

*Let
Every Heart
prepare
Him Room*

DAILY FAMILY DEVOTIONS FOR ADVENT

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Let Every Heart Prepare Him Room: Daily Family Devotions for Advent

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Introduction

As December dawns, most families are busy putting Christmas programs and parties on the calendar, making holiday travel plans, and purchasing Christmas gifts. Those are all wonderful things, but if your family is anything like mine, these good things can squeeze out the best thing—nurturing a longing in our hearts and our homes for a fresh sense of wonder that God has come to us in Jesus. If we do not set aside time to focus together on what God’s Word tells us about the promise of Christ, on Christmas morning we can find ourselves surrounded by mounds of torn gift wrap, our laps full of presents, but with hearts that are empty and unprepared.

As you enter into December this year, I hope you and your family will gather at some point each day to read this book and turn your focus to God’s promise of a Savior. You’ll be reminded of how God’s people longed for centuries for the Messiah to come, and you’ll read the Gospel accounts of the Messiah’s coming. By setting aside this time, you’ll turn away from this world’s materialistic frenzy and toward a truly sacred celebration of Christ’s coming.

Let Every Heart Prepare Him Room provides a short reading for every day in the month of December, taking your family on a journey of identifying with the distant longings of Israel, listening for the angel’s announcement, and gazing at the Baby in the manger. You’ll find several suggested discussion questions that will help to transform this time into a meaningful discussion in which everybody in the family can participate. Each day’s questions begin with a question that even the youngest member of the family can likely answer. There are additional Scriptures you might want to read as part of your discussion and Christmas songs your family can talk through and then sing together. Several lined pages have been spaced throughout the book where you can jot down dated notes of

comments made and questions asked by various family members that you want to remember as the years go by.

The busyness of December can easily crowd out contemplation of the amazing reality of God's coming to live among us as one of us. I hope that your family will overcome the empty busyness of this season and that in your home, every heart will prepare room for Jesus.

—Nancy Guthrie



When someone promises us something wonderful, we can hardly wait for that promise to be fulfilled. If the promise is something good, we want it *now!* We really don't like to wait. And yet the very best things are worth waiting for.

A long, long time ago, God made a promise to his people, Israel. In fact, he made many promises to them. But God's most important promise—the promise all his other promises depended on—was that he would send the Messiah, the Anointed One, who would save them from the difficulties of living life in this world broken by sin. The Messiah would not be an ordinary person, but God's own Son. The people he made the promise to had to wait, putting all their faith in the One who made the promise.

The season leading up to Christmas is called Advent, which means *coming*. During Advent, we remember the thousands of years God's chosen people anticipated and longed for the coming of God's salvation through the Messiah. Then, at Christmas, we celebrate the fulfillment of the promises God made. Jesus—the Savior God had promised—was born to us. No more waiting. Jesus came.

When John the Baptist was born, his father, Zechariah, recognized that the long years of waiting were finally over. God gave him a special understanding that his son, John, was going to prepare the way for the promised Messiah. Zechariah celebrated that God was about to fulfill his promise. He said, "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people. He has sent us a mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David, just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago" (Luke 1:68-70).

God promised that he would send a Savior, which he did when Jesus became a human baby. And while Jesus did everything necessary to save us when he came the first time, he also promised to come again. Then all God's promises will be completely fulfilled. So again we are waiting. Waiting patiently for God to fulfill his promises is what it means to have faith.

Putting faith in God's promises is not something a person does only one time on the day he or she becomes a Christian. The essence of being a Christian is placing all our hope in God, knowing we can trust him to fulfill all his promises—even the ones that haven't been fulfilled yet. We are willing to wait, trusting that "God's way is perfect. All the LORD's promises prove true" (Psalm 18:30).

PRAYER

*Like your people of old, we are waiting for you,
God, to fulfill all your promises. And because we remember
how you fulfilled your promise to send Jesus,
we know that you will fulfill all your promises to us.*

+ + +

Discussion Starters

- What does it mean to make a promise?
- Zechariah said that God would soon send a mighty Savior "as he promised through his holy prophets long ago." Look up these verses in your Bible to see a few examples of promises God made about the Messiah, given through his prophets in the Old Testament: Deuteronomy 18:15; Psalm 72:10; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6.
- Waiting for Christmas to come gives us a tiny taste of what it must have been like for God's people to wait hundreds of years for God to fulfill his promise in sending Jesus. Why do you think it is good to learn to wait on God?

