

All Who Draw Near

A 25-Day Journey
to Christmas

LIFEWAY WOMEN

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How to Use This Study

Welcome to *All Who Draw Near: A 25-Day Journey to Christmas!*

Thank you for choosing to participate in this study during the Advent season. Advent is the four weeks leading up to Christmas that anticipates the coming of Christ through His birth and calls for us to prepare our hearts as we await His second coming.

This study will guide you through these days, sharpening your spiritual focus and enhancing your celebration. Though this is a 25-day study, it's laid out in four weeks, following the Advent calendar and culminating with a celebration on Day 25.

STUDY PLAN

You can approach this study in a couple ways:

1. If you're doing the study with a group, you can each complete the six days of personal study, then meet as a group on the seventh day of each week.
2. If you're doing the study as an individual, you can complete it in twenty-five consecutive days or stagger your days of study according to what best fits your schedule. Because we believe learning happens best in groups, we encourage you to invite a friend or two to go through the study at the same time.

PERSONAL STUDY

There are six days per week for personal study, but not all the days of the week are formatted in the same way. Here's a preview of what you can expect each week:

FIRST DAY: This day is a brief moment to pray and prepare your heart for the week's journey.

MIDDLE DAYS: On these four days you'll dig into Scripture as you examine the journey of one or more of the original Christmas travelers.

LAST DAY: This day is called "Rest Stop." It's a day to be still, pray, consider what you've experienced and learned from this week of study and how to apply it.

DAY 25 – CELEBRATION DAY!

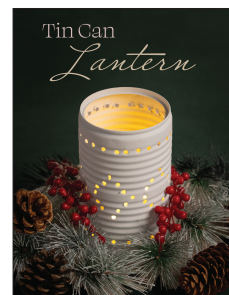
The last day of the Advent study is a time of celebration and final reflections. We've included Scripture, Christmas carol lyrics, and reflection questions to provide a fitting closing to this Advent journey. You may choose to do this day of study individually, with a friend or two, with your family, or with your Bible study group.

EXTRAS

Since this Advent study centers around a traveling theme, we've provided some extra features to help equip you for your own Christmas journeys!

FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY	WEEK 1
REACH COCKTAILS 1. In a medium bowl, whisking egg, add the remaining ingredients. 2. Stir to combine. 3. Refrigerate for 1 hour. 4. Serve with crackers. INSTRUCTIONS 1. Prepare the recipe in 2017. 2. In a small bowl, add the egg and whisk thoroughly, then add the flour and mix through.	5. In a medium bowl, whisking egg, add the remaining ingredients. 6. Stir to combine. 7. Refrigerate for 1 hour. 8. Serve with crackers. INSTRUCTIONS 1. Prepare the recipe in 2017. 2. In a small bowl, add the egg and whisk thoroughly, then add the flour and mix through.

FUN FOR THE JOURNEY
SAFE TRAVEL CITY OBJECTIVE: To identify the states in the United States. HOW TO PLAY: Start with the participant person in the vehicle for going across a city. Moving from person to person, the next person has to guess the city that they are in. The first person to guess correctly wins the game. OPTION: You can use a map to help you identify the states.



FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

We've provided several recipes for tasty snacks that are appropriate for all kinds of travel.

FUN FOR THE JOURNEY

Each week you'll find instructions for easy-to-play travel games suited for all ages.

CREATIVITY FOR THE JOURNEY

You'll find craft ideas to not only assist with your travel and make your home an inviting place for those who will travel to be with you!

LEADING A GROUP

We've provided some tools to help you lead your group through this study at lifeway.com/allwhodrawnear. There you'll find a free, downloadable Leader Guide to assist you in structuring each group meeting and facilitating group discussion. You'll also find free downloads to help you promote the study in your church or neighborhood.



Introduction

BY TESSA MORRELL

Embedded deep within all humans is the desire to learn, grow, be curious, and discover new things. From birth, we begin to explore with wonder the sounds, sights, smells, tastes, and tangible experiences that make up the world around us.

Travel provides an incredible way to learn and grow as we encounter new experiences. Traveling expands our understanding of other places and other cultures. It gives us opportunities to connect deeply with the people we love and offers moments to meet new and interesting strangers who become friends. We learn more about ourselves as we encounter new opportunities, fresh challenges, and exciting moments.

