



For anyone. But especially students, who are seeking the Lord in the Advent season

*Simply Advent* is a 21-day devotional guide for students. It will work for anyone, but especially for students who are seeking the Lord in the Advent season.

**How it works:**

The 21 days are split using the word SIMPLY. Basically, you will spend a few days on a central theme of Advent. The themes are:

- S – Significant
- I – Intimate
- M – Merciful
- P – Perfect Plan of Peace
- L – Love
- Y – Yahweh

Each day you will read a passage or a selection of passages. You will be challenged with some questions to think through the theme in light of God's Word. You will be guided through some meditative practices to ponder the wonder, grace, and truth of Scripture as well as the reality of the coming of Jesus.

All of this will be presented and designed in a way that is relevant to a student. There won't be a lot of deep theological terminology or abstract concepts to wrestle with. There will be tangible application and opportunity to work out the season of Advent where you are.

Welcome.

I'm so glad you decided to try this devotional guide. I know that Christmas can be a really busy time of year, especially for a student. From finishing the semester, to family gatherings, your Christmas season seems to go by so fast. My prayer for you is that you would find the time to slow down, to really dig into the Word and reflect on what this season is all about.

Speaking of what this is all about, have you ever heard the word advent before? Maybe you have heard it, but do you know what it means? Probably the simplest definition I can give you is that Advent is the time of preparation for the birth of Jesus. And that is exactly what I want this to be. Simple.

Now, I do not intend to take something as incredible, magnificent, and absolutely huge as the birth of Jesus Christ and suggest that it is simple. It is not. It's just the opposite! But I want to present this devotional in a way that allows you to take such a huge concept and really ponder, think, and just spend time with it. So, hopefully that will be achieved and hopefully you will be able to see Christmas, Advent, and the birth of our Savior and Lord in a new and refreshing light.

—Mark Phillips

## **DAY 1 - SIGNIFICANT**

Read Psalm 80.1-7 and 80.17-19.

Our story really isn't that different from the Jews. As they were waiting in anticipation for the coming of the Messiah, they lived in a constant back and forth of faithfulness and unfaithfulness. In other words, they were sometimes really good and followed God and what He wanted them to do. Other times (which seemed like most of the time), they did not follow God. They sinned. We sin, too. Because of our sin, we can relate to the prayer offered in Psalm 80. "...stir up your might and come save us!" Isn't that what we say? "God, I want you to do something! Come and save me from all of my mistakes!"

The Jews were waiting for their Messiah to come. They were asking God to send Him. Even when Jesus came, they, for the most part, did not recognize Him as the Messiah. We have the benefit of living on this side of history. We know that Jesus has already come, that He has already won the battle and forgiven us of our sins. He has indeed saved us! So we wait for Christmas in anticipation of remembering and celebrating when Jesus did finally come into our world. We also get to wait in anticipation for His second coming. This is the significance of advent.

Re-read the passage three times in a row without stopping.

What stood out to you? What do you think God is trying to communicate to you through this passage?

## **DAY 2**

Read Isaiah 64.1-9.

I love the examples that Isaiah uses to describe the presence of God. Mountains quaking at His presence, fire burning up brush, and water boiling because of the great heat. When God is present in our lives, stuff

happens! His presence cannot go unnoticed. But because of our stubbornness, we have continually missed God's presence.

Isaiah uses for different examples to describe our sin. "Like one who is unclean," as would have been used in those days to describe a leper: infected and infectious. That is what our sin does in our life and those around us. Sin is "like a polluted garment." Even our righteousness is disgusting to God. It's "Like a leaf," decayed, brittle, lifeless. It's "like the wind," the overwhelming power of sin.

As a result, God has hidden His face from us. When God's face shines upon His people, they live in His favor. When He hides it due to our unfaithfulness, we suffer.

So we must become clay, able to be molded, changed, and made right. We trust that God is our potter who will shape us into what He desires us to be. Being molded and sculpted can take a long time. So as we wait, we do so in obedience of the significant changes taking place.

What do you need to confess to God? What sins are in your life that you are keeping hidden?

