.” The philosopher said “hope is the bait which nature uses to get her hook in our nose.”

Many people this Christmas are prisoners in their own dungeons of hopelessness. Hope for them is a mirage in the desert. It seems as if the drapes have been pulled forever on hope. For others, hope is nothing more than wishful thinking and optimism. In fact, that is the normal usage of the word in English. “I hope it doesn’t rain.” “I hope we have fried chicken for dinner.” “I hope the Cowboys have a winning season this year.” Such hope is best described as wishful thinking, optimism that may or may not materialize. Such hope is subjective, an anemic invalid, forever nervous, trying to be cheerful but frequently sick in bed with nervous prostration.

But hope is not a bedraggled prisoner of circumstances. It is a strong soldier who marches side-by-side with faith! That beautiful word hope in the Greek New Testament means “a settled certainty and confident expectation based upon the promises of God.” It is not subjective, something in you; it is objective, someone beyond you. You can’t create it. You can’t invent it. You can’t manufacture it. You can’t buy it. It is only in Jesus, and it is a gift.

Christian hope is not optimism based on what I see around me, but it is confident expectation of what I know is above me, regardless of the circumstances I see around me. No wonder Jeremiah could say “Blessed is the one whose hope is in the Lord.” (Jer. 17:7).

Peter informs us that “we have been born again unto a living hope, incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading.” “Incorruptible”—this hope is death proof! “Undefiled”—this hope is sin proof! “unfading”—this hope is time proof!

Hope is not a sedative for Christians in troubled times. Hope is a shot of adrenalin. Hope gives encouragement and enablement for living. It doesn't put you in a rocking chair; it puts you out in the marketplace. It puts you on the battlefield of life. It is what puts you out there on Monday morning at school or at work, and causes you to live, not in fear but in faith.

Hope is faith's future tense. Hope makes plans! Hope waits for the delayed but guaranteed fulfillment.

This Christmas, Christians all over the world will gather for Christmas Eve Carols and Candles services. At some point in most of those services, the carol “O Little Town of Bethlehem” will be sung. Lean in and listen close to these words one more time: “The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.”



## WEEK TWO - LOVE

### “Christmas Love”

John Fawcett, English Baptist preacher, author and hymn-writer, entered the ministry as a Baptist pastor in 1764, pastoring a church in Halifax for the next 53 years until his death. He is mostly remembered today as the author of “Blest Be the Tie that Binds,” his most well-known hymn. But he also authored a remarkable book *Christ Precious to Those That Believe*, published in 1799. Fawcett’s purpose in writing is to open up to us the love of Christ and teach us to love Him more.

Christmas is all about love—the love of Jesus who left heaven’s glory to enter our dark world, become one of us, and die for our sins. Another hymnwriter, Charles Wesley, expressed this same love in one of his most famous hymns, “And Can It Be”:

He left His Father’s throne above,  
So free, so infinite His grace;  
Emptied Himself of all but love,  
And bled for Adam’s helpless race.

What was the purpose of that first Christmas in Bethlehem? Incarnation. God became man. Emmanuel—God with us. And what was the purpose of that incarnation? Calvary. “Unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given.” To what purpose? That he should die for our sins.

Such love! “But God demonstrated his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). “Amazing love! how can it be, that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?”

Because of Christmas and because of Calvary, Christ is indeed precious to those of us who believe.

This Christmas, we recognize that we can only love Jesus because he first loved us!

Fawcett reminds me how I should strive to love Jesus more: “If such a Savior is not precious to us, nothing can equal our ingratitude.” While still getting over my conviction at this statement, Fawcett has the audacity to inflict me again: “Surely they who love him most, have reason still to be grieved that they do not love him more, and sing the wonders of redeeming love.”

Several years ago, each day as a part of my prayer time, I lifted up to the Lord these words of George Croly’s hymn, “Spirit of God Descend Upon My Heart”:

Spirit of God descend upon my heart,  
Wean it from earth, through all its pulses move;  
Stoop to my weakness, mighty as thou art,  
And teach me to love thee as thine angels love.