Travel is an interesting thread that winds its way throughout the story of Advent. Jesus Himself left the splendor and glory of heaven to humbly enter our world as a vulnerable, helpless baby. Mary and Joseph listened to the direction of God and followed wherever He led, even when it meant leaving everything behind. The shepherds marveled at an angelic interruption to their normal lives and hurried to Bethlehem to behold in awe and wonder the Messiah's birth. The wise men traveled for miles to find the King, whose arrival sparked intrigue and even danger, and they followed the star right to the feet of the King of kings and Lord of lords.



What was true at the time of Christ's incarnation (His arrival in a physical body in our world) remains true today: The Lord often moves in our lives by leading us to physically move our feet to new places. He leads us where He knows we need to go, whether it's across the street to care for a neighbor or around the world to share His love with those who have never heard of Him. Even when He doesn't lead us to change our physical location, He often calls us to travel outside of our comfort zones and step into a new understanding or a fresh opportunity to love and care for someone in our lives. And often He leads us to travel into new seasons—both good and beautiful ones and challenging and painful ones.

The amazing thing about our Savior is the reality that wherever He leads and wherever we go, He is right there with us. At Christmas, we're reminded that He is Immanuel, which means *God with us*. The beauty of the Advent season is the anticipation of both His first coming and His second coming. We get to enjoy journeying with Him as His children through our daily lives here on earth and forever into eternity in heaven.

Jesus Himself
left the
splendor
and glory of
heaven to
humbly enter
our world as
a vulnerable,
helpless baby.

WEEK

1



Jesus
**JOURNEY OF
RESCUE**

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

- ✦ Are you a fan of traveling? Why or why not? If so, what's your very favorite place you've traveled to? Why is it your favorite?
- ✦ When you were growing up, did your family travel during the Christmas season? If so, how often and where did you go? Is travel part of your Christmas schedule this year? If so, what are your holiday travel plans?
- ✦ What do you love most about this time of the year and why?
- ✦ Are you looking forward to this Christmas season? If so, why? If not, what seems to be hindering your joy and anticipation?
- ✦ Read Isaiah 9:6-7. How does this passage point us to the hope of Christmas? Which of the names—Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace—means the most to you in this season?
- ✦ Why do you want to be a part of this study and this group? What are you hoping to contribute and receive from this experience?

Prayer: Thank the Lord for the opportunity to be a part of this Advent study. Ask Him to help you not get caught up in the rush of Christmas but to slow down and maintain the right focus. Prepare your heart for this journey and give the Lord space to speak to you as you travel through these pages.

NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



DAY 1
You are here.

DAY 2
From Heaven to Earth
Philippians 2:5-11

DAY 3
God With Us
John 1:1-18



DAY 4
A Saving Mission
John 3:1-13



DAY 5
Coming Again
Acts 1:1-11



DAY 6
Rest Stop



TRIP PLANNER ✦ WEEK 1

Jesus: Journey of Rescue

TRAVEL NOTES

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, willingly gave up the glory of heaven to humbly come to earth to save us from our sin. John 1 tells us that He became flesh and dwelt among us. He expressed His unwavering love for the world through His incarnation, His ministry, His death, and His resurrection. He is our Rescuer and Redeemer, the One whose journey to our world changed everything. The King of the universe became a helpless child in the arms of ones He created so that we could know Him. He drew near to us so that we could draw near to Him. And we look forward to the day when He returns to take us home to be with Him forever.

THINGS TO DO

- **Food:** Ranch Crackers, Dill Crackers, Spicy Mini Crackers
- **Fun:** Name That City, Find the Fifty
- **Craft:** Tin Can Lantern

STUDY SUMMARIES

DAY 1: Prepare your heart for this week's study.

DAY 2: Jesus came from heaven to earth to sacrificially serve.

DAY 3: The Word became flesh to dwell with us.

DAY 4: God loved the world, so He sent His Son to save us.

DAY 5: Jesus's return prompts our mission as gospel witnesses.

PRAYER FOR THE TRAVELER

O Great Sojourner,

The One who left everything,

The One who chose

The hard route,

The humble road,

The lonely trail,

The way into darkness,

The path toward death,

Open our hearts to each step of your journey

From glory to grave and from grave to glory

That we might grasp the scale of Your love

And the enormity of Your deliverance

In the past

In the present

And—O Our Highest Hope—in the future

When You return, bringing heaven with You.