What sort of things does it take to be clay before the potter? List them here.

What do you think God can sculpt you into? How can He use you for His glory?

### **DAY 3**

Read 1 Corinthians 1.3-9.

Take each verse and rewrite it into words you would use today.

"Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

"I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Jesus Christ,"

“that in every way you were enriched in Him in all speech and all knowledge – “

“even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you – “

“so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ,”

“who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

We sit at an interesting point in history. We have the incredible gift of having the entire story! We know creation, the fall, God’s works among His people, Jesus coming to Earth as a human, offering Himself as a sacrifice for our sins on the cross, defeating death and sin by raising back to life on the third day, ascending into heaven, giving us the Holy Spirit, and now we wait for His promised return!

While the Jews waited for the Messiah’s first coming, we get to wait for His return. And just as God sustained His people over and over again in the Old Testament, so He sustains us as we live out His truth in our lives every day.

Spend some time praying today. Ask the Lord to show you how He will sustain you. Ask Him to give you the strength and courage to follow Him in obedience.

## **DAY 4**

Read Mark 13.24-37.

Stay awake. I love how Jesus shifts the focus away from His disciple’s question of how they would know when the end would come. It’s really not about that. In fact, Jesus doesn’t even know when it is going to happen, only the Father.

So as we wait for His return, we need to do so in a manner that glorifies God. We don't need to worry about the different signs or all the craziness that is bound to take place. Really, what we need to focus on is Jesus and living like Him, to stay awake really means to be prepared. When Jesus returns, He wants us to be prepared for Him.

It's like if you have a friend coming over to stay the night. You might get some snacks, rent a new video game, or get movie tickets. You do it before they arrive so you can enjoy your time together. The same is true in our obedience to Christ. We follow Him and do what He wants so that when He does come, we are ready to go with Him, wherever He takes us.

What do you need to do to stay awake?

How can you use the next few weeks to really prepare for Jesus?

## **DAY 5**

Spend some time looking over what you have read, thought, and prayed this last week.

Write down some of the things God has communicated to you.

Write down some areas you plan to focus on as you prepare for the coming of the Messiah.

Take some time today and rest.

## **DAY 6 - INTIMATE**

When Jesus took off His crown and put on our flesh, He took the relationship between God and man from distant to intimate. No longer did we need to look to the heavens when addressing God, we need only look in the eyes of a helpless, vulnerable baby.

Here's what I mean when I say intimate. It's like a mother holding her brand new baby for the first time. There is nothing in the world that is more important to that mother than holding her baby. The intimacy displayed by

God in sending Jesus to the Earth took something so distant and brought it so close.

Read Ephesians 2.12-13.

Remember that you were once separated from God (because of your sin), but Jesus brought you close (ultimately because of His death, burial, and resurrection). While our hope in eternity is secured because of Jesus' actions on the cross and rising from the grave, it is important to take a moment (or a season) and remember His birth which began the journey to Christ's victory.

Take some time to thank God for bringing you near to Him, which wasn't anything you did, but only God's great love for you.

## **DAY 7**

I am the father of two boys. My oldest son, Brian, is now at the stage where he is running, climbing, and getting into everything. He knows several words but still really struggles to communicate, especially when he wants something. He knows what he wants and he knows that he wants it; he just doesn't know how to communicate to us what it is he wants! It's pretty intense and frustrating.

But I don't speak to my son in a harsh way. I don't yell at him because he doesn't know how to speak yet. I help him. I get on his level and try to figure out what it is that he wants. God did this with us. He sent Jesus and became like us. Jesus experienced the things we experience. Jesus knows what it's like to be frustrated, angry, sad, and happy.

Read Ephesians 4.3-7.

How does it feel to know that the Creator of the universe has adopted you?

How should you act towards God in the mindset that He is your Father?

## **DAY 8**

Read Isaiah 40.1-5.

What about the fact that God became human brings you comfort?

When has God spoke with tenderness to you?

How are you preparing the way for Jesus?