Teach me to love thee as thy angels love,  
One holy passion filling all my frame;

The baptism of the heavenly descended dove,  
My heart an altar, thy love the flame.

What do I want this Christmas? To give Jesus the gift of my love. . . and perhaps take my cue from John Fawcett’s prayer in Christ Precious to Those Who Believe:



To thy love I must ascribe my whole salvation and through all the ages of a blissful eternity, I humbly hope and trust, I shall proclaim the wonders of redeeming love, and tell to listening angels what this love has done for my soul. “Unto him that loved us; and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests to God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Along with Isaac Watts, let's sing about “the glories of His righteousness . . . and the wonders of His love!”

Merry Christmas! Maranatha!



## WEEK THREE - JOY

If ever there was a single word that describes the Christmas story in Luke 1-2, it would have to be the word “joy”! When the angel Gabriel came to Mary, he greeted her with the word “Rejoice”! When Mary came to visit Elizabeth as recorded in Luke 1:39-45, both were pregnant. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby in her womb “leaped for joy.” In Mary’s song in Luke 1:46-47, she sings “my heart rejoices in the Lord.” When the angels came to the shepherds on the hillside in Luke 2, they said: “I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”

Joy to the world, the Lord is come! This is the meaning of Christmas for you, your family, and for all people.

What does your “joy meter” say about the level of your joy this Christmas season? Are you experiencing the joy of the Savior? The incarnate Savior? The crucified Savior? The risen Savior? The coming again Savior?

Interestingly, Jesus speaks of joy in relationship to his disciples three times in his farewell discourse and prayer in John’s Gospel (15:11; 16:24; 17:13). In all three examples, Jesus is concerned that the disciples’ joy might be “full” or “fulfilled.”

Christian joy is far removed from what is commonly construed as happiness, which is dependent upon outward circumstances. It can certainly include such, but Christian joy is much deeper and richer in meaning. Joy is the presence of Jesus in our lives by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Joy describes a reality in life of genuine satisfaction intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. Joy is a spirit of exultation regardless of circumstances.



Joy is a sense of supernatural strength which can only come from the Lord: “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

I have seen the joyless eyes of miserable people in many cities around the world. I have observed the joyless faces of people in third world countries, clawing and scratching to eek out an existence for themselves and their families. Even those fortunate enough to be in decent economic shape along with those who have anything and everything money can buy, might sometimes experience happiness, but without God through Christ they can never experience genuine joy.

The wisest and richest man who ever lived found that out when he sailed the high seas of life in an effort to find fulfillment. The man on whom the world exhausted itself and for whom the world was not enough, discovered the bitter truth that at the end of every paycheck, the bottom of every bottle, and the morning after every one-night stand, there was no joy in Mudville. So he tells us in his personal memoirs known as Ecclesiastes. Mighty Solomon had struck out.<sup>1</sup>

Only God can grant joy to the human soul. “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11). The crown of joy can only be worn by those who have been adopted into God’s royal family through his Son, King Jesus. The banner of joy will only fly over the castle of your life when the King is in residence there. Joy is the response of the soul that is rightly related to God through the knowledge of Christ as our Savior and Lord.

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<sup>1</sup> A gloss of the final line from the poem “Casey at the Bat” by Earnest Lawrence Thayer, ca. 1888.



Philosophies had always dreamed of a Savior, but what philosophy could only dream about and aspire to; God has given to the world in the person of Christ Jesus. Joy to the world, the Lord has come!

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!

Let men their songs employ;

While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains,

Repeat the sounding joy, Repeat the sounding joy, Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Material taken from David L. Allen, *1-3 John: Fellowship in the Family* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013).



## WEEK FOUR - PEACE

War began on planet earth in the Garden of Eden. Human history began with everything in harmony. But sin quickly entered picture and separated humanity from God. It didn't take long people to begin to be separated from one another because of sin. The result—war.

Long before Jesus was born, Isaiah prophesied: “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, . . . He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6) When the angels announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, they exclaimed “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to men of goodwill.”

