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#### **ABOUT ADVENT**

When I was a young teen, I started a Christmas tradition of making a simple green-and-red construction-paper chain and taping it to a door. My little brothers took turns ripping off one of the 25 rings every day until Christmas. Something about seeing that paper chain get shorter each day filled us with eagerness and hope. The coming of Christmas became a sure and tangible event.

We made a big deal out of ripping the rings and declaring how many days were left. The shorter the chain, the greater the excitement. Each rip of paper was a small celebration, leading up to the celebration.

That's what Advent is: a hopeful waiting, a sort of pre-joy. It's a time to focus our thoughts on who Jesus is and why He came. It's a time to remember, to prepare our hearts and to hope.

This Christmas season, embrace that waiting and anticipation as you read through these four Sunday devotions leading up to Christmas. Similar to those who waited, searched the Scriptures and prayed for the Messiah's coming thousands of years ago, you can dig into God's Word, talk to Him and allow these Advent devotions to be your own "paper chain"-something that fills you with hope.

Jenny Nanninga is a wife and a mama to five daughters. She and her family live on the central coast of

California where they adventure, read, care for their many pets and serve the Lord.



WEEK ONE SUNDAY, NOV. 27

### Is It Ready Yet?

->>> Read, ««--

**We've all had to wait.** Whether anticipating a small or big something, waiting is challenging because we don't know when it will end.

When I was 15, I bought an old, rusted Ford Mustang. It was quite the fixer-upper. My dad and I removed parts, restored parts and reinstalled parts. And I waited. When would it be done? When could I drive it? At 16, I got my license, but the Mustang still wasn't ready. About two years after I bought it, I gave up—thinking I'd be driving our family's big Suburban forever.

But Dad knew better. His experience with cars gave him a clear understanding of when the project would be finished. When my dad finally handed me the keys to my shimmery, blue Mustang, I drove off with a huge smile on my face.

I hadn't known when the waiting would end because I couldn't see the bigger picture.
Likewise, we often can't see the end of life's larger seasons of waiting. But God sees it all.
Not just the bigger picture—the *entire* picture.
And we can trust in that knowledge and wisdom.
This allows us to wait with hope.

Before Jesus, people waited for the fulfilment of God's greatest promise—that a Savior would arrive to rescue them. Today, we know who our Savior is and how He rescues us, but we still long for His return. The promise of Jesus gives our hearts hope. He made us. He understands our longings and—spoiler alert—He knows exactly when our waiting will end.

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). I am so glad that my hope doesn't depend on what I can see but on faith in the One who sees everything.

PSALM 27:14	 	
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2 PETER 3:9	 	
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ROMANS 12:12	 	
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PRAY THIS WEEK THAT GOD WOULD HELP YOU PUT YOUR HOPE
IN HIM AND HIS PROMISES RATHER THAN ON WHAT YOU CAN
SEE FOR YOURSELF. ASK HIM TO GIVE YOU "THE ASSURANCE OF
THINGS HOPED FOR."

->> Pray ...

->>> Reflect \*\*\*
Make a Tree of Hope ornament this week. Get directions on page 8.



WEEK TWO SUNDAY, DEC. 4

#### Cheer Up!

->>> Read, ««--

**As a freshman,** I was thrilled to make the varsity cheer team. I couldn't wait to learn the cheers and perform our routines at big events.

What I didn't expect was that some of the older girls could be quite mean and would say cruel things behind my back. One time, after I'd made a mistake, an older girl yelled and threw a pompom in my face. I laugh at that incident now, but it didn't make me laugh then. It hurt my heart. What had I done wrong to make them dislike me?

The cruel actions of those girls weren't my fault. But sometimes I also make bad decisions—things that really are my fault. I marvel at God's incredible care, that He loves us—me and you and all the mean cheerleaders—while we are still sinners. He came to earth as a baby to one day die for those sins.

I could have tried harder to get those older girls to like me. I could have worried about what I wore and what I said and how I acted around them—and they still might not have accepted me. But God's love has no such conditions. We don't have to earn it. Salvation is for anyone who repents and trusts in Him.

An assurance of that love helps us fight anxiety during the many worries of this world. Will people at school like me? Will I pass my test? Will I get a job? Our hope does not rest in whether we do all the right things or whether circumstances work out the way we desire. Our hope rests in a God who loves us perfectly, whose love has guaranteed our salvation and future. "Hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption" (Psalm 130:7).