God's glory was revealed all those years ago when Jesus was born. It wasn't a split sea, fire from heaven, or bread from heaven in the desert. It was Jesus, the TRUE bread from heaven who came to save the world from their sins, not just their stomachs. The intimacy of God's actions through the birth of His Son is incredible. But it doesn't end with the birth. God wants a relationship with us. And He wants it to be intimate. Close. Pure. True. Do you have that relationship? Take some time and speak to the Lord about your relationship with Him.

## **DAY 9**

Read Psalm 85.1-2; 8-13.

Isn't it incredible to think that the plan all along was for Jesus to be born, live a perfect life, die on the cross for our sins, and raise back to life defeating sin and death?

Surely His salvation is near to those who will hear Him. Are you listening to Him?

"But let them not turn back to their folly." What are the things you keep turning back to that are away from God?

Spend some time evaluating where you have been, where you are, and where you are going. Ask the Lord to help you.

## **DAY 10 - MERCIFUL**

Read 2 Peter 3.8-13.

In our world, we are conditioned to receive things immediately. If I have to wait longer than seven minutes at Starbucks, I get upset. If the movie I am

downloading takes more than 30-seconds, I feel like I'm in the Stone Age. But in reality, those are incredibly minor setbacks.

God exists outside of time. For Him one day is the same as a thousand years and vice versa. Sometimes it seems like we wait on God for a long, long time. In reality, the length of time is exactly as God intended it to be. We may not know the reason, but we are called to trust Him while we wait.

We are also called to live lives of holiness and godliness while we wait. Our lives are an example of God's mercy that He revealed in His Son Jesus.

Take some time and thank God for His mercy.

## **DAY 11**

Read Mark 1.1-8.

While you don't have to wear camel hair, eat locust and honey, and live in the wilderness, you do have to prepare the way for Jesus! John the Baptist was the poster child for Jesus' preparation. Remember that that is exactly what Advent is all about? It's a season of preparation for the coming of Jesus. So, John was all about Advent, whether he knew it or not!

While John was definitely extreme, his message is the same message we need to declare today. We should be actively preparing for Jesus. We need to make it simple, plain, easy for people to hear the message of Jesus. Jesus must increase and we must decrease.

How can you simplify the message of Jesus to your friends? Family? Neighbors?

What do you need to do to make Jesus increase in your life and make yourself decrease?

## **DAY 12**

Read Matthew 9.9-13.

Jesus often surrounded Himself with sinners. He hung out with them. He never sinned, or did the things they did that were sinful, but He spent time with them. He taught them. He shared life with them.

The religious leaders did not like that. They thought that if Jesus really was who He said He was, He wouldn't be caught dead with those people! But Jesus had a lesson for the religious leaders (and us).

“Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Jesus didn't come to hang out with people who already knew Him and believed. He came to heal the sick, not the healthy. This doesn't mean that Jesus didn't associate at all with those who believed, He had plenty of disciples who followed Him around for three years. No, Jesus was making a point for the religious leaders to care more about steadfast love, rather than rituals and religious ceremonies. Jesus wanted the religious leaders to love and care for those sinners they felt so strongly that Jesus shouldn't associate with.

Take some time today and evaluate who you associate with. Do you ever put yourself in situations where you can share the love of Jesus with people who are considered sinners and not worthy?

## **DAY 13**

Read Deuteronomy 4.29-31.

God's mercy is unending. Even when we choose everything besides Him, He will still welcome us back. But God doesn't want us to go through the motions when we look for Him. We need to search for Him with ALL our heart and ALL our soul.

In other words, we need to seek God with EVERYTHING that we have. He needs to be our top priority above everything else. God is merciful and He will not leave you, forget about you, or the promises He has made. That is the promise of God's mercy. And He delivered on that promise with Jesus.

Have you made other things more important than God?

What do you need to change to seek God with ALL your heart and ALL your soul?

## **DAY 14 - PERFECT PLAN OF PEACE**

Read Isaiah 61.1-4; 10-11.

What an incredible passage! This was written somewhere in the ballpark of 700 years before Jesus would be born. And yet, Isaiah is very clearly referring to Jesus. Jesus is to come and preach into existence His new, liberated people, who will pray into existence His new, redeemed world.