Peace is the presence of tranquility, harmony, or security. Peace is something everyone wants but few people find. The standard greeting in Israel from of old until today has been “shalom”—“peace.”

Peace is the gift of God. Isaiah 26:3—“You will keep the mind that is dependent on you in perfect peace....” Jesus said in John 14:27: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.” Jesus himself is called the “Lord of peace” in 2nd Thessalonians 3:16. God give us peace with Himself through the justifying work of Jesus on the cross according to Romans 5:1. God's peace will guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus according to Philippians 4:7. Peace is the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:22-23.

If humanity and God were ever to be reconciled, there must be a peacemaker. God took the initiative and came to us in Christ on a mission of peace.



Notice how many times in the four Gospels the disciples were disturbed and troubled. Yet in every situation, Jesus, the Prince of Peace, never worries or frets, but in perfect calmness and repose meets every situation with peace.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, referred to as “America’s Most Beloved Poet” by the Maine Historical Society, was born in 1807 in Portland, Maine. A very bright child, Longfellow completed a college degree at Bowdoin College at an age younger than many young people today enter college. Languages came easily to him, and upon graduating from Bowdoin in 1825 he was offered a professorship in modern languages there. Eventually, he would teach at Bowdoin, and later at Harvard.

Longfellow was no stranger to tragedy. A miscarriage claimed the life of his first wife, and a house fire claimed his second. His oldest son, Charles, was nearly killed by a rifle-shot while serving as an officer in the Union Army during the Civil War.

His poems won him world-wide acclaim. *Evangeline* (1847), *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855), and *The Courtship of Miles Standish* (1858) were among his famous writings. His *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (1863) contained his well-known poem, “Paul Revere’s Ride.”

On Christmas Day, 1864, as he sat alongside the bed of his son who was recovering from his near-fatal wounds, Longfellow wrote the words to a poem he entitled, “Christmas Bells.” Eight years later the words were edited and set to music by Jean Baptiste Calkin. The poem now appears in most hymnals entitled, “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.” Longfellow was distressed about the ongoing war between the states that claimed so many young lives. Three of the seven stanzas of the original poem told the story of America’s pain:



***Then from each black accursed mouth, the cannon thundered in the South, and with the sound the carols drowned of peace on earth, good-will to men! It was as if an earthquake rent the hearth-stones of a continent, and made forlorn the households born of peace on earth, good-will to men! And in despair I bowed my head; “There is no peace on earth,” I said, “For hate is strong, and mocks the song of peace on earth, good-will to men!”***

However, Longfellow was a man of clear vision. His closing stanza says it well:

***Then pealed the bells more loud and deep; “God is not dead; nor doth he sleep! The Wrong shall fail, the Right prevail, with peace on earth, good-will to men!”***

This Christmas season, for various reasons Christmas will be a problem. Family disagreement, turmoil, illness, financial stress, and a host of other things will squelch the Christmas spirit for many people.

In the “Peanuts” cartoon strip, Lucy said to Charlie Brown–“Charlie Brown, you are the only person I know who can turn Christmas into a problem.” Why not let Jesus, the Prince of Peace, turn your problem into a little bit of Christmas!

“Hark the Herald Angels Sing!”

In the book Christmas Spoken Here, John Killinger wrote:

One day I was staring through the window of a beautiful little Christmas shop. It was packed with Christmas items, even though Christmas was still six months away. There were exquisite crèche from Italy, Germany, and Norway. There were fuzzy-faced elves and jolly old Santa Clauses, sleighs and reindeer of every size and description, bells and trees, and music boxes. There were nutcrackers and candles



and electric lights, angels and wise men and little drummer boys, stars and snowmen and gingerbread cutouts. The little shop was fairly bursting with Christmas, and a loudspeaker broadcast a medley of Yuletide tunes. It was infectious, even in the summertime. And down in the corner of the front door, where no one could miss it, was the neatest touch of all. It was a small sign that said, “Christmas Spoken Here.”

During this last week before Christmas, for you and your family, let Christmas be spoken in your house, . . . and in your life. . . and always.

Because . . . “Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Merry Christmas!

*David L. Allen*





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