More from the Bible about—

THE PROMISED ONE:

Remember that Christ came as a servant to the Jews to show that God is true to the promises he made to their ancestors.

ROMANS 15:8

All of God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding
"Yes!" 2 CORINTHIANS 1:20





DECEMBER 2

Right on Time

Most days we set specific times for when we will go to school, have piano lessons, or get picked up from our friend's house. But sometimes there is not a specific time set for something, and we're left waiting, wondering when the package will be delivered, when the plumber will arrive at our house, or when our ride is going to show up. We wonder if we've been forgotten.

By the time Jesus was born, the Jewish people had been waiting for hundreds of years for God to send his promised Messiah. It had been more than four hundred years since they had even heard God speak to them through one of his prophets about the Savior he would send. It seemed like God had stopped talking to them, and some people had grown weary of keeping up their hopes that God would come through for them. While they were waiting, the Romans occupied their country and ruled over them. This made them long even more for the great Deliverer God had promised.

Though it is hard to wait on God, and though it sometimes seems to us that God is slow, God's timing is always perfect. He is never late. He always acts at just the right time.

God knew when the time was just right to send Jesus, the Messiah, into the world. He knew when the exact religious, cultural, and political conditions were in place. Paul wrote, "*When the right time came*, God sent his Son, born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4, emphasis added). You see, God is not making up plans as he goes. All the grand events of God's plan for our redemption have been scheduled in advance, from Creation to the enslavement and exodus of God's people from Egypt; to David's taking the throne in Israel; to the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus; to the day when Jesus will return. Paul said that God "has set a day for judging the world" (Acts 17:31). The course and timing of history is not a mystery to God. Time is in his hands, and he will bring about his plans and purposes in our world and in our lives right on time.

PRAYER

*You are the God of history and time is in your hands,
so we know that you can be trusted to accomplish everything
you intend in the world and in our lives in your perfect timing.*



Discussion Starters

- Describe a time when you had to wait for someone to show up. What was it like to wait?
- Can you think of some instances in the Bible when God said exactly how long something would last? For example, what did he say would last forty days (Genesis 7:4)? What did he say would last four hundred years (Genesis 15:13)? What did he say would last forty years (Numbers 14:34)? What does this show us about God's careful timing?
- How can understanding God's lordship over time help us to trust God's perfect timing for our lives?

More from the Bible about—

GOD'S TIMING IN SENDING JESUS:

Before John came, all the prophets and the law of Moses looked forward to this present time. MATTHEW 11:13

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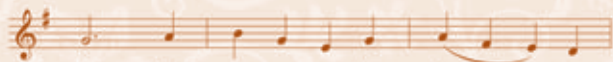
"The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced.
"The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe
the Good News!" MARK 1:15



O Come, O Come, Emmanuel



1. O come, O come, Em - man u -
2. O come, Thou Day - spring, come and
3. O come, Thou Key of Da - vid,



el And ran - som cap - tive Is - ra -
cheer Our spir - its by Thine ad - vent
come, And o - pen wide our heav'n ly



el, That mourns in lone - ly ex - ile
here; Dis - perse the gloom - y clouds of
home; Make safe the way that leads on



here, Un - til the Son of
night, And death's dark shad - ows
high, And close the path to



God ap - pear, Re - joice! Re -
put to flight, joy!
mis - er - y.



joice! Em - man - u - el Shall



come to thee, O Is - ra - el!

The writings of the prophet Isaiah inspired the hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” Long before the birth of Jesus, Isaiah prophesied about the Savior God would send, implanting in the hearts of God’s people a longing for Immanuel (which is the Hebrew version of the Greek name Emmanuel). Hundreds of years before Jesus was born to the Virgin Mary, Isaiah wrote, “The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’)” (Isaiah 7:14).

Though it was hard for the people in Isaiah’s day to imagine or understand how God would actually become a human, they began to long for this Messiah who would be “God with us.” They looked forward to the day when God would fulfill all his promises by coming to live with them. We identify with them in their longing for God to fulfill his promise to send Jesus when we sing “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.”