All along, God's perfect plan was to send Jesus to die for us, so that we may be His ambassadors to a dark, fallen world. It is by no means our responsibility to save another human. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. However, we are God's messengers. We proclaim, we sow the seed, we go out and tell the truth of the gospel. The truth of a Savior born into our world, who is coming again.

How does it make you feel that God's plan all along was through Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection?

How does it make you feel that you were a part of that plan as well?

## **DAY 15**

Read Psalm 126.

Focus on verse 6. As we read yesterday, God's plan has been in motion since the beginning. Sometimes we forget our role in the plan. Sometimes we get discouraged because of the great brokenness of our world.

Understand this: God promises us that we will come home with shouts of joy bringing back the product of our sowing. God made us this promise! I know it can be hard. But that is never reason to not try; to not sow the seed of the gospel. We must constantly bear the truth as we live out our lives.

What are some ways that you have lived out the truth of the gospel well?

What are some ways that you can improve?

## **DAY 16**

Read 1 Thessalonians 5.16-24.

Sometimes we encounter passages of Scripture that are just really hard to understand. They don't seem to make any sense and we aren't sure how to respond to them.

This is NOT one of those passages. Paul is so clear and his words carry so much application for us.

Part of the plan God has been playing out from the beginning is us. We are definitely not the focus of the plan, but we are part of it. And what God desires for us in His plan is really well laid out here in 1 Thessalonians. Pray without ceasing, rejoice always, and be thankful in every circumstance. Paul goes on and explains how we need to test everything. Not out of doubt, but out of being refined.

Abstain from every kind of evil. If you are reading this, I want you to try something. The next time you are going to do something and you're not sure if it is evil or not, just ask yourself a few questions:

1. Would God receive glory if I did this?
2. Would I honor God and my family by doing this?
3. Is there a chance I could get myself or someone else in trouble by doing this?

It really isn't difficult to abstain from evil. The hard thing is to try to be a Christian and live outside of what God wants you to do.

Are you doing evil things right now? Stop doing them. Give them over to the Lord. Ask Him to help you.

Put verses 16-22 into practice this week.

## **DAY 17**

Read John 1.6-8; 19-28.

We have already encountered John, but we would definitely be missing something if we didn't talk about him when talking about God's *perfect plan of peace!*

This time, I want to highlight the exchange that John had with the people who were sent by the Pharisees. Notice that the Pharisees themselves didn't come to talk to John. They sent people. They didn't take John seriously enough to show up themselves.

The world will not take you seriously. Most people who are not Christians look at Christianity with a lot of speculation and mistrust. When you are found out to be a believer, you should not be surprised when you are met with sarcasm, disbelief, or even some form of hostility.

But again, John's message is clear. Jesus must increase and we must decrease. We are not even worthy to stoop down and untie Jesus' sandal. This is a call to humility.

How can you be more humble this week? Make this a challenge to yourself.

How can you be bold like John, and prepare the way for Jesus?

## **DAY 18 - Love**

Read John 3.16-19.

This is one of the most well-known passages in the Bible. Even some non-Christians know John 3:16. Yet, one of the most unknown verses is John 3.17. Right after one of the most well-known verses is a verse that really sheds some light on the depth of God's great love for us.

So many people think of God as a bully with a magnifying glass, looking down on us like an ant hill. In reality, God didn't send Jesus into our world to condemn it. He sent Jesus to save us. That is a really important thing for us to understand. God's great love for us has always been the heart of His plan. Not condemnation or punishment. Love.

Take some time and rest in the greatness of God's love for you. He doesn't want to punish or condemn you. He loves you and wants you to be saved through His Son, Jesus.

## **DAY 19**

Read Luke 1.26-38.

If you're a girl reading this, try to put yourself in Mary's shoes. How would you feel if this happened to you? An angel of God comes to you in a dream and tells you that God is going to cause you to be pregnant with His Son. That is a lot to take in all at once, especially since Mary was a virgin teenage girl who was engaged to Joseph. Talk about drama!