HEBREWS 13:6
JEREMIAH 29:11
ROMANS 8:37-39

WHEN YOU ARE TEMPTED TO WORRY ABOUT WHAT OTHERS

THINK, FOCUS ON GOD'S ETERNAL LOVE FOR YOU. CONFESS YOUR

FEARS, ASKING GOD TO GIVE YOU CONFIDENCE OF HIS LOVE.

THANK HIM FOR THE HOPE YOU HAVE IN JESUS.

->> Pray « --

->>> Reflect \*\*\*

Make a Diamond of Love ornament this week. Get directions on page 9.



WEEK THREE SUNDAY, DEC. 11

## Swinging for Joy

->>> Read, ««--

**In school,** I had a friend with sensitive eyes. It usually wasn't a problem, but if her eyes got poked, she would experience temporary blindness for a few days. So, she often wore goggles during basketball games.

One day at camp, she was poked in the eye during an activity. She had to lie on her bunk in the dark, a cool cloth over her eyes. The other girls in the cabin and I wanted to help lift her spirits. So we wrapped a bandana around her eyes and led her down to the swing set, helping her get started until she could pump her legs to go higher and higher. Soon she had us all laughing at how silly she looked swinging blindfolded.

I still remember my friend's smile and laughter. She could have complained, focusing on her discomfort or all she was missing out on at camp. Instead, she chose joy.

Christians are on a journey that often holds many trials. Yet, no matter how challenging the road may be, we know that the redemptive work of Jesus fills us with a lasting joy. "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).

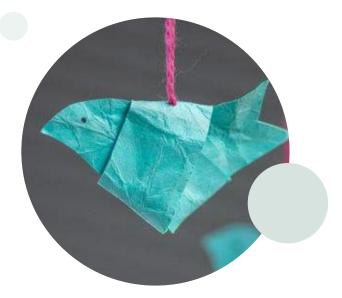
If we put our hope in comfort or success, people or pleasures, we inevitably end up disappointed. But a hope placed in Jesus is a perfect, never-ending hope—a lasting joy, not a temporary thrill. A joy that lives on even when we don't get what we long for, whether we are sick, poor, hurting or unpopular.

We might hope for certain things to happen, but we shouldn't hope in those things. Because things fail. Only God never fails. Only in God is there "fullness of joy."

I PETER 1:8			 
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PROVERBS 10:28			 
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ROMANS 15:13			
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ARE THERE THINGS YOU'VE PUT YOUR HOPE IN INSTEAD OF LOOKING TO GOD? TELL HIM ABOUT THEM, AND ASK HIM TO FILL YOUR HEART WITH JOY AS YOU PLACE YOUR HOPE IN HIM. THEN PRAISE HIM FOR THE GIFT OF HIS SON.

->>> Reflect ««
Make a Ball of Joy ornament this week.
Get directions on page 11.



WEEK FOUR SUNDAY, DEC. 18

#### Leap of Faith

->>> Read, ««-

What comes to mind when you think of peace? Quietly watching a sunset? Getting along or agreeing with everyone? Getting your way?

Sometimes we think peace can only be achieved if everything is working out just so—if there is no conflict or if everyone agrees with one another. But God doesn't see unity as a requirement for peace. Peace can be achieved even during strife or disagreements. This is a peace "which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7), an inner peace that is possible even during difficult times.

One summer when I was a kid, my brothers and I decided to jump off a bridge into a lake where our family was camping. The jump was apparently safe enough for our parents to agree to it, but I was really scared. I remember standing on the bridge, with my life jacket on, struggling to find the courage to drop off the bridge and into the blue-green depths below.

I finally jumped, and as I stepped out into nothingness, panic overwhelmed me. However, I had enough time to pray a quick, "Lord, help!" I immediately felt a complete peace fill me, regardless of what would happen to me next. In that moment, my circumstances had not changed, but my mindset had, and I had a peace that didn't make sense. It "surpassed understanding."

Remember that the Prince of Peace lives inside us—"He himself is our peace" (Ephesians 2:14). Jesus fills us with His supernatural peace so that we can be still and calm in spirit while troubles rage around us. We don't put our hope in perfect circumstances; we place it at the feet of a perfect peacemaker.