To understand what this song is saying, we have to understand some of Israel’s history. Remember that at one time God’s people were slaves in Egypt and God brought them out, led by Moses. They wandered in the wilderness for forty years before finally entering into the land God had promised them. But God’s people sinned and rebelled, and after a while, one part of the country was carried off into exile to Assyria and another to Babylon. Living far away from home, the people of God longed for him to come and rescue them from their captivity. As they sat in exile, many undoubtedly remembered the prophetic words of Isaiah. A child was coming who would save Israel—the Lord’s presence in the flesh. We sing of their longing in the first verse:

*O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

When we sing the verse “O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer . . . ,” it reminds us of Zechariah’s prophecy: “The morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death” (Luke 1:78-79). In other words, Zechariah likened the coming Messiah to the rising sun, shining light upon the dark world (cf. John 1:1-5).

*O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer our spirits by Thine
advent here;*

*Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put
to flight.*

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

This song stirs in us a longing for Christ to come to fulfill his promises. The words prepare our hearts to truly celebrate Christmas when it comes. We are *preparing* for Christmas by purposefully nurturing in our hearts and in our homes a sacred longing for Christ to come.

Singing this song reminds us that the birth of Christ was not a surprising turn of events in history; it was the long-awaited fulfillment of God's promise to his people. As we sing it, we are encouraged that as he came before, he will come again! When he comes again, we'll hear a shout from the throne of God, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them" (Revelation 21:3). When he comes back, all the longings we sing about will be fulfilled. Finally and forever we will enjoy Emmanuel—God with us.



DECEMBER 3

Family Matters

You might know people who can trace their ancestors to someone famous—a war hero, an inventor, a sports legend, or a Hollywood actor. People who are related to someone famous usually like to talk about it, but it is different when people can trace their ancestry to someone infamous for being a liar or murderer or thief. Descendants of these kinds of people are not usually so quick to want to talk about their ancestor.

But that is not the case with Jesus. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke both include a genealogy—a record of Jesus’ human ancestry—and it includes some people known more for terrible sin than for something good. Matthew began his book this way: “This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham . . .” The list goes on for many generations and ends, “Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah” (Matthew 1:1, 16). Luke traced Jesus’ ancestry all the way back to Adam, beginning, “Jesus was known as the son of Joseph,” and ending, “Adam was the son of God” (Luke 3:23, 38).

When we look through the list of people in Jesus’ ancestral line, we see people famous for their faith—like Noah and Abraham and David. But we also see people with tarnished reputations—like Judah, who was intimate with his daughter-in-law; Rahab, who was a Canaanite prostitute; and Manasseh, the king who put false idols in the Temple. Even Noah, Abraham, and David, as faithful as they were, were sinners, and all of them needed a Savior.

We find hope in the ancestry of Jesus that no matter what we’ve done or where we come from, we too can be included in Jesus’ family. Jesus does not look for people who are perfect and have never failed or made mistakes to be in his family. Instead, he is drawn toward people who recognize their failures and see their need for him.

PRAYER

How grateful we are to know that you are not ashamed to have sinners and failures in your own family, Jesus. When we look at this record of your own family, we know that you are not ashamed to have us in your family. Instead, you welcome us.



Discussion Starters

- What do you know about your ancestry—your grandparents and great-grandparents and great-great-grandparents? (Parents, do you have an interesting story you can share with your children about one of their ancestors?)
- Look through the two genealogies of Jesus, in Matthew 1 and Luke 3. What do you know about some of those people? Who are you surprised to see there because of what you know about them?
- Why does Luke 3:23 (NIV) say that Jesus was “the son, so it was thought, of Joseph,” and why does that matter?

More from the Bible about—

BEING IN JESUS' FAMILY:

Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother! MATTHEW 12:50

So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. HEBREWS 2:11





DECEMBER 4

Getting and Giving

This is the season our mailboxes are filled with stacks of mail-order catalogs, and the television is full of advertisements of all kinds of shiny new things wrapped up with red bows. Through their colorful pictures and creative words, advertisers seek to convince us that we don't have enough stuff—that we need more, newer, better. It is their job to convince us to feel dissatisfied and discontented with what we have. They want to feed our natural desires for more than we really need.

So how will our family respond to all the messages around us this time of year? How can we make sure that Christmas in our house is about more than making lists of the stuff we want and figuring out what to give to other people? Do we really need to keep collecting more stuff and spending more money on ourselves? Can we stop believing the lie that the more we get, the more satisfied we'll be?

