

# Advent Reflections

by Vanessa Stricker



on the side of grace . com

# hello friends

Thank you for joining me in these Advent Reflections!

I've always loved Christmas. It feels magical and nostalgic, full of joy and celebration and expectation. But in some ways, Christmas can feel a bit removed from our everyday life. As we manufacture merriment with presents and lights and parties, it's often hard to remember the significance of an infant king that was born so long ago.

Advent is where the baby in a manger meets our current reality. It's where the Christmas cheer meets the struggle of our everyday lives. Advent acknowledges our pain and reminds us that God is present with us in the midst of it. Advent embraces the tension we feel living in a broken world and teaches us to wait in expectation for a Savior who is faithful to redeem and restore. Advent reveals to us the many ways that the kingdom of heaven touches earth.

My hope for you is that as you engage with this Advent devotional, you will recognize that you don't have to bury your reality for the pretense of Christmas cheer. Instead, I hope it will lead you to let the longing and hope of a Savior abide in your everyday life.

*Vanessa Stricker*

# about this devotional

This Advent devotional is designed to be used by both individuals and families. There are 7 days of material for each of the 4 weeks of Advent, but you can feel free to go through the material as you please. I personally love to spend time alone in the mornings in reflection and go through a family reflection in the evenings. If you want a daily rhythm, that's available to you, but if you just want to pick and choose a few days of content each week, that works, too. The choice is yours.

Each week of material starts on Sunday with a brief reflection to get you thinking about the weekly theme. There will also be an image that you can print, decorate in some way, and hang up.

Monday thru Friday, you'll see a devotional with some type of contemplative practice or reflection questions meant for adults. This will be followed by a Family Reflection.

On Saturdays, there will be another short reflection to invite you to respond to all that was stirring in your heart throughout the week.

When you see Reflection Questions, you can look through the list and choose the ones that fit best for you and/or your family. Some questions may not be relevant for all ages.

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# Sunday

## week 1

Take some time to reflect on the word HOPE. This can be done individually and/or as a family. While you think or discuss, you can print out the graphic on the following page and engage your creativity. Maybe color or paint the picture, glue squares of colored tissue paper on it, or write some words that come to mind when you think of hope. Find a place to hang your picture(s) and add to your display each week.

Feel free to use some of the questions below to help you reflect. You can choose the questions that are right for you and/or your family. Or you can choose to reflect in your own way.

### Reflection Questions:

- What comes to mind when you think of hope?
- What are some things that you hope for?
- Can you think of a time when you received or experienced something that you were hoping for? How did that feel?
- Can you think of a time when you were hoping for something and it didn't happen? How did that feel?
- What does hope have to do with Christmas?

print. cut. color



# Monday

## week 1

HOPE. I wonder what that word brings to mind for you. Sometimes we might think of hope as seeing the world with rose-colored glasses or being optimistic that things will go our way. But the hope that is realized in the birth of our Savior is much deeper and more complex than that.

We can't talk about hope without talking about suffering. Suffering is the birthplace of hope. When things are good and all is as it's meant to be, there is no reason for hope. But hope is necessary because we live in a world that is broken.

We all have things in our lives that are not as we want them to be - broken relationships, unfulfilled desires, health issues, loss, or injustice. We all know pain and disappointment in some form or another. And yet, God calls us to hope.

This hope does not ignore the suffering or explain it away. It is raw and honest about the current reality. And it is precisely the vulnerability that comes with acknowledging our pain and need before God that leads us to a place where hope is cultivated.

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*I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."*

– Lamentations 3:19–24 (NIV)

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The book of Lamentations was written more than 500 years before Jesus was born. It's an expression of deep grief and heartbreak over the destruction of the city of Jerusalem by Babylon. The Jewish people spent centuries in both exile and foreign occupation, awaiting the arrival of a Messiah who would deliver them from their oppression. During this time, the prophets called on the people of Israel to lament, to cry out to God, to remember his faithfulness, and to wait.

If we are to experience the true hope that Jesus offers us, we must first be willing to lament. Spend some time today considering an area of pain or suffering in your life or in the world around you. Write or speak out your lament to God. Be honest and vulnerable. Ask questions. Express your doubts. And ask God to remind you of his faithfulness.



# family reflection

Read or paraphrase the paragraph below for your family...

*Jesus came to earth to give us hope. He showed us that God loves us so much that he wants to be with us, take care of us, and teach us how to live well. We hope because we know that God is like a parent who takes good care of their children. But hope doesn't mean that we always have to look on the bright side. Sometimes, we feel sad or scared. Sometimes we feel angry or frustrated. And God wants us to be honest about that. When we are honest with God, we open up our hearts to hear from him and be reminded of his goodness.*

Spend some time talking through one or more of the reflection questions below.

## Reflection Questions:

- What is something that makes you feel sad or scared?
- What is something in your life that you wish was different?
- What is something in the world that you wish was different?
- Do you have any questions for God? *(If so, don't feel the need to provide answers for those questions.)*

Close your time by praying together about what was shared. Acknowledge the emotions and questions while also thanking God for his goodness in the midst of them.