If you're a guy reading this, try to put yourself in Joseph's shoes. The girl who you are engaged to marry tells you what the angel said. You might start thinking about breaking off this engagement, right? I mean she is obviously crazy. But then, she actually becomes pregnant! And you know that she is telling the truth because you haven't married her yet!

This is a pretty crazy situation. I'm not sure how I would have handled it. I mean that would take a lot of trust that God was in control!

But for a moment, let's think about how much love God had to have for these two. He chose Mary to carry Jesus in her womb. Out of all the women he chose this young, unmarried, teenage girl. And out of all the men He chose Joseph. A descendant of king David, but otherwise a completely unknown and obscure carpenter from Bethlehem. But by choosing Mary to carry Jesus, he was choosing Joseph to be Jesus' step-dad. Wow!

Sometimes, the greatest legacy we leave on this earth is through our children. Take some time today to love your parents. Tell them you love them. If your relationship is a bad one, make the first effort to build a bridge to them. If your relationship is a good one, go out of your way to do something they will love.

## **DAY 20 - YAHWEH**

Yahweh is the most important name for God in the Old Testament. It actually occurs about 6,800 times! We actually aren't even sure how to correctly pronounce the original name (the one God used to identify Himself to Moses at the burning bush) so we came up with Yahweh.

Sometimes the complexity of the Trinity (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) can be really overwhelming. While it is hard (if not impossible) to understand, we can at least rest in reality that the infinite, supreme, and ultimate being in the universe, God, loves us. Christmas is definitely centered on the arrival of the Son, Jesus. And rightly so! But let us not forget that it was the plan of the Father who sent Jesus. Even as Jesus was praying the night before His crucifixion, He asked the Father if there was any other way.

Read Exodus 3.14.

This is such a powerful moment. I sometimes get chills as I imagine this exchange between Moses and the Creator. Who are you? Isn't that the basic question we all ask of God? Who are you? Why should people believe me concerning you? And God simply says, "I Am Who I Am." In Hebrew, this is translated as *hyh*. This later got us to the somewhat familiar YHWH. This eventually got us to the more familiar Yahweh. Who is God? "I Am." He. Is. Everything.

Spend some time really thinking about how big God is. Meditate on His greatness.

## **DAY 21**

Read Luke 2.

There are so many things that we can talk about in this chapter. I want to highlight only a few.

Counted. Everyone was being counted. That's what the census was all about. But everyone had to go to their ancestral town. Basically, where were they from? Joseph, Jesus' step-dad, was a descendant of King David

who hailed from the city of kings, Bethlehem. So up they went to Bethlehem to be counted.

Praise. Jesus' birth was completely and utterly surrounded with praise. Remember the shepherds out in their fields? The angels show up and start praising God. So, the shepherds start doing the same thing! They go and find Jesus just as the angels had told them, and then what do they do? They go tell everyone about Jesus! The shepherds were the first missionaries!

Dedication. Jesus' parents took Him to the temple and they offered a sacrifice to God because of Jesus. There was a man there at the temple named Simeon. Simeon was old. Like really old. And as soon as he saw baby Jesus, he knew who he was looking at. Look at verses 29-32. "For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all your peoples..." Simeon recognized that Jesus was and is the salvation for all people. Not only for the Jews, but everyone.

May you know that Jesus is your salvation. There is nothing in this life, no present, gift, moment, experience, that will be better than Jesus. Our hope is in Him and Him alone.

I pray that you have not only enjoyed this advent season, but that you feel closer to the One Whom we worship as a result. May you and yours have a very merry Christmas.

## **BONUS DEVOTIONAL #1**

Read Lamentations 3.22-24.

Re-read the passage five more times without breaks.

Practice this exercise:

As you take in a deep breath, recite this in your mind on every syllable:  
“The steadfast love of God.”

And as you breathe out, recite this in your mind on every syllable:  
“Never ceases.”

Allow this to work in your heart and mind today. Practice this meditation throughout the day, especially if you are anxious, worried, or concerned.

## **BONUS DEVOTIONAL #2**

Read Acts 2.22-24.

I have stated earlier that God’s plan all along was to send Jesus to die for us. I wanted to take a day and put Scripture to that claim.