BY HANNAH WAKEFIELD

Prepare Your Heart

Before exploring the journey of Jesus from heaven, we've provided a verse for memorizing and meditating, a few questions to consider, and a prayer to help you prepare for what's ahead.

VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION: JOHN 1:14

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

How do you currently view God and the way He relates to humanity?

Would you be comfortable explaining the meaning and purpose of the incarnation to someone who is curious and wants to know more about Jesus? Why or why not?

Is the return of Christ top of mind, an occasional thought, a distant blip on the radar, or something you never consider? Why?

INSTEAD HE EMPTIED
HIMSELF BY ASSUMING
THE FORM OF A SERVANT,
TAKING ON THE LIKENESS
OF HUMANITY. AND WHEN
HE HAD COME AS A MAN,
HE HUMBLLED HIMSELF BY
BECOMING OBEDIENT TO
THE POINT OF DEATH—
EVEN TO DEATH
ON A CROSS.

Philippians 2:7-8

From Heaven to Earth

JULIE BUSLER

When my husband sold his car, I knew we were really moving. Becoming missionaries meant leaving privileges that accompanied his career as an engineer. Chasing the American dream kept us seated on the throne of our lives, but that's not where true joy is found. Joy is found in forsaking our plans out of obedience to God, even if that decision leads to sacrifice, even of our very lives. In Christianity we find life through death, and honor through humility. There is no greater example of humility than Jesus, who descended from the heavenly throne room to a lowly manger on that miraculous day in Bethlehem.

I assumed imitating Jesus would be simple. But it took God stripping me of abilities, dignity, and comfort (but not my identity) to grasp the depth of Christ's descent from dwelling in the radiant shekinah glory of God to being wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger.

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8.

This passage is an early Christian hymn which could be "a pre-Pauline hymn adapted by Paul. It is just as likely, however, that Paul composed the hymn for this setting."¹ Regardless of origin, this treasure in the Bible is the very heart of Christmas. At first glance, though, the beginning of this hymn may seem confusing. In order to understand the intended message, let's follow its rhythm.

In verse 6, what did Jesus *not* do?

In verse 7, what did Jesus *do*?

There are two words worthy of our attention in verses 6 and 7: *form* and *likeness*.

FORM: "No one could be in the form (morphe) of God who was not God,"² and Jesus is God (John 1:1). Jesus being the exact expression of God's nature (Heb. 1:3) means He is God's ultimate image bearer. Not only did preincarnate Jesus possess all the attributes of God, but He continued being fully God in His human state. He continued being what He's always been and will always be.

LIKENESS: This word means resemblance. “In His essence (morphe) He was God, but took upon Himself, in addition to His deity, the likeness of men (with a true human nature in a real body), yet without sin (Heb 4:15).”³ Likeness isn’t suggesting Jesus merely resembled humanity, but rather affirms He was fully human while offering the distinction that He was sinless. Romans 8:3 (NIV) affirms this truth by telling us God sent “his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.”

Given what you’ve just read, explain this statement in your own words:
When Jesus emptied Himself, He did not cease being God.

Christ’s emptying Himself is a controversial concept. The Greek word for empty (*kenoo*) can literally mean to pour out, which some interpret as Jesus ridded Himself of His deity. However, saying Jesus gave up His deity is inconsistent with the whole of Scripture. The word *empty* can also mean to give up privilege in a metaphorical sense. Paul wasn’t saying Jesus became less God but that Christ gave up His privileges to be born as a baby. Emptying Himself was not a subtraction, but rather a taking on of what we are. The divine Christ’s humility was further highlighted in the way He didn’t exploit His divine status or use it to His advantage.

Verse 8 says Jesus died on a cross. What do you think is significant about the form of death Jesus experienced?

Crucifixion was the cruelest, most shameful death ever devised, making the cross the ultimate display of the Savior’s humility and obedience to the Father. And this is what we must hold in view as we look forward to Christmas. Advent loses meaning if while we behold the manger we miss the shadow of the cross.

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:9-11. For what reason did God highly exalt Jesus (v. 9)?

The phrase *for this reason* points to God's response to Jesus's voluntary humiliation. Jesus made Himself low, so God raised Him high. This is the way of God's kingdom where the path up is down. Where to gain your life you must lose it. And the path to greatness is to be a servant. Jesus's journey down led to His exaltation. For His sacrifice and obedience, God exalted Him, giving Him the name above all names, "So that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11).

Let's work backward as we close our day of study.

