



God's Words

Advent Study

Day 1

Read: Genesis 1:1-5; John 1:1-5; [2 Corinthians 4:6; 1 Timothy 4:6; Hebrews 1:1; Revelation 22:5]

Word / Light

While preparing to write this study of the essential biblical vocabulary, I discovered that many of these words are closely related with others. Therefore, I've combined two words into each day's study. Days with many potential readings have optional ones in brackets.

There is a unity in God's revelation. He has spoken and revealed Himself and His will in various ways so we could comprehend it, but it is one message. It is a message of God by God for God's people. While God is unknowable and beyond our mind's comprehension, He has communicated with His people so we may hear Him and seek to live according to His word.

Jesus is the living Word and we know him from the Bible as the written word. The foundations of our faith are found in the Scriptures, and Jesus is the rock upon which it sits.

God's Word and words give light—the light of Christ and the light of his will. We know what God is like because of His Incarnate Son, Jesus. Both word and light are “master images” of the Bible. Light from God's word reveals creation, providence, judgment, redemption and sanctification. God has provided the means of knowing Him through His Word and His light.

R&D Look up “word” and “light” in a Bible concordance to see how often they are used and find some of the references for a rewarding Bible study.

Prayer: Your Word, O Lord, is the guide for my life and salvation.

Day 2

Read: Exodus 3:13-16; John 1:14, 18; [Philippians 2:10-11; Revelation 7:14]

God / Lord

God is. “I AM WHO I AM.” God is unique, personal, and perfect. He is absolutely sovereign, transcendent (different from His creation), and immanent (present everywhere). God is one. God is three in one. That's not human ideas or philosophical speculation. God has revealed Himself through the Scriptures and ultimately in Jesus Christ His Son and all this is the work of the Holy Spirit.

While the Trinity is not a biblical word, it summarizes the revelation and Bible's teaching about God. The doctrine of the Trinity is not an explanation of God, but an analogy that encapsulates what God has shown us about Himself through the experience of His people, first in Israel and then in the Church.

God is the one Supreme Being, the creator and ruler of universe and all life and history. The invisible God made Himself known through the Holy Spirit to us through the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments, and perfectly in the person, words, and work of Jesus Christ.

The earliest Christian creed was simply “Jesus is Lord.” God reigns in His kingdom through Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords. When we believe and obey Jesus by faith and baptism, he brings us into his kingdom and is our Good Shepherd.

R&D Read one of the historical psalms (78, 105, 106, 136) to understand how we know God through what He does.

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, and show us the Father through the Son, Jesus Christ.

Day 3

Read: Luke 24:44-47; Galatians 4:4-7

Son / Messiah

Jesus Christ as the Son of God is mentioned about 150 times in the New Testament. He is one with God the Father. The Son of God is God incarnate (made flesh) to dwell among us to be our Savior and Lord. By the Holy Spirit we are made the children of God in Jesus.

As God’s Messiah (“anointed”), Jesus fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies about God sending a savior for His people. Israel expected a Messiah, who was to be a military/political deliverer and ruler to restore the freedom and glory of Israel. Jesus corrected that hope, teaching that he would establish a spiritual kingdom to complete God’s promises of a Redeemer.

The Old Testament pointed to the coming Savior (see Luke 9:3; Hebrews 7:23-28, 9:23-28). The old revealed what is to come in the new (1 Peter 1:10-12). Passages such as Isaiah 53 were used by the Holy Spirit to show the true Messiah would be a suffering sacrifice to save God’s people. Jesus was revealed to John as God himself (John 1:1-18). Jesus’ death and resurrection are the key to all the saving acts of God.

R&D Read Colossians 1:13-23 as a summary of Jesus’ identity as God’s Son and his role as our Messiah.

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for showing us that you are our Redeemer; and grant me to see you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly.

