

THE 
HEART
OF CHRISTMAS



**CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONS FOR
INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, OR GROUPS**

THE 
HEART
OF CHRISTMAS



**CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONS FOR
INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, OR GROUPS**



The Heart Of Christmas: Christmas Devotions for Individuals, Families, or Groups

Copyright 2022 by Outreach Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including storage or retrieval systems, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review.

Published by Outreach Inc. Colorado Springs, CO 80919

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV® Copyright © 1973 1978 1984 2011 by Biblica, Inc. TM Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Also used is The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®). ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. The ESV® text has been reproduced in cooperation with and by permission of Good News Publishers. Unauthorized reproduction of this publication is prohibited. All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-64744-129-6

Publisher: Jamie Stahler
Publishing Manager: Carri Gambill
Design: Tim Downs, Alexia Garaventa
Written by: Trevor Miller

Printed in the United States of America

SAMPLE

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
WEEK 1: Hope Is at the Heart of Christmas	3
1 – Hope Was Born	8
2 – Overflowing with Hope	10
3 – The Eyes of Our Hearts	12
4 – Blessed Trust	14
5 – Written to Teach	16
6 – Things Hoped For	18
WEEK 2: Find Peace in the Heart of Christmas	21
7 – Do Not Be Anxious	26
8 – Peaceful Sleep	28
9 – God’s Christmas Card	30
10 – Choose Peace	32
11 – Not as the World Gives	34
12 – The Power of the Mind	36
WEEK 3: The Heart of Christmas Brings Joy in All Circumstances	39
13 – Joy Is Sneaky	44

14 – Unexpected Joy	46
15 – Future Joy	48
16 – Tears Turned to Joy	50
17 – For All People	52
18 – The Gift of Today	54
WEEK 4: The Heart of Christmas Is Love	57
19 – Dead Giveaway	62
20 – God So Loved	64
21 – Life’s Instruction Book	66
22 – Lead with Love	68
23 – The Love of a Father	70
24 – Love Is Patient	72
Christmas Eve – In the Flesh	74
Christmas Day – God’s Not Surprised	76
ADVENT READINGS	79

SAMPLE

INTRODUCTION

At the heart of Christmas are the four themes of the Advent season: hope, peace, joy, and love. This monthlong devotional will lead you, on your own or with others, through what really matters this Christmas holiday. Each week, the daily encouragement will be focused on a different theme. Find a time each day to read the Scripture, devotional, and prayer. Each week will begin with some fun activities, like watching a Christmas movie and enjoying a Christmas hymn, that will prepare your heart for the devotions to follow.

This Christmas season, focus on the things that matter most. Discover all that God has for you by getting to the heart of Christmas.

SAMPLE

WEEK 1



HOPE
IS AT THE HEART
OF CHRISTMAS

SAMPLE

WEEK 1 OVERVIEW

The Church has, for centuries, observed a season called Advent leading up to Christmas Day. The word *advent* comes from the Latin, meaning “the arrival.” Advent is a season observed in many Christian denominations as a time of expectant waiting and preparation for both the celebration of the Nativity of Christ at Christmas and the return of Christ at the Second Coming. Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem was unexpected in its location, but not in its happening, because the prophets of old had foretold of a coming Messiah. These prophetic words had given the Jewish people hope that one day God would restore the brokenness in the world that was created by sin and make all things right again. Just as God showed up in a powerful way on that first Christmas night, we can have hope that He will show up again in our lives today.

This week, read the six days of devotionals based on the theme of hope. Go deeper by engaging in the following activities and answering a few questions by yourself, with your family, or in a small group.



SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

—Isaiah 9:2



MOVIES GET TO THE HEART

Consider watching the following Christmas movie alone or with a group of people and wrestling with the questions that follow.

Movie Title: *A Charlie Brown Christmas*

Runtime: 25 minutes

In this 1965 classic, Charlie Brown expects to feel happy and excited that Christmas is right around the corner. However, rather than being elated at the prospect of this festive time of year, he is saddened by the rampant materialism that is all around him. It is evidenced by his sister Sally's Christmas letter to Santa and his dog Snoopy entering a Christmas decorating competition for a cash prize. Charlie finds himself disheartened and is afraid everyone has lost the heart of Christmas in the hustle and bustle of gifts and things.