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:1-5. What did Paul exhort us to do in verse 5?

What will be the character of our lives and our church if we embody the attitude of Christ (vv. 2-4)?

As Christ lived selflessly and loved sacrificially, we will too. We will walk together as a church in one purpose and one mind. We will make the journey across the aisle, across the street, across town, and across the world to love people as He has loved us, regardless of the cost.

What steps will you take this Advent season to reflect the humility of Christ in your life?

However the Lord leads you during this time of Christmas, may you display Immanuel's humility in the way you delight in giving rather than receiving, in serving rather than being served. Great joy will be found in giving of yourself for His sake.



THE TRUE LIGHT THAT GIVES
LIGHT TO EVERYONE WAS
COMING INTO THE WORLD.

John 1:9

God With Us

ERICA WIGGENHORN

When I'm looking for a Christmas gift for my culinary-loving husband, I search for the latest and greatest cooking gadget. Maybe someone on your gift list lights up over a new technology product that boasts brand-new features.

There is something about newness that excites us.

John opens his Gospel heralding the news that something extraordinarily new has arrived—Jesus!

READ JOHN 1:1-3.

While John attests the arrival of Jesus as the latest and greatest thing, he also points out this foundational truth: Jesus has always existed with the Father. “He was with God in the beginning” (John 1:2). John certainly had Genesis 1:1—“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”—in mind when he wrote his opening words. Jesus entered human history at a specific moment in time, yet He is the eternal Creator God clothed in flesh who spoke the world into existence.

Look carefully at John 1:3 and describe how active Jesus was in the creation of the world.

READ COLOSSIANS 1:15-17.

How active does Jesus continue to be in His creation?

John testified that EVERYTHING was created through Jesus. And Paul reinforced that truth in Colossians by stating that not only was everything created through Him, but it was also created by Him and for Him, and now, He is holding it all together. Jesus is the full revelation of God.⁴ We read throughout Genesis 1, “*Then God said,*” and aspects of creation were realized. As God is the Creator of it, He is also ruler over it. Nothing within creation remains outside of His control. Jesus, “*the Word,*” now speaks a new thing into His creation. His arrival demonstrates God’s desire to be present with us and His plan to make a way for us to draw near to Him.

Reflect on and respond to the following aspects of Jesus. How do these truths currently bring you comfort or peace?

Jesus is the eternal God, so He holds authority over all creation.

Jesus is also human, so He can sympathize with our loneliness, rejection, hurt, sadness, and the pain of life on earth.

READ JOHN 1:4-5,9.

In both Jewish and Greek belief, “life” came through adherence to truth.⁵ For the Jews, obedience to the laws of Moses brought life. While in Greek philosophy, life was achieved through virtuous behavior. Speaking to both groups, John points to Jesus alone as the Giver of life, not self-effort or rule-following.

Jesus is also described as “the true light,” meaning He was superlative to the light the law brought to the people. John also said the darkness could not “overcome” the light, meaning it could not “grasp, comprehend or overtake” it.⁶ Jesus’s opponents, neither earthly or spiritual, could control Him, understand Him, or stop Him.

John's words echo Isaiah's promise and prophecy in Isaiah 55:11. What does God say about His word in that passage?

According to John 1:9, to whom is "the light," or the truth of Jesus's salvation, available?

Does that mean that everyone will be saved? Explain.

READ JOHN 1:10-13.

How do these verses speak to the previous questions?

Light represents a great paradox. As a child I remember being afraid of the dark, but the hallway light brought a sense of safety. We seek light to navigate and avoid danger. But after a night of darkness, the dazzling rays of the morning sun hurt our eyes, and we turn away from it. So it was with Jesus. His presence revealed the way to God, but many rejected Him.

John 1:10-11 says Jesus was unrecognized and not received. How does it feel to be unwelcomed, unacknowledged, or rejected?

What did Jesus offer those who did receive Him according to John 1:12?

According to John 1:12-13, who gives spiritual “birth” to these children and how does it happen?

It is critically important for us to understand that we don’t come to Jesus through our family heritage, through self-determination, or because someone deems it so. We only become children of God when we “believe in His name.”

READ JOHN 1:14-18.