Peter was addressing the huge crowd in Jerusalem at the festival of Pentecost. There were tons of Jews from all over the place listening to Peter tell them that they were responsible for killing Jesus. BUT he went on to say that this was always part of the plan. Look at verse 23. “...according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God...”

Peter wanted those listening to know what role they played in the killing of Jesus, but he also wanted them to know that “God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it.”

So Peter explained God’s plan in a way that those listening would both feel convicted and encouraged. Do you know what the result was? 3,000 people believed and were baptized that day.

How can you communicate God’s plan in grace and truth?

How does it make you feel that God's plan had to happen the way it did?

### **BONUS DEVOTIONAL #3**

Read Isaiah 9.6.

What's in a name? Every person has a name. A lot of people carry a family name, or their name is special for a specific reason. What does Isaiah say Jesus' name will be called?

Beside each name, write what you think that name means for Jesus:

Wonderful Counselor -

Mighty God -

Everlasting Father -

Prince of Peace -

### **BONUS DEVOTIONAL #4**

Read 2 Samuel 7.1-5; 16.

God's presence among His people in the Old Testament was constantly housed in a tent. When God made David king over Israel, God asked David to build Him a house. Because David was a man after God's own heart, God was with him.

God goes on to explain to David that He would establish David's throne forever. This is not because of how good David was. In fact, David made some pretty huge mistakes. God was doing this because it was part of His plan. Jesus would come and Jesus would be a descendant of Israel's greatest king, David.

God shows His love for us through establishing David's throne forever because that means that Jesus' reign and His rule will never end! The perfect Prince of Peace will never be defeated!

How does it make you feel to know that your King will never be defeated?

How can you show God how thankful you are for his never-ending love?

### **BONUS DEVOTIONAL #5**

Read Luke 1.46-55.

Mary's song, also known as the *magnificat*, is a wonderful song of praise directed to the Father for His gift of Jesus. Take some time and write your own song of praise to God for the gift of Jesus. Use Mary's song as inspiration.

### **BONUS DEVOTIONAL #6**

Read Romans 16.25-27.

Have you ever tried to solve a mystery? Maybe you were watching some crime show on TV, or you lost your keys, or maybe you tried to figure out where that last cookie went...

We all kind of love mysteries. Some more than others, but we all have this internal longing to know what the solution to the mystery is. For many, the waiting while sitting in an unsolved mystery is the worst part.

God's people had been waiting a really long time for Him to reveal the mystery to them. Who was the Messiah? When would He come? What would He be like?

Jesus is the solution to the mystery. How can God love us? We rebel against Him constantly. Don't we deserve death? Yes. But God's great love for us is a mystery that is revealed through Jesus.

Take some time to thank God for allowing you to know the answer to His mystery. That He loves you more than you can imagine.

## **BONUS DEVOTIONAL #7**

Read Numbers 22.22-35.

Many scholars agree that when we see the phrase, “angel of the LORD” in the Old Testament, this is actually pre-incarnate Jesus. In other words, Jesus before he was actually born as a human. I know! That’s a pretty wild thing! But stay with me.

We know that Jesus has always existed (compare John 1 and Genesis 1). Therefore, what better way to interact in human history than through His Son? Not only did Jesus come as a human baby who was fully God and fully man, he appeared in various moments throughout history.

This story of Balaam and his donkey is one of my favorites. Some of us might feel like the donkey. We keep trying to do what is right, but people keep beating us. They keep insisting our way is wrong and do everything they can to oppose us. Some of us are like Balaam. We think we know what is right so we maintain our stubborn course, regardless of who might get hurt along the way. Still some of us are like the princes with Balaam and his donkey. We are along for the ride. We don’t really have much of an opinion, and even if we do, we don’t speak up.

Regardless of where you are and who you relate to, one thing is certain. Jesus is there. Sword drawn. Ready to oppose those who oppose God. Not because He desires bloodshed, but because He believes so much in God’s plan. He proves it later with His own life on the cross.

Take some time to thank God for His great plan, that His name is the greatest name. Thank Him for his continual involvement in our history and our lives.