It is not until his friend Lucy asks Charlie to direct a Christmas play that those things begin to turn around. After searching for a Christmas tree for the centerpiece of the show and choosing a small, sickly looking real tree, Charlie finds the hope he was longing for. It was not found in the gifts or the lights; it was found in the birth of Jesus. Charlie's friend Linus gives a rousing speech, complete with the Christmas story directly from Scripture, at the end of the film. He reminds Charlie Brown that the hope of Christmas is found in Christ. Hope is at the heart of Christmas.

Questions

1. Do you think our culture has lost the true meaning of Christmas? Why or why not?
2. How are the various characters in the film missing the heart of Christmas?
3. Why can't gifts, toys, and things bring lasting hope?
4. Why is the tiny, sickly tree such an important image within the story?
5. Why does Linus's speech at the end of the movie bring such hope?
6. How does the birth of Jesus bring you hope?



MUSIC GETS TO THE HEART

Alone, with your family, or as a small group, listen to the following Christmas hymn and wrestle with the questions that follow.

Hymn Title: “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus”

Author: Charles Wesley

Charles Wesley penned this beautiful Advent hymn and included it in his *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord* in 1744. The words of this song speak to the double nature of the Christmas season of hope as the Church celebrates both Christ's first coming and longs for His triumphant return.

Come, Thou long expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Questions

1. Why is it so hard to wait in life?
2. Why were the Jewish people waiting for Jesus to be born? Why had they long expected Him?
3. What was the world needing to be freed from? How did this enlighten their need for hope?
4. How might the presence of Christ in your life bring you hope?

1

HOPE WAS BORN

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and
the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty
God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

—Isaiah 9:6

When I held my firstborn son in the hospital, I cried. Typically, when people cry, it is because they are sad or have been hurt in some way, shape, or form, but the tears I shed that day were for none of those reasons. I have often thought back to the emotions I felt holding my little boy, and the closest I can get to explaining them fully is the word hope. The birth of my tiny child revealed to me all kinds of endless possibilities that lay ahead of him. His future was full of hope.

Christmas is about the remembrance of the birth of another Son so many years ago. This Son was divine and came to a broken world full of despair. The Bible says that when Jesus was born, it changed everything because He would be given authority to rule and reign in our midst in order to make all

WEEK 1: Hope Is at the Heart of Christmas

things right once again. There were, and are, endless possibilities because of His birth, life, death, and resurrection. He was called Wonderful Counselor because of His divine guidance. He was called Mighty God because nothing is impossible for Him. He was called Everlasting Father because of His endless love. He was called Prince of Peace because He has made us right with God. At the heart of Christmas is hope that the Son of God was born unto us.

PRAYER

God, thank you for sending your Son to be born in order to rescue us. Remind us today that the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace is in charge; therefore, anything is possible. May that give us hope today.

2

OVERFLOWING WITH HOPE

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

—Romans 15:13

My children love to prepare for Santa's arrival each Christmas Eve. Their favorite thing is to bake chocolate chip cookies and pick out a festive plate to put them on. They also love pouring a cold cup of milk to accompany the sweets by the fireplace. If they place it just right, they know old Saint Nick will be thankful for such a snack during his long trip. One year, my kids were a little overzealous, and while pouring, the milk overflowed the cup and covered the table. They were so upset at the mess they made, but we assured them it would be cleaned up in no time and Santa would appreciate the extra-full cup. The Bible tells us that God is zealous to fill us up just the same.

WEEK 1: Hope Is at the Heart of Christmas

As the God of hope, He pours joy and peace into our lives until we are overflowing. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are given more than enough for ourselves, and as our hearts overflow, we can share hope, peace, joy, and love with those around us. At the heart of Christmas is more than enough hope for all.

PRAYER

God, today I feel a bit empty. Would you pour into my soul the hope of your plan for my life, the peace of your presence, the joy of your salvation, and your unfailing and extravagant love for me? Give me more than enough so that I might let it overflow to others.

THE EYES OF OUR HEARTS

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.

—Ephesians 1:18

Experiencing Christmas through the eyes of a child is one of the most refreshing ways to embrace this holiday each year. To them, every twinkling light, every sweet candy cane, and every gift under the tree is thrilling and fills them with hope. Because of the hustle and bustle of Christmas, as adults it is easy to lose sight of the heart of the season and find it to be more of a chore than a joy.

Perhaps recalling Paul's words to the Ephesians can help us recover a childlike delight. Paul's prayer is for the eyes of our hearts to be enlightened. This is an interesting choice of words, as hearts lack the ability to see. However, it speaks

WEEK 1: Hope Is at the Heart of Christmas

to how we can perceive God with the totality of our being—body, soul, and spirit.