My aunt and uncle frequently took my cousins and me camping. We had a great time huddling together in the tent, giggling and telling stories long into the night. The overwhelming feeling of belonging wrapped around my heart like the coziness of my sleeping bag. I love the wording in John 1:14 that tells us the divine, glorious Jesus covered Himself in flesh and “tabernacled” or “tented” among us. Since the severing of the relationship between God and humanity in the garden of Eden, God has been taking steps to draw close to us. In Exodus 25:8, He told Moses to construct the tabernacle so that He could dwell among His people. Now, with the coming of Jesus, God took another step to close the divide between us.

Jesus came full of “grace and truth.” He embodied both the holiness of God and His lovingkindness. He was able to both call out sin and call us to Himself. Through His grace, Jesus “has rescued us from the domain of darkness . . . In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13-14). And now we continue to experience “grace upon grace.”

What do you think that phrase, *grace upon grace*, means?

I like how one scholar talked about it being like waves upon a seashore that lap up to the edge without ceasing.⁷ It just keeps coming and coming.

How do you continue to experience the grace of Christ every day?

Jesus's grace covered our sins and continues to empower us through the Holy Spirit. Through His grace we can continue to draw near, to grow in Him, and to minister in His name.

According to John 1:18, what was "the Word" sent forth to show us?

Jesus revealed God, and in doing so revealed God's desire to be close to us, to save us, to make us His own. But it's not grace to be hoarded; it's to be shared.

Who will you commit to pray for during this Advent season, that they would be open to the gospel and receive Jesus? What are some practical ways you can communicate and show God's grace and love to that person?

The greatest gift of Christmas will always and forever be the arrival of Jesus. He pierced through the darkness shining His light of love. Now it's up to us to share this gift of grace and truth that brings light into our dark world.

FOR GOD LOVED THE WORLD
IN THIS WAY: HE GAVE HIS
ONE AND ONLY SON, SO THAT
EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN
HIM WILL NOT PERISH BUT
HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. FOR GOD
DID NOT SEND HIS SON INTO
THE WORLD TO CONDEMN
THE WORLD, BUT TO SAVE
THE WORLD THROUGH HIM.

John 3:16-17

A Saving Mission

SARAH MCLEAN

Ask children what they like most about Christmas morning and most will undoubtedly say, “the presents!” Waking up to a Christmas tree surrounded by neatly wrapped packages of all shapes and sizes incites wonderous anticipation and excitement. Yet no matter how pretty the wrapping paper or how big the bow, what matters most is the gift inside. Even the most gorgeous wrapping paper cannot make up for a defective or thoughtless gift.

READ JOHN 3:1-13.

Summarize what you notice about Nicodemus and Jesus’s response to him.

When Nicodemus encountered Jesus at night, he came as a “neatly wrapped” Pharisee. On the outside Nicodemus looked righteous. He was a teacher of the law, and zealous about obeying it. In fact, Pharisees were so devout, they even added extra rules as safeguards to ensure they did not accidentally break an Old Testament law.⁸ Nicodemus was not only morally upstanding, but as a member of the Sanhedrin—like a Jewish Supreme Court—he was also a ruler of the Jews (v. 1).⁹ Outwardly, Nicodemus appeared like someone we would expect to make it into heaven.

But Jesus wasn’t impressed with Nicodemus’s resume. Because Jesus could see past the pretty packaging to Nicodemus’s heart (see John 2:25), Jesus segued right into a conversation about what it takes for someone to enter the kingdom of God.

According to Jesus, what’s the key to seeing the kingdom of God?

Have you ever tried to “clean-up” the outside of your life or tried to be good enough to earn God’s approval? If so, how?

READ TITUS 3:4-7.

According to these verses, what is the basis of our salvation—our works or God’s mercy and grace? Explain.

With kindness and patience, Jesus taught Nicodemus that a person can only enter the kingdom of God by being born again and experiencing a spiritual rebirth. Despite all of Nicodemus’s earthly accomplishments, apart from the life-giving work of the Spirit, Nicodemus was dead in his sins (see Eph. 2:1-4). He could do nothing to cause himself to be born again. Only the work of the Spirit brings new life to a spiritually dead person. Only the work of God in the hearts of sinners can cleanse them from the inside out, making them new creations.

Like Nicodemus, apart from the Spirit’s work in our hearts, we also remain dead in our sins. All of our good works will not erase our sins against a holy God. But if we are powerless to save ourselves, how can we ever be saved? Verse 13 gives us good news: The Son of Man, Jesus Christ, journeyed from heaven to complete the greatest saving mission.

READ JOHN 3:14-18.