Day 4

Read: Genesis 1:1-2; John 14:15-26; [Ezekiel 37:1-14]

Spirit / Life

God is Spirit and Life. By the Spirit He creates and He breathes His Spirit into us to give us life. By God the Holy Spirit we know God the Father through God the Son. Because of the grace of the Holy Spirit, we can follow Jesus as his disciples. In Jesus’ death and resurrection, we share in his eternal life by faith and baptism the work and grace of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of God inspired the prophets and writers of the books of the Bible. Jesus was incarnate by the Holy Spirit, and anointed by him in John the Baptizer’s baptism. After his death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to the church through the apostles. More than once the Holy Spirit descended and filled the early church. Each believer receives the Spirit in baptism and gifts of the Spirit (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 27-30; Ephesians 4:11). The Spirit enables us to believe, pray, and witness. The goal of life in Christ is to grow in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26).

The Bible uses various images to describe the experience of the Spirit's invisible presence and work: wind, breath, a dove, fire, comfort, and anointing oil. As the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is personal and the active love between the Father and the Son. The Spirit of truth is our life-giver in Jesus Christ who makes us one with the Father. Our life in God is by the Holy Spirit.

R&D Prayerfully review your life and faith and write down the ways in which the Holy Spirit has given you life in God. Then give thanks.

Prayer: Alleluia. The Spirit of the Lord renews the face of the earth. O Come, let us adore him. Alleluia.

Day 5

Read: Genesis 15; Exodus 19:3-6, [20:1-17]; [Matthew 5:17-20]

Covenant / Law

God makes covenants with His people and by them He gives us His law, a gracious gift to guide us in living faithfully in His love and rule (see Romans 7:12). God made covenants with Adam and Eve, Noah, and Abraham. The beginning of redemption is in the covenant with Abraham by which he was blessed to be a blessing (Genesis 12:1-3). These are all covenants of grace given by God to His chosen people, His representatives and witnesses in the world.

The tragedy of Israel's sins and idolatry is their faithlessness to the covenant law (see Ezekiel 17:13-19) in dramatic contrast to God's faithfulness. God's covenant with David (2 Samuel 7:19-16) is fulfilled in Christ Jesus as the promised Messiah, Savior, and Lord (Ezekiel 34:25-32). God's covenant through Jesus is the better and final one (Hebrews 8:6-13, 9:15).

The sign of this new covenant is baptism, taking the place of circumcision. The means of renewal is the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11: 23-26). With this new covenant of salvation, the law of God is also renewed and clarified in the two great commandments of loving God above all else and loving our neighbor as ourselves. God's law is one with His redeeming acts of deliverance in the exodus of the Israelites and, finally, in the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus.

R&D Pray Psalm 119 as a celebration of God's covenantal law in his written word. Give thanks that Jesus fulfilled that law and in him, by his mercy and grace, we are righteous before God the Father.

Prayer: Lord, have mercy upon us, and write Thy law in our hearts, we beseech Thee.

Day 6

Read: Mark 1:1-15; [Romans 1:1-6; 1 Corinthians 15:1-5]

Gospel / Promise

The Good News of God is Jesus Christ, who is the gospel of God in himself. We know this good news through the four Gospels and through the preaching and teaching of the apostles. The Gospels are historical and theological proclamations revealing the identity and mission of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Through the Gospels we are shown good news of God's love in His mercy through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:8).

The gospel is that Jesus Christ fulfilled all the promises of God made in the Old Testament covenants with Israel as we read in 2 Corinthians 1:20, "All the promises of God find their 'Yes'

in Jesus Christ,” and in Romans 1:1-6. The good news is for all peoples, Jew and Gentile alike (Galatians 3:26-29). By the work and grace of the Holy Spirit we are enabled to believe and grow in living as the representatives and witnesses of Jesus Christ (see 2 Corinthians 7:1). Through Jesus we enter the Promised Land, the kingdom of God. We are his witnesses of the Good News in the world.

The heart of the gospel is the sacrifice on the cross, resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and his ascension into glory (Luke 24:25-27, 44-49). This is the Good News which the church preaches and teaches.

R&D Using your own words, write down what the gospel means to you and how you have received and experienced it.

Prayer: Lord, give me the faith and grace to confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection and share his love.

