



ADVENT DEVOTIONALS WEEK ONE

Advent Devotionals: Giving Jesus Week One: Giving Community

Sunday, December 2

Video of Leslee and John (<https://vimeo.com/295913458/2foa24f4fd>)

So the Lord made a covenant with Abram that day and said, “I have given this land to your descendants, all the way from the border of Egypt to the great Euphrates River—the land now occupied by the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.” (Genesis 15:18–21 NLT)

During the Christmas season, we often look at Christ’s birth divorced from the rest of the story of the people of Israel. However, Jesus was not born in a vacuum; He was born at a specific time within a specific people group in a specific part of the world. There was intentionality throughout God’s plan, leading all the way back to the creation of the world.

God’s covenant with Abram in Genesis 15 is one of the early pieces that God set in place as He paved a path to the Incarnation. This is the seed that once planted became the nation of Israel, which was intended from the beginning to be a holy nation, a people set apart for the Lord, not as an indictment against the nations around them but as a beacon to invite them to join God’s community. The children of Abraham were always meant to be a blessing to the world, a community that gives rather than condemns.

This week’s video tells the story of what it looks like when a community of believers acts as this sort of beacon, extending their community beyond the church to bless those around them. Watch the video above and ask yourself how God is leading you and your community to act as a beacon that blesses the people around you and invites them to join the larger community of God.

Monday, December 3

Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being. (Philippians 2:6–7 NLT)

Within every group, there are defining factors that limit who is included. It's unlikely someone who is illiterate would be interested in a book club, and a neighborhood watch populated entirely by people from outside the neighborhood would be ineffective at best. Yet there is an even greater value to be found in being open to people from outside the group. God certainly calls out to His people time and again in Scripture to live as holy and separate from the pagan peoples around them, but He also instructs them to “show love to foreigners” and to include them in certain festivals and celebrations (Deuteronomy 10:19; 16:9–15).

We see this idea of inclusion modeled in Jesus, who, despite the close communion within the Trinity, chose to step down from the throne of heaven to invite us into a close communion with God through Himself. From the very foundation of the world, God's plan involved us entering into a right relationship with Himself and being included as part of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Welcoming outsiders into a group does not mean that group must compromise what defines them. Read through the entirety of Philippians 2:5–11, which theologian Gordon D. Fee describes as “one of the most exalted, one of the most beloved, and one of the most discussed and debated passages in the Pauline corpus.” Grasp onto the significance of Jesus humbling Himself and relinquishing His “divine privilege” so that we could be included in the family of God. Take time to wrestle with how you can better embrace the inclusive nature of Jesus's character this Christmas season. Who will you invite into the family of God?

Tuesday, December 4

Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab).

Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth).

Obed was the father of Jesse.

Jesse was the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah). (Matthew 1:5–6 NLT)

Out of all Jesus's ancestors listed in Matthew 1, there are only four women mentioned other than Mary, his mother. The three mentioned in these two verses span four generations, and two of them are not even Hebrew. Rahab was a prostitute from the city of Jericho who gave shelter to Joshua's spies before the Israelites destroyed the city and who, as a result, was invited to join the community of God. Ruth was a Moabite woman who chose to remain with her Hebrew mother-in-law after her husband died, forsaking the community in which she grew up in favor of the community of her husband's family. Despite their heritage or background, both of these women found a home amongst a people who were not their own. In turn, the people of Israel welcomed these women as their own.

There is a warning in this passage as well. Uriah was a member of David's mighty men, the best warriors, all of whom were incredibly loyal to David. King David, in turn, took advantage of this tightly knit community of loyal men by impregnating Bathsheba, having Uriah killed, and taking her as yet another wife. David took advantage of the trust granted to him by his close-knit community, and the ultimate result was a kingdom split in two.

Take a few moments to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you where you have acted like the Israelites who accepted Rahab and Ruth into their community and where you have acted like David and betrayed the trust of your closest friends. Then, take time to celebrate the former and ask God to lead you to repentance and restoration of the latter.

Wednesday, December 5

After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother,” the angel said. “Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, and they stayed there until Herod’s death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “I called my Son out of Egypt.” (Matthew 2:13–15 NLT)

This is not the first time in scripture we find a descendant of Abraham fleeing to Egypt to find sanctuary from a foreign leader. After the destruction of the temple and exile of most of the people of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon appointed a governor over those who remained. When a Judean killed him and all those with him, “all the people of Judah, from the least to the greatest, as well as the army commanders, fled in panic to Egypt, for they were afraid of what the Babylonians would do to them” (2 Kings 25:26).