This enlightening that Paul prays for fills us with a hope that is unique to followers of Christ. It is an inheritance. An inheritance is something that is received by the family of one who has passed away, and according to Paul, Christ followers will receive an inheritance as well, as brothers and sisters of Jesus and sons and daughters of God. This inheritance is the hope of eternity, a rich and glorious union with God forever. This should instill within us a deep hope that the troubles and trials of this present world will not last forever; rather, we are given the opportunity, through Jesus' sacrifice, to receive the wonderful grace of God.

PRAYER

God, awaken my heart to your love today. I want to receive your grace, which is available to all who place their hope in you. This Christmas, I want to get back to the heart of the holiday and discover the thrill of hope in Christ.

4

BLESSED TRUST

*But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD,
whose confidence [hope] is in him.*

—Jeremiah 17:7

The commercialized understanding of Christmas has tainted the heart of the season. For many, to celebrate Christmas the proper way means spending more money than we have on things that we really do not need. I would argue that this idea has crept into the celebration of Christ's birth because we have a false sense of what it means to be blessed by God.

Many in the Western world determine blessing based on the amount of stuff someone has or how big their bank account is. This is not too far off from the ancient Middle Eastern understanding of blessing as well. If you and your family were healthy, well fed, and had many livestock, then you would have been considered blessed.

However, Jeremiah 17 challenges that thought. Blessing does not come from the number of gifts under the tree or the total value of what is unwrapped. Rather, true blessings are

WEEK 1: Hope Is at the Heart of Christmas

for those individuals who place their confident hope in Christ Jesus. When our hope is placed in the faithfulness of God, no matter what comes our way, we can know that we have His blessing over our lives.

PRAYER

God, forgive me for getting absorbed in desiring more stuff. I know that life is made up of more than the abundance of one's possessions. Strengthen my hope in you alone. I know that in you, I am blessed.

SAMPLE

5

WRITTEN TO TEACH

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

—Romans 15:4

In 1843, author Charles Dickens penned one of our most memorable Christmas stories: *A Christmas Carol*. The original title given to his work was *A Christmas Carol. In Prose. Being A Ghost Story Of Christmas*. *A Christmas Carol* chronicles the history of a man named Ebenezer Scrooge. Scrooge is an elderly miser who dislikes Christmas and disrespects people around him. He is only concerned with money—most notably at the expense of his employee Bob Cratchit. Dickens tells of three different ghosts of Christmas—past, present, and future—that visit Scrooge to teach him what really matters in

WEEK 1: Hope Is at the Heart of Christmas

life. On Christmas morning, Scrooge awakes a new man with joy and hope in his heart.

This story has been read for decades as a way of teaching us the same truths. The heart of Christmas is not about being stingy and greedy. It is about being generous. The Bible says that the Scriptures have been written for the same reasons. We read about those who have come before us to learn, to be encouraged, and to be filled with hope. May we never stop exploring God's Word so that we might become the people He longs for us to be.

PRAYER

God, help me to have a deep hunger for your Word. Teach me the lessons that others demonstrate within the Bible so that I might live life well. Thank you for the hope that we find through those who have been faithful to you.

6

THINGS HOPED FOR

*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for
and assurance about what we do not see.*

—Hebrews 11:1

When I was young, my grandparents always had a JCPenney catalog when Christmas drew near that my cousins and I would share. We each would take a pen and spend hours combing through the pages and circling the things we were hoping to receive for Christmas, complete with our initials so no one would get confused when the time came. My grandmother called them our “wish lists,” and as the days counted down, we kept up hope that we would get everything on our lists.

This is a lot like the faith of a Christian, actually. Though life can be full of difficulty and disappointment, faith causes us to trust that God can bring about the things that we hope for and the changes that we pray for. The renewal of a marriage, the forgiveness between friends, or the healing of a loved one is the type of thing that can weigh heavy on our hearts. Faith

WEEK 1: Hope Is at the Heart of Christmas

is hoping—with the assurance of God’s faithfulness—that He can do anything. But rather than simply circling items in a magazine, we circle our concerns in prayer, trusting that God is at work and one day we will see His goodness in our lives.

PRAYER

God, thank you that you can be trusted with anything in our lives because you are in control. You know the things that burden my heart today. In faith, I offer them to you and ask that you would fill my heart with hope. Your faithfulness in the past gives me assurance of your faithfulness in the future.

SAMPLE