Day 7

Read: Matthew 18:1-4, [19:23-30]; [Revelation 11:15-18, 12:10]

King / Kingdom

Christ the King reigns over his kingdom. As Lord of all, he was already supreme before his incarnation and then triumphed over sin and death on the cross. God is always King as a shepherd who looks after His people as His beloved flock. He rules by right of being God—the only God, true and living, who creates, sustains, judges, and redeems.

The kingdom of God came in the person of Jesus whose preaching was centered in that kingdom (Mark 1:15). He gave all the signs of Messianic royal rule: healing the sick, casting out demons, teaching with authority, forgiving sins, rebuking the hypocrites, and guiding the lives he touched. Jesus is both the King and the kingdom of God. The time when that kingdom will be fulfilled (completed) is yet to come so he taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” When he returns to visibly establish his sovereignty, time will end in his new creation.

When we trust Jesus as Savior and Lord, worship and follow him as disciples, we enter his kingdom. Jesus established the true kingdom of God as spiritual—encompassing the cosmos. The kingdom has begun, yet will be completed in Jesus’ second coming. God’s redeeming acts all point toward a new creation under the authority of Jesus at the right hand of the Father.

R&D Examine your life and ask the Holy Spirit to show you any areas you have yet to surrender to Jesus as King. Pray with repentance and ask for mercy and grace to allow him to be Lord over all of you and your life.

Prayer: Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Day 8

Read: Hebrews 10:1-18

Passover Lamb / The Cross

The cross was the cruelest means of execution used by the Roman Empire, a long and tortuous death. God used that terrible instrument to establish our salvation by the sacrifice of Christ. He took upon himself all the sins of the world and entered the ultimate darkness of death to conquer. He rose again from the grave in triumph to go before us into the glory of heaven,

opening for us the door to eternal life. The cross is the sign of the new covenant between God and His people.

His sacrifice was prefigured in the blood of the Passover lamb in the Exodus story (Exodus 12:1-27). The lamb's blood was spilled as an offering of life to God, the giver and Lord of all life. The blood was spread as a sign of God's covering, the delivering of God's people.

That sacrifice was completed, fulfilled, and surpassed by the supreme sacrifice of Christ on the cross, making the temple sacrifices unnecessary. Jesus is the slain and victorious Lamb whose blood takes away the sins of the world. He is the Paschal Lamb for the propitiation of our sins, establishing the new, final, and eternal covenant.

We are baptized into the death of Jesus in order to rise with him in his eternal life. We claim that gift of new life by faith: "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:17).

R&D Read and reflect upon Isaiah 53 considering Jesus as the suffering servant who lived, died, and rose for us.

Prayer: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Day 9

Read: 1 Corinthians 15

Sin / Death / Resurrection

This is a triple header. Sin leads to death, and in the resurrection of Christ Jesus, death has been defeated. All three are inextricably tied together. When sin entered the world through Eve and Adam's mistrust and rebellion against God, creation itself fell into death. All things die. We will all die. Yet, in Christ's sacrifice on the cross and his victory by the resurrection, the grave of death has become redeemed into the gate of heaven.

We all sin by ignoring God's will and deceiving ourselves that God doesn't know or care about what we do or say. We sin by neglecting to love God and our neighbors. Satan deceives us by promising unending pleasure and fun, the fulfillment of all our desires and dreams. And yet, like the empty calories of sugar that tastes so sweet at first, it becomes a deadly sickness when we are addicted to it. We are enslaved by our desires. Our sin taints and corrupts everything and everyone we touch because of our self-centered selfishness and self-reliance. There is no such thing as "victimless sin."

The only antidote, cure, pardon, and commutation of our sentence of death is through Jesus Christ. He is our only hope when we realize we've taken the wrong road and are lost in darkness. When we cry out for his mercy, it's ours. He promised and he is trustworthy. He loves us so much he died for us and lives for us.

R&D Reflect on the reality that you will die. Are you prepared for it?

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on us.

Day 10

Read: 1 Peter 1:18-19; Mark 10:45; 2 Corinthians 5:19-20; [Romans 5]

Salvation / Redemption

Salvation is multi-dimensional. It's like a kaleidoscope with a myriad pattern of beautiful colors. Turn it a bit, and another facet emerges. A danger is when we insist on only one aspect of our redemption as the only true one. Nevertheless, there are some dominant themes.

