

# Advent Meditations

*Brackley Baptist Church*

The material in this booklet has been adapted from a publication produced by 'Practicing the way', a non-profit organisation committed to spiritual formation in followers of Jesus.

Each part of this four-week guide contains a reading from Scripture, a reflection, a few questions, and a guided prayer. This guide replaces the LIFEgroups for the month of December.

Feel free to use the material in your groups as you see fit. In addition to material do continue to include a time of worship.

May we make space this advent season to reflect on Jesus, the Prince of peace.

# Advent 1: Peace is Being Present

## READ Psalm 131

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 contingency, 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.



## Reflection Questions

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?

## Prayer

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.

## Advent 2: Peace is Slowing Down

### READ Psalm 23

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 re-educated 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.



### Reflection Questions

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.

### Prayer

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

## Advent 3: Peace is Walking by the Spirit

### READ John 20v19-27

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.

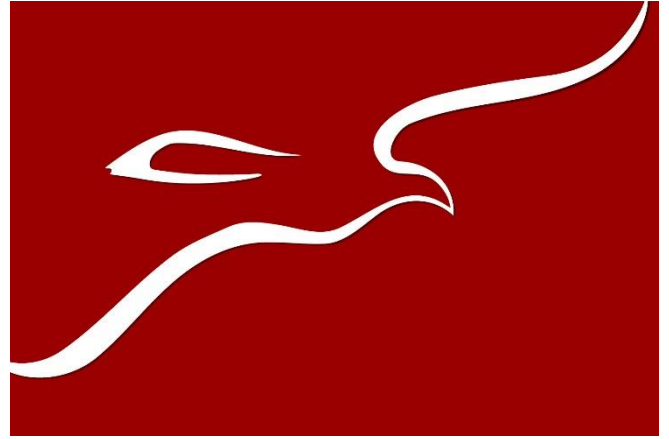
In the resurrection stories, the throughline is: the disciples are afraid, hiding in an upper room, racked by anxiety; and Jesus comes, and the first thing he offers is peace. And in John's version, right after Jesus says, "Peace be with you" for the second time, we read that "... he breathed on them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



### Reflection Questions

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?

### Prayer

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



## Week 4: Peace is a Person

### READ Isaiah 9:2-6

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 Immanuel, God with us.



### Reflection Questions

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 neighbourhood?

Take a moment to invite the Spirit to help you carry his peace in the coming year.

### Prayer

Jesus, Immanuel, Thank you for coming. Thank you for being with us. We need and embrace and love all that you are: Wonderful Counsellor, 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