

ADVENT STUDY GUIDE 2023



FIRST
BAPTIST CHURCH



WEEK 1

WAKING UP IN DARKNESS

1. If you could eradicate only one evil in our world today instantly, what would you choose and why?
2. Read Luke 13:10-16. What words are used to describe Jesus' interaction with the woman in this text?
3. Compare Jesus' response with that of the synagogue leader. What values or priorities do you think that they each had that led to their different reactions to this woman?
4. Jesus saw this woman in her place of pain and moved towards her. The synagogue leader looked the other way. What are places of darkness, or suffering, in our world that we instinctively turn away from?

Ask each person in your group come up with one idea, and the same thing can't be mentioned twice! Try to get at the things that may not immediately come to mind.

5. What kinds of *internal* darkness, pain or struggle, do you think people might have a hard time facing?
6. What might be some of the reasons that we turn away from these things?
7. What could help us to get better at noticing the pain of others? What would it look like in practice to move towards some of these things rather than looking away? Think about this in the context of our church community, our broader city, and the world.

PRAYER EXERCISE

Read Psalm 88 out loud three times.

First reading: Notice what word or phrase stands out to you the most. *Invite people share if they would like to.*

Second reading: Why does this part stand out to you? How might it resonate with something in your own life, or in the life of someone you know? *Invite people share if they would like to.*

Third reading: Spend time in silent prayer for these things.

PRAYER FOR THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

You may want to reflect on this prayer throughout the week.

God,
We walk this road with heavy burdens:
grief, loss, shame, stress, exhaustion.
We walk a road paved with pressures,
lined with difficulties,
and darkened with despair.
It is a wide road and there is plenty of company.
But there is a narrow road few have found.

It, too, is dark and difficult and paved with pressures.
It, too, has many a grief-stricken traveler,
many who know loss and shame,
many whose faces bear the marks
of stress and exhaustion.

But on the narrow road you walk
And carry our heavy load
And offer us yours
And never leave.

Show us the way
in Jesus 'name. Amen.

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WEEK 2

STRANGE VOICES IN THE DARKNESS

1. Who are the public figures (authors, tv personalities, preachers, etc.) whose perspectives you trust the most? Why do you believe their voices to be trustworthy?
2. Read Isaiah 40:1-8 and Mark 1:1-8. In what way does John's ministry fulfill what was written in Isaiah 40?
3. In Mark 1, why do you think that John was able to draw such a crowd?
4. As you think about all that is going on in our world today, what do you think are the big questions that people are asking? Try to list a few of these.
5. Today we have access to many different voices that all make claims to truth and that try to answer these big questions. How do you decide which of these voices are worth listening to? What measure do you use?
6. How often do you find yourself listening to voices of people who are different from you: who come from a different ethnicity, country, socio-economic background, political party, gender, language, generation, etc.?
7. What value might there be to paying attention to these different voices? In what ways does this feel like a risk?
8. How can we discern the voice of Jesus amidst the all the other voices we hear today? Are there any practices that you could adopt this Advent season to help you to pay attention to how God is speaking into these difficult places?

PRAYER FOR THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

God,
The voices of light come from places
of darkness,
on the margins;
they sound strange, unfamiliar, dissonant.
Our ears are attuned to the shouts and whims
of the crowd,
of the powerful;
they sound like truth.

Re-train our ears to hear your still, small voice
in the wilderness.
Amen.

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WEEK 3

HOPE IN THE DARKNESS

1. It can often be hard to know what to say when someone is going through a difficult time. What are examples of things we sometimes say that don't actually help, or that could make the person feel worse?
2. Read Isaiah 61:1-4 and 8-11. This passage references the captivity in Babylon and the ruin of Jerusalem. What hope does this text offer? What is this hope based on?
3. Read Luke 4:17-21. How does Jesus re-interpret Isaiah 61? What hope is he offering to his listeners?
4. Thinking about your own life, what helps you to get through difficult times?
5. How would you define 'hope?' What kinds of things do you hope for, and why do you hope for certain things and not others?
6. We are living today in a time of 'now and not yet.' God's kingdom has come in Jesus, but we are still waiting to see the full realization of this in our world. What helps you to remember to hope in this time of waiting? What 'signposts' of hope do you see in your own life?

PRAYER FOR THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

God of hope,
We want to be present, in this moment,
but we do not want to forget
we are a people stretched through time
toward the coming Day of the Lord.

Let us be found present on that Day.
Give us hope for that Day.
May your presence with us this day
bear witness to that Day.
Amen.

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WEEK 4

BELIEVING IN THE DARKNESS

1. What do you think is the difference between *belief* and *hope*? Can you think of an example to illustrate this?
2. Read Luke 1:26-38. Notice how you respond to Mary as you read this passage. In what ways can you identify with her, and in what ways can you not?
3. In Luke 12:45 Elizabeth exclaims: "Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" Mary is the first person to believe the good news about Jesus. Why do you think she believed the message, and how do we know that she did?

You might also compare Mary's response with Zachariah's in Luke 1:18-20.

4. The angel declares that Jesus will reign over a kingdom that will never end (verse 33). What do you believe about Jesus and his kingdom? How does this belief shape how you live?
5. You may know people who were Christians but have decided that they don't believe any more. What do you think causes people to step away from their faith?
6. What role might Christian community have in helping you to hope when it feels difficult? Do you think that we have a role in helping each other to believe? If so, what does this look like in practice?

PRAYER FOR THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

In a world of doubt, put our faith in you
the solid rock
the unshakeable foundation
the promised Messiah
the Son of God.

Now lift up our eyes, loosen our tongues,
Praise be to the Lord, for he has come.
The dawning of hope, the anointed one
God's tender mercy, the rising sun.

Amen.

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