Salvation is healing our first and fatal wound of turning away from God for a false substitute. It's called idolatry. And the most common version of it is we idolize ourselves and think we are our own master and lord of the world around us and then treat others accordingly.

Christ frees us from the fear of death, for we "through the fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage" (Hebrews 2:15). Jesus is the Good Physician who knows what we need and provides it in himself.

Salvation is our rescue—our deliverance from a pit so deep we can't get out on our own. Only God in Jesus can reach down and lift us up, which he does when we ask him! He can do that by making the one, true, pure sacrifice of divine love and then rising from death to new life in a transformed body.

Salvation is not only atonement for our sin but also Jesus redeeming (ransoming) us from whatever or to whomever we've sold our soul. And we are reconciled to God from whom we have turned away. Salvation and redemption are God's love in action for us.

R&D Reflect on Romans 5 and put yourself into the dynamic Paul describes.

Prayer: The Lord is full of compassion and mercy; O come, let us adore Him.

Day 11

Read: Matthew 1:21; Romans 6:12-14; 1 John 3:9-10, 5:18

Salvation / Redemption (Part 2)

Salvation is the unifying theme of all Holy Scripture. It began after our universal Fall in the Garden of Eden and it won't end until Christ returns to finish his new creation. From Genesis 3:15 to Revelation 19:6-9, the story of God's saving work is centered first in the deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt and entrance to the Promised Land; and then, second, and supremely, in the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

What did Jesus accomplish on the cross? First, he saved us *from* ourselves, our substitute gods and evil itself. He saved us from God's judgment and the penalty for sin. It is liberation from what oppresses our souls, from despair and darkness. Second, Jesus saved us to enjoy the blessing of God—for freedom and peace (*Shalom*). This the joy of health, wholeness, and holiness.

The greatest blessing of redemption is salvation in Christ who unites us with our heavenly Father (Ephesians 2:21-22; 1 Peter 2:4-5). This is the life-giving unity of the vine and branches (John 15:1-10; Colossians 2:6-7) and being incorporated into the Body of Christ of which he is the head (1 Corinthians 6:15, 19; Ephesians 1:22-23). And Christ lives in us (Galatians 2:20) and we are adopted into God's family by faith and baptism in Christ Jesus (Exodus 4:22; Hosea 11:1; Galatians 4:5-7; Romans 8:15).

And all this is a new life in Jesus Christ by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit.

R&D Write down how you have known Jesus as your Savior and what effect it has had on your life. That's your witness to the gospel of salvation.

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord Jesus, for becoming my light and my salvation.*

Day 12

Read: Deuteronomy 18:9-22

Prophecy / Fulfill

God called his prophets to proclaim His word, not their own. He anointed them with the Holy Spirit to “tell forth” God’s will and “foretell” only His promises and judgments. Many of their prophecies were fulfilled, especially in the destruction of Israel because of their faithlessness and idolatry, as well as their return from exile. Their messages were not fortune telling, but a call to repent and reform. Most significantly, they promised a Messiah that the Lord would give them, which was fulfilled in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, his life, and ministry.

The royal and religious establishments of Israel most often rejected the “word from the Lord” and even persecuted these servants of God. God’s word was heard again when He raised up John the Baptizer to declare that the promised Messiah was near, and to prepare by repentance and baptism for the one who would baptize them in the Holy Spirit.

One way to classify the prophets and their messages is to see them as proclaimers of the kingdom of God: in kingdom warnings, kingdom judgments, and in Jesus, the last, true, and ultimate prophet—and in the kingdom requirements, conditions, and consummation. A great danger throughout biblical history and continuing today are false prophets. The Lord promises the gift of discernment to His people in order to rightly distinguish the true from the pretenders.

R&D Without looking at your Bible, make a list of all the prophets’ names you remember—then check your work and study the ones you didn’t recall.