It was likely a remnant of this Jewish community in Egypt that welcomed Joseph, Mary, and Jesus when they left Israel and crossed the desert in search of sanctuary. Regardless of whether this young family was in Egypt for months or years, we know they felt safe enough to call it their temporary home until they knew they could return once more to Israel without fear for their lives. Above all, the community they found themselves a part of in Egypt afforded them the safety and security they were lacking in Israel. Spend a few minutes reflecting on when you were granted safety in the midst of a dangerous situation, and thank God for those who assisted you and how He guided you in that situation. Look for ways to be that place of sanctuary and refuge for others.

Thursday, December 6

“But forget all that—
it is nothing compared to what I am going to do.
For I am about to do something new.
See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?
I will make a pathway through the wilderness.
I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.” (Isaiah 43:18–19 NLT)

Dashrath Manjhi lived in a remote village in northern India when his wife fell ill and died due to lack of readily available medical care. He spent the next twenty-two years using simple tools to carve a path through the hills separating his village from the closest community with medical care. His work transformed a journey that was once a choice between a short but perilous trip over the mountainous terrain or a 70-kilometer journey by road into a trip that is a safe walk of less than 2 kilometers.

Roads are intrinsically communal spaces. It is not simply the builders of the road who benefit, but all who come upon it. Roads also connect disparate communities. The road through the wilderness in Isaiah 43:19 is a prophecy that points in two directions: to the Lord bringing the Israelites back home after Babylonian captivity and to the coming of the Messiah, who will “guide us to the path of peace” (Luke 1:79). Both of the ways this prophecy in Isaiah is fulfilled are within community—the release of the Israelites from captivity allowed them to reestablish their collective identity as a people group, and all who have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit have been united as one in Christ.

Celebrate this unity in Christ that brings together disparate peoples and communities; examine your own life to see where you have built a dividing wall instead of carving a pathway through the wilderness, and ask God what you can do to correct it.

Friday, December 7

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. . . . And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him. (Luke 1:57–58, 65–66 ESV)

Brennan Manning once wrote, “In a futile attempt to erase our past, we deprive the community of our healing gift. If we conceal our wounds out of fear and shame, our inner darkness can neither be illuminated nor become a light for others.” Truly living in community means everyone around you knows the ups and downs of your everyday life. When Zechariah was struck mute due to his unbelief, everyone in their community knew he had seen a vision that had caused him to lose his power of speech, just as everyone knew when Elizabeth was pregnant for the first time, despite her old age.

This is one of the most beautiful things about living in community: the sharing of life together. This allows us to share in our joys, sorrows, celebrations, and sufferings. Because everyone knew of the childless decades Zechariah and Elizabeth had gone through, they could join in the great joy found in the birth of their son. They also knew of the troubles this couple undoubtedly experienced during the pregnancy due to Zechariah’s divinely tied tongue, so when his voice returns just in time to name this new baby boy, they were rightfully struck with fear.

Because of the tightly knit community around them, Elizabeth and Zechariah were able to not only share the miraculous story of John’s conception and birth but also allow others to experience it with them firsthand. Imagine how much greater their witness was because of it. When it comes to your community, do you leave yourself open so that they are aware of your past, wounds and all, and so that they can continue to take part in your ongoing journey?

Saturday, December 8

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. (John 1:1–4 ESV)

Every person has been created to live in community. In this way, we reflect our Creator, who resides in perpetual and continuous communion with himself—Father, Son, and Spirit. He also desires to live in communion with us, but due to our sin, failings, and limitations it wasn't until "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" that the door was opened for us to come to know Him in all his fullness, through Christ (John 1:14).

This was a big reason for the Incarnation. Jesus didn't come to earth only to die on the cross and defeat death through resurrection. Even adding in His three-year teaching and healing ministry to His death and resurrection doesn't encapsulate the full purpose of His life among us. As Scot McKnight puts it in *The King Jesus Gospel*, the Incarnation, the story of Jesus, "is the narrative of his birth, his life and teachings, his miracles and actions, his death, his burial, his resurrection, and his ascension and exaltation." Jesus lived, slept, ate, worked, and walked among us because He wanted to build relationship with us, and He couldn't do that when there was a distance between Him and us.

To bridge the gap created by distances between ourselves and our neighbors, family members, and friends, we too must leave the safety and comfort of our homes behind as we, like Jesus, make our way into the wider, dusty world to befriend tax collectors, Samaritan women, and the leprous and unclean. Consider what this would look like if you embraced such an incarnational life.