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7		
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JOHN 16:33		
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JOHN 14:27		 

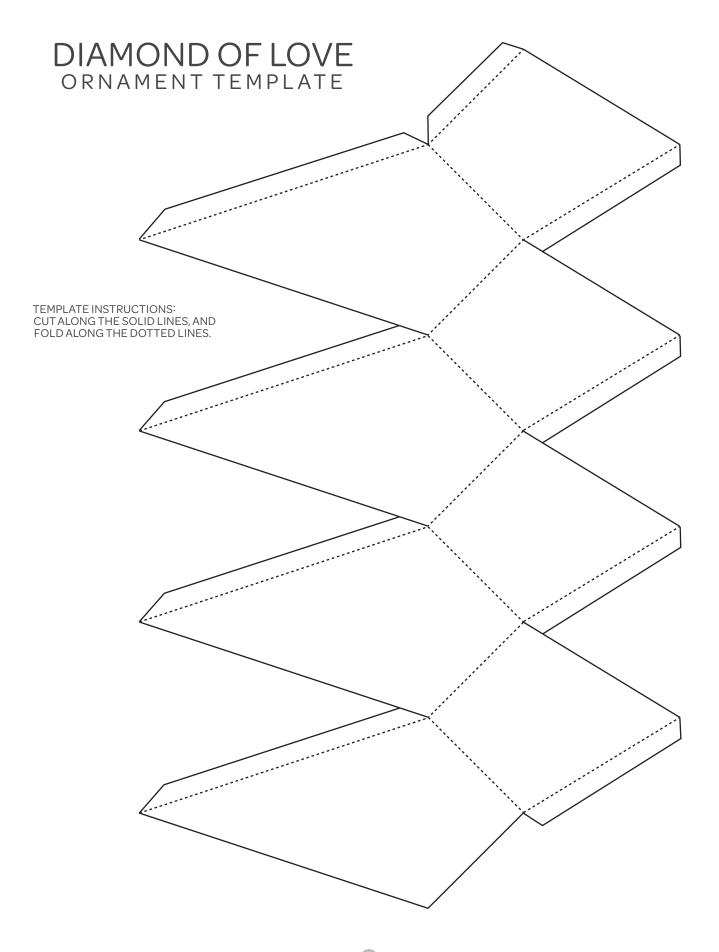
ASK GOD TO FILL YOU WITH A PEACE THAT GOES BEYOND UNDERSTANDING. TELL THE LORD ABOUT WHAT IS KEEPING YOU FROM FEELING PEACE, AND ASK HIM TO TURN YOUR EYES TO HIM RATHER THAN YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES. PRAY THAT GOD WILL SHOW YOU THE PATH TO PEACE IN YOUR SOUL.

->>> Reflect \*\*\*

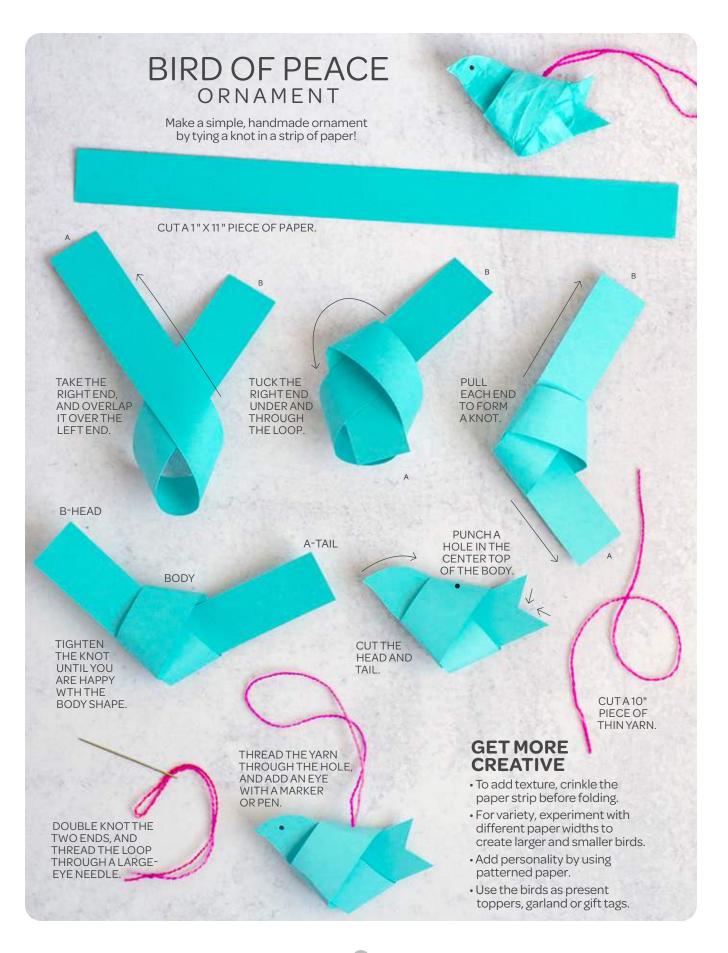
Make a Bird of Peace ornament this week. Get directions on page 12.











ARLENE PELLICANE

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