Prayer: *Almighty God, You spoke through your prophets of old, and finally in Jesus Christ: Grant us grace to hear Your word and obey it to Your glory.*

Day 13

Read: Romans 1:18—2:16

Mercy / Judgment

God is both just and merciful. That is not a contradiction. We are considering the very character of God as holy and loving. God is truth Himself and by that truth He judges falsehood. God is righteous and by that goodness He judges evil and wickedness. His righteousness and justice are an exercise in mercy and love for His creation and His people. They are a unity of His character and grace.

God’s justice expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden and expelled Israel from the Promised Land when they persisted in rebellion by idolatry and immorality. They had violated the covenants of God. The church’s excommunication is the necessary discipline to protect the body from the infection of sin (judgment) and to awake the sinner to repentance (mercy).

God is patient and sends incremental judgment as a warning before He is the final and perfect judge on the Last Day. At the end, God is both prosecutor and judge of evil while Satan is the prosecutor of believers, and God is the supreme judge in Jesus who is also our defender. The judgment of God has nothing to do with the human emotions of anger or rage. Rather, God is “without passions” but simply reality in Himself. The basis for God’s law and judgment is the

simple and all-important truth that “You shall be holy for I, the LORD your God, am holy” (Leviticus 19:2).

R&D Read Matthew 25 and apply the parables to yourself. How have you responded to God’s love and used His grace?

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, grant me pardon and peace that I may be cleansed from all my sins and serve You with a quiet mind.

Day 14

Read: Matthew 5:1-16; Galatians 14:15

Grace / Blessing

God blesses. God is in the blessing business for His will for us is love. When He blessed Abraham to be a blessing to the world, He laid the cornerstone for the Lord’s purpose for His people. His grace is His love in action for us, for which we have no merit or any deserving.

Choosing His people, Israel, is an act of grace. His love and favor to us in Jesus Christ is pure grace (John 1:14). His sacrifice on the cross, resurrection, and ascension are the highest gifts of grace for us. It was the perfect gift of love for us forever.

At the same time, God’s grace is powerful, enabling us to “grow in grace as we grow in age.” So, God’s grace is our pardon (justifying grace), the power to grow and share His love (sanctifying grace) and, finally, the welcome He gives us into heaven (glorifying grace)—all His work for us, in us, and through us for others.

The Beatitudes that Jesus gave us are his central blessings for us as both gifts and guides to living in the kingdom of God. Jesus also pronounced curses, as in Luke 6:24-26, for when we reject God’s gifts and responsibilities—for which we enter into the darkness of separation from God.

R&D Read and reflect upon Exodus 34:6-7, considering how you have been blessed by God and how He holds you accountable for your faithfulness to His will.

Prayer: May the almighty and merciful Lord bless us and keep us, now and evermore.

Day 15

Read: Psalm 23; [Ezekiel 34]

Shepherd / Servant

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psalm 23). Growing up in my home church, “our” pew for the family was right below a large, beautiful stained-glass window of Jesus the Shepherd. Then I went to seminary and prayed in the Chapel of the Good Shepherd with a striking statue of Jesus the Shepherd in the center. God as our Shepherd is one of the central Bible images, and reveals the relationship between the believer and Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

So, what do shepherds do? They lead the flock to nourishment and refreshing water. They protect the sheep from predators. They know their sheep by name and they follow him, trusting him. He corrects them when they try to go astray and rescues them when separated from the flock and/or in danger.

Sheep are the animals most often cited in Scripture, about 400 times and 100 for their shepherds. They are powerful metaphors for the Lord and His relationship with us largely because

sheep are rather helpless creatures! So, they depend upon their shepherds as guides, protectors, companions, providers, and leaders to live. That's like us when we are blessed by knowing we are "poor in spirit," totally dependent upon the Lord, our servant leader. He washed the feet of his disciples and died for us so we may serve others.

R&D How has God served you through the pastors of the church and how are you serving the Lord now?

Prayer: O Lord, to know You is eternal life and to serve You is perfect freedom; bless us that we may be a blessing to others.