What comes to mind when you think about God’s heart toward you? Do you imagine Him as angry and annoyed with your sinful failures? Or do you see Him as loving, kind, and merciful? Explain.

READ EXODUS 34:5-7 and list how God describes Himself.

How do you see His self-description displayed in John 3:16?

Three words changed history forever: *For God loved*. Before the world began, God loved all people—Jew and Gentile—and had a plan to rescue them. His abounding faithful love moved Him to send His Son into the world to die for sinners. As Romans 5:8 says, “But God proves his own love for us in that *while we were still sinners*, Christ died for us” (emphasis mine).

Because of our sinful nature, we cannot earn or merit God’s love. Yet He loves us and revealed His love through the costly, precious gift of His one and only Son. Just as Moses lifted up the bronze snake to save the Israelites from death (Num. 21:4-9), Jesus was lifted up on the cross for the sins of the world. Through Jesus, God reveals His character to be both gracious and just—gracious in forgiving all who believe in Jesus and just in sending Jesus to bear the punishment we deserve.

READ LUKE 19:10 AND JOHN 3:17.

What was God’s purpose in sending Jesus into the world?

Use a dictionary to define the following words:

Perish

Condemn

REREAD JOHN 3:16.

What does Jesus mean by “believes in Him”? What is the outcome of belief in Jesus?

God didn't send Jesus into the world to condemn the world. Why not? All people are already pronounced guilty because of their sin (see Rom. 6:23). From the time sin entered the world in the garden of Eden, every person stands condemned before a righteous God. Instead, Jesus's saving mission was to rescue people who could not save themselves. Without faith in Jesus, sinners will perish—that is, they will face eternal destruction in hell. But because of His great love, God sent Jesus to take our punishment so our sins could be forgiven.

Jesus reminds us that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. But what does it mean to believe in Jesus? To believe in Jesus means we accept by faith the reality of who He is and what He has done on our behalf. We trust that His life, death, and resurrection alone save us from our sins and give us eternal life.

How does the reality of people's eternal state without faith in Christ encourage you to share the gospel?

Who do you know that needs to hear the good news of Jesus's saving grace? Pray for them and ask God to give you boldness to share the gospel.

When we hear the gospel and respond by believing in Jesus, we are saved from our sins and given eternal life as we are “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (Eph. 1:13). And the Holy Spirit not only guarantees that we will receive life forever with God, but He also gives us new life now. God’s Spirit causes us to be born again, making us alive in Christ. Through faith in Jesus, we become new creations who desire to follow God’s ways, and out of love for Him, live for His glory.

How has the gift of salvation changed how you live now and how you view eternity?

This Advent season, reflect upon God’s great love for you and how His love was revealed by sending Jesus to provide your salvation. As we look forward to Christ’s return, we respond to His saving work by living in the new life He died to give us—asking Him to transform us from the inside out.

THEY SAID, “MEN OF
GALILEE, WHY DO YOU
STAND LOOKING UP INTO
HEAVEN? THIS SAME JESUS,
WHO HAS BEEN TAKEN FROM
YOU INTO HEAVEN, WILL
COME IN THE SAME WAY
THAT YOU HAVE SEEN HIM
GOING INTO HEAVEN.”

Acts 1:11

Coming Again

ANA HOEKSEMA

Most of us love a good cliffhanger! The show or movie takes us right up to the edge of a dilemma . . . then leaves us there. While the unresolved situation might be a little frustrating, we wait with expectation for that next chapter to unfold when the mystery is revealed, the problem is resolved, and all is made right.

When Jesus came to earth the first time, He came to accomplish the work of salvation, living a perfect life, dying a sacrificial death, rising again to conquer death forever, then ascending to the Father. What a story! But that was not the end. In today's study, Jesus leaves us with a cliffhanger. He may have left, but He is coming again.

READ ACTS 1:1-3.

Take a look at a few of the following passages and note some of the convincing proofs Jesus provided to His followers confirming that He was alive.

Matthew 28:16-20	
Luke 24:13-35	
John 20:11-20	
John 21:1-14	
1 Corinthians 15:5-7	

Why do you think the apostles needed proof?

Most of us deal with times when we lack assurance of our relationship with the Lord or maybe encounter situations that feel hopeless and God feels far away. One way to combat those feelings is to remind ourselves of “many convincing proofs” that Jesus is alive and God is near.