By putting our focus on giving to others and meeting their very real needs, we can battle the greed in our hearts. Christmas is a season not of getting, but of giving, because at Christmas we are celebrating that God is the most generous and outrageous Giver in the universe. After all, he gave us his Son. Proverbs says, "Some people are always greedy for more, but the godly love to give!" (Proverbs 21:26). To pour ourselves into becoming outrageous givers is to pursue becoming more like God. God turns greedy, grasping, fearful hoarders into generous, honest, cheerful givers.

To become givers, we have to decide not to listen to the voice inside us that tells us we must keep a tight grip on what we have so we will never be in need. We have to reject the lie that money in the bank and a pantry full of food takes care of our needs, remembering that ultimately it is God who takes care of all our needs. We have to tell ourselves the truth about God—that because he has been so generous in giving us Jesus, we can be confident that he will give us everything we need. We take him at his word, believing that he can satisfy us and that he will bless us as we

give to others. We trust his promise that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

PRAYER

Generous, giving God, we want to put your word to the test this Christmas. We want to find out for ourselves how happy it will make us to give. We want to become generous givers like you are, confident that you will take care of all our needs.



Discussion Starters

- What do you find yourself dreaming of getting? What do you find yourself dreaming of giving?
- When have you experienced or observed someone else enjoying the happiness that comes from outrageous giving?
- This Christmas, how can our family avoid the trap of making Christmas only about getting stuff?

More from the Bible about—

GIVING AND GREED:

Since [God] did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? **ROMANS 8:32**

A greedy person is an idolater, worshipping the things of this world.

EPHESIANS 5:5





DECEMBER 5

God Pitched His Tent

It can be great fun to put up a tent in your backyard to play in or sleep in. Imagine what it would be like for someone else to put up a tent in your backyard and begin living there—right in your backyard! In a sense, John says Jesus did just that. “So the Word became human and made his home among us” (John 1:14). The Greek word translated “made his home” is the word for “set up a tent.” This verse is saying that God became a human person who set up his tent in our backyard and moved in.

If another family were to put up a tent in your backyard to live in, they would probably use your bathroom and have their meals around your table. They would be with you almost all the time, and no doubt their lives would intertwine with yours. This is what Jesus did when he became human. He made his home with us. He did this so that his life would be intertwined with ours—so that we would share our lives with him and so we could see him up close and really know him.

When we see God up close in the person of Jesus, what do we see? John wrote, “He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness” (John 1:14). Imagine having someone living with you who always loved perfectly and who was completely dependable to do what he said he would do. Doesn’t that seem like the kind of person you would want to have making himself at home with your family?

John writes that many people of Jesus’ day were not so happy to have Jesus right there with them. “He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:11-12). While many rejected him, there were those who believed and accepted him. To believe and accept Jesus is to invite him to make his home with you and among you. It is to welcome him in, not as a guest, but as a permanent part of the family.

PRAYER

*You have come, Jesus, to make your home among us.
And we welcome you! We believe you. We accept you.
Make yourself at home in our home.*



Discussion Starters

- When someone wants to sit by you at an event or spend the night at your house, what does that say about how that person feels about you?
- John describes God in the flesh as “full of unfailing love and faithfulness.” Do you think that is how most people see Jesus?
- What difference would it make if our family lived as if Jesus had made himself “at home” in our house?

More from the Bible about—

GOD MAKING HIS HOME WITH US:

I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them.” REVELATION 21:3



About the Author

Nancy Guthrie has a passion for sharing God's Word through her growing national and international Bible teaching ministry. She is the author of *Holding On to Hope, The One Year Book of Hope, Hoping for Something Better, One Year of Dinner Table Devotions and Discussion Starters, Hearing Jesus Speak into Your Sorrow, and When Your Family's Lost a Loved One* (cowritten with her husband, David). Nancy lives with her husband and their son, Matt, in Nashville, Tennessee. Visit her Web site at nancyguthrie.com.

Has your family enjoyed talking together about truths from God's Word each day during December? Why not keep it up all year through? *One Year of Dinner Table Devotions and Discussion Starters* by Nancy Guthrie serves up daily truths from God's Word to chew on and apply to real life at a level that kids from elementary age through high school will understand and relate to. Transform family devotions from dry lectures into dynamic conversations as you draw closer to each other—and closer to God himself.