Day 16

Read: Psalm 51

Repent / Forgive

One of Jesus' many grace-giving acts in his earthly ministry was to forgive sins. That was blasphemy for the religious authorities who insisted that only God could forgive sins. Which was the point—Jesus was ministering God's absolution and still does.

Most believers have some form to confess sins and receive forgiveness during their Sunday worship. And many also confess in their private prayers trusting God to be merciful, or make a sacramental confession to a priest representing the church. However we do it, seeking God's forgiveness is an essential part of walking with God since we are always falling short of His glory.

Baptism cleanses us of our sins. Nevertheless, we are weak and far from the goal of holiness in Jesus. So, we need regular course corrections to stay on track and not get lost again.

John the Baptizer called for God's people to repent and that same message was continued by Jesus. Repentance is necessary to claim God's forgiveness. It means that we recognize our sin and need to turn around to regain God's way by changing our lives. Satan is always patrolling God's kingdom to pick off stragglers, so self-examination, sorrow for sin, and confession are needed as part of our repentance.

David, in our reading for today, and the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-24) are models for our repentance. They are examples of reconciliation with God.

R&D Pray though Psalm 103 and claim the incredible loving kindness of the Lord in His mercy and forgiveness.

Prayer: Almighty God and Father, I confess to You that I have sinned, through my own fault in thought, word, and deed, and in what I have left undone.

Day 17

Read: Psalm 143; Luke 18:9-14

Justify / Righteous

That God is right (righteous) in His character and in all that He does, is a basic teaching of Scripture. That we are not righteous by nature should be obvious to anyone who is observant and honest of human behavior—and especially our own. Therefore, we need to be justified, or made right, with God.

The majority of the New Testament examples of the word “justify” are from Paul because he realized that Christ’s sacrificial death for us sinners is the heart of the gospel of God. As we trust Jesus as our Savior and Lord we are “made right” with God so that we may obey Him in being baptized, be fed in the Lord’s Supper, and share His love with others. God’s justifying grace blesses us with the righteousness of Christ.

Paul used the image of a court of law to explain how a pure and holy God can remove our guilt by declaring us “not guilty” when we obviously have broken His commandments. It is Jesus who steps in to cover us with his own righteousness and so claims us as his own. Jesus came for us sinners (Luke 5:32) because “No one is good but God alone” (Mark 10:18). Only God is righteous and therefore our sins separate us from Him. When we repent and turn to Christ as our hope, his gift to us from the cross is our appropriation of his righteousness (Romans 1:17). Jesus Christ justifies us, which we receive by grace through repentance and faith.

R&D We renew our faith by prayerfully reading God’s word and giving Him thanks and praise. Try a different way of studying the Bible and glorifying Him with gratitude to refresh your spirit.

Prayer: I thank You, Lord, for You are good all the time and all the time You are good, which is why I can trust You in Jesus and repent of my sins.

Day 18

Read: Colossians 1:9-23

Justify / Righteous (Part 2)

The most common form of justification is self-justification—when we assure ourselves that whatever we do, think, feel, say is okay, the right thing. That’s the oldest idolatry—the unconscious assumption that we are our own god, the master of our fate, beyond any accountability or judgment.

The reality is that we are under judgment for that very sin and we cannot save ourselves. When the Holy Spirit brings us to realize that we are lost and we cry out for God’s mercy, that leads us to God’s saving justification.

Here’s a little example of what God does for us. While traveling through the Yucatan jungle with my friend, Charles, we went to a largely unexcavated Mayan ruin. He urged me to go with him to the top of one of the pyramids. I declined, being terrified of heights. He assured me he would help me and that there would be no problem. I trusted him and agreed. We got the top of those steep, narrow steps and marveled at the green sea punctuated by the tops of other pyramids. Then, we had to go down and I froze. Charles simply said, “Do it this way” and sat down on the top step. He then started down on his rear end and I followed his example. He humbled himself to my level to lead me to safety. He was a friend who rescued me.

That’s what Christ did for us in his incarnation and dying on the cross. He covers us with his righteousness and saves us. We receive that gift by trusting him.

R&D How have you experienced God’s saving grace in Jesus Christ? Write it down and share it—that’s your testimony.

Prayer: Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Day 19

Read: Matthew 11:28-30; Hebrews 13:20-21, [3:7—4:13]

Rest / Peace

We all need rest. The human body and mind cannot be healthy or even survive without it. Once our houses and cities were electrified, however, we have gotten less and less rest, especially with pervasive communication and internet/texting becoming a mass addiction. What rest we do get is constantly interrupted.

One of the great promises and gifts of God to His people is rest. It begins with the command to honor the Sabbath. This law is a gift of grace so that we may be free to honor the Lord with praise and thanksgiving. One of the dangers of this law is to make its application so detailed and elaborate as the Pharisees did that it distorts God's intention. Jesus restored God's intention for the Sabbath by reminding us that it was made for us.

The spiritual renewal of the Sabbath re-orientes our souls and bodies to serve God in Christ Jesus. The rest that he promises is salvation itself and it is ours now by faith, to be completed in its fullness in our life after life in his resurrection, the Promised Land.

On our own, without Christ, we are restless—our souls have no peace. In Christ, we enjoy that peace that passes all understanding which the world cannot give. We are given that peace through the highest cost of Jesus' sacrificial offering of himself on the cross for our sake. Jesus is our peace, our shalom, our rest and harmony with God.

R&D Write down all the ways you have enjoyed peace and rest in your soul. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you and then give thanks to the Lord for this gift of His grace.

Prayer: May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Day 20

Read: Hebrews 10:1-22

Holy / Sanctify

God is holy, for holiness is what He is. He is set apart as the singular reality before He created anything. He is pure transcendence, so different from us in His majesty, sovereign power, moral purity—perfect in His love and glory—that we cannot comprehend Him or see Him and live.

Of His love and mercy, He comes to us in ways we can perceive His presence and receive His word, will, and grace. He has provided various ways to sanctify (make holy) His people. The blood of sacrificed animals as a gift of life back to the God of life was the primary method in the Old Testament. Now we have been given the one true, perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ to be our sufficient offering through whom we are accepted by God the Father. We renew that gift and life in every celebration of the Lord's Supper.

God will not tolerate evil in His sight, but offers redeeming grace to all who trust Jesus as Savior. The Lord calls us to be His holy people with His new covenant in Jesus. Furthermore, God the Holy Spirit nurtures us and gives us grace to grow in holiness as we follow Jesus as Lord. Hebrews 12:3-14 tells us that God's discipline is part of our growth in living into the sanctification through Jesus.

R&D *Read and pray 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 and give thanks and praise to the Lord for this promise and gift through Jesus.*

Prayer: *Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.*

Day 21

Read: Hebrews 9:1-15, 23-28; [10:5-10, 19-22]

Tabernacle / Temple

When Solomon prayed to dedicate the first Jerusalem temple, he asked one of the most important questions in the Bible: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth?” Yet, God made Himself available in both the tabernacle and the temple that were the central places of worship for Israel. Both were microcosms of creation and symbols of redemption that were fulfilled and completed in Christ Jesus’ incarnation. Jesus is God’s tabernacle and the temple in himself.

God’s purpose in both was to provide the means by which His people can meet Him to worship Him and be blessed by Him. The ark of the covenant that was moved from the tabernacle to the Jerusalem temple was the symbol of God’s presence with His people. When the temple curtain was torn at the death of Jesus on the cross, it symbolized that God is now accessible to all people through the crucified, risen, and ascended Christ, our Great High Priest.

In John 1:14, “made his dwelling” is the Greek word for tabernacle. Since both the temple and the tabernacle point to the heavenly reality of which they are copies, the incarnation of the Son of God meant that God Himself “moved into the neighborhood” (*The Message*). The church, the Body of Christ, is a new temple of God’s presence (see 1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Peter 2:4-5; Revelation 3:5).

R&D *Read Revelation 21:1-4, 22-27 and give thanks that in Christ our destiny by grace is to see the Living God face to face.*

Prayer: *Give me faith, O Lord, that I may with confidence draw near to Your throne of grace, where I may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Day 22

Read: Job 28:12-28; [Matthew 11:16-19]

Wisdom / Fool

One of the most striking and important contrasts in the Bible is between the way of wisdom and the way of the fool. They are the difference between God’s word as one way of life, as opposed to the path of darkness and death by rebelling against God and His will for us.

Wisdom is not a popular topic today, but was a vivid and concrete way of living to the Hebrew people. Proverbs 1-9 personified wisdom as a woman providing manifold blessings, while the fool turns away. Job wondered where to find it, just as the writer of Ecclesiastes pondered about the wise way to live and its value. Both concluded that the “the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom” (Job 28:28).

Tragically, the way of the fool is always with us and as popular as ever. Foolish living is the life of sin, stubbornly turning away from God and His light. The promise of wisdom is peace and joy in the Lord. The lie of foolishness is the empty lure that leads to confusion and wandering in the wastelands—the same as wickedness and sin.

Jesus, the Word of God, is Wisdom, our guide in the kingdom of God. Jesus demonstrated the choices that the wise and foolish make in his stories of the farmer (Luke 12:13-21) and the wedding attendants (Matthew 25:1-13).

R&D In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus contrasted the foundations of wise and foolish lives. Do your life's work and purpose rest upon the rock of Christ or the sand of the world?

Prayer: Guide me with Your wisdom, O Lord, that with Your help I may glorify You in the way I live through Jesus Christ.

Day 23

Read: Romans 2:1-11; [Revelation 21:1—22:5]

Heaven / Hell

Now we come near the end of the Advent season to consider the destinations of our souls. One is with God, enjoying His full presence and rejoicing in Him with all the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. The other is the opposite, hell, the cold yet consuming darkness of being cut off from God and the torments of knowing we rejected His love and mercy.

Unlike the silly and naïve popular depictions of heaven and the lurid depictions of hell, both are very real. Not with winged cherubs nor red devils with pitchforks, but with the presence of God in the first and the terrible curse of the fullness of evil in the second.

While God is present everywhere to His creation, His eternal abode is above and beyond this world and our intellect. The Bible uses many kinds of images to describe heaven, but they are all limited by human language. Heaven, like God Himself, is beyond our understanding and vision—until, through Christ, we enjoy it ourselves as the goal of our existence and God's intention for us—the true, eternal Promised Land.

Hell is often described as an eternal burning of everything and everyone that is evil and opposed to God—a horrible punishment. These images of hell are symbolic language for our sake, since the reality is beyond our comprehension or description.

Heaven is full, complete blessedness and hell is the total opposite—a full, complete curse. Heaven is the promise and reward of the faithful in Christ, while hell is the final judgment of God on all who fought His reign and sought to destroy life and souls.

R&D Pray Revelation 7:15-17 and give thanks to the Lord for this promise.

Prayer: May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace; and may light perpetual shine upon them.

Day 24

Read: Mark 13:5-8, [32-37]; Revelation 22:8-17

Advent / The Last Day

The word Advent comes from the Latin *Adventus* meaning “arrival” and is used in the church's calendar for the four Sundays before Christmas and for the return of Christ in his second coming. And it means the ways in which Christ has promised to be with us. When Christ comes into the heart of a believer, that is his advent. Another is when he comes into the midst of his disciples when they gather to pray, hear his written word and celebrate the Lord's Supper.

God comes to us first. He loved us before we knew or loved Him. He comes to us by the work of the Holy Spirit to bring us to faith, discipleship, and growth in grace. God initiates our relationship with Him because He desires us to be part of His family, His household of faith.

Just as God came in Christ Jesus as the Incarnate Son in the son of Mary, so Christ will return at the end of time to complete his kingdom. On the last day he will make the last judgment, and heaven and earth will be one, a new creation.

We cannot know the date of Jesus' return, but our calling until then is to be ready. That means to be actively loving God and our neighbor. Our watchword is "stay awake." That means to keep learning, growing, serving, sharing the blessings we have received, always expecting the Lord to come—among us, within us, and at the end of time.

R&D *Look up the words "eschaton" and "eschatology" to know more about Jesus' second Advent.*

Prayer: *Come, Lord Jesus.*

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