What has God done for you that can only be explained as His hand on your life? How have you seen Him work powerfully in your life in the past? How has He provided for you, guided you, or spoken to you through His Word?

Let's not stop reminding ourselves who He is and what He's done.

PURPOSE

READ ACTS 1:4-8.

Why did the apostles need to stay in Jerusalem instead of being sent out right away?

The disciples were commanded to wait for the Father's promise—the promise of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had already told them that the Holy Spirit would be coming to be their Counselor, Comforter, Teacher, and Guide (John 14:16-17,26; 15:26; 16:7). But in verse 8, He told them the Spirit would also empower them for an assignment.

What did Jesus tell the disciples the Holy Spirit would empower them to be and do?

In verse 8, Jesus gave His followers a new purpose—to be His witnesses. They would be the ones to carry the gospel to the world, and they had to be ready. So, He told them to wait in Jerusalem because they weren't yet ready to travel to the ends of the earth. They were simple men commissioned to tell an extraordinary story. They would need great power to fulfill this purpose.

All of us as believers have that same calling—to be His witnesses. Maybe for you it's to share the good news with your neighbor or to build a relationship with an unsaved coworker. Maybe you're called to teach a class to equip others to be on mission, or to be involved in short-term or full-time missions.

What current assignment has the Lord given you as His witness in your Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the world?

How is the Holy Spirit empowering you to fulfill your assignment?

PROMISE

READ ACTS 1:9-11.

After Jesus issued the command for His followers to be witnesses, He was taken up into heaven in a cloud.

How did the apostles react to Jesus's departure? What do you think they felt and thought as they watched Jesus go out of their sight?

Most of us have probably had times in our lives when overwhelming circumstances left us stunned or shocked, not sure what to do next. It seems the apostles were in one of those moments. They had the proof of the resurrection and a promise of the Spirit's power to come, but still, they could do nothing but stand "gazing into heaven" (v. 10).

It took a couple of angels to shake them from their spots. The angels admonished them, "Why do you stand looking into heaven? This same Jesus . . . will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven." The angelic words were both a comfort and a challenge. The apostles now had the promise to go with the proof and the purpose. But they couldn't stay in that spot and wait; it was time to move forward.

How does the promise of Jesus returning affect how you live your life? Does it give you a different perspective? Does it change your priorities? Explain.

During Advent season, we often give a lot of attention, as we should, to Jesus's coming as a helpless babe. But let us remind ourselves and each other of the ultimate promise: Our King has won, and He's coming again. Until then, let's stand on the truth of what Jesus has accomplished for us, and live out our purpose as witnesses in the power of the Holy Spirit.



REST STOP

For some journeys, we're in a hurry. We can't wait to get to a vacation destination or to see a family member or old friend. So, we bypass things of interest or beautiful sights along the way because the destination holds such promise.

Our ultimate spiritual destination as Christ followers does hold great and wonderful promise, but we're not in a rush to get there. Along the way we need to grow and learn and study and share and witness. That means taking time to stop, ponder, and pray. So, that's what we're going to do on the last day of each week. We're going to pull over to the side and not rush to the next week of study.

This week you looked at the journey of Jesus from heaven's throne room to the manger. At this rest stop, consider the sacrifice He made for us so that we might be with Him and how you need to respond.



Take the exit and enjoy the rest.

QUIET First, take a minute, put down your pen or pencil, and just be quiet before the Lord. Ask Him to still your heart so that you can truly rest in Him and hear His voice.

REFLECT Look back over the days of study this week. Which one was most meaningful to you and why?

Jot down some key things you learned this week.

How has what you've learned this week impacted your spiritual journey?
Consider the following:

How has it convicted you?

How has it comforted you?

How has it challenged you?

How has it changed you?

To support and reinforce what you've learned this week, meditate for a few moments on the following passages of Scripture that speak of the rescue we have received from the Lord.

*And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient. **Ephesians 2:1-2***

*He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. **Colossians 3:13-14***

*For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. **Romans 5:6-8***

ACT What are next steps you need to take in your spiritual journey to know Christ more deeply? To grow in your faith? To share the message of Christ's rescue mission with others?

PRAY Before you leave the rest stop, take some time to pray. Thank God for what He's done for you. Submit your life to Him to be used for His purpose. Express your trust in the Lord and your desire to love and serve Him as you continue your journey with Him. Feel free to write your prayer in a separate journal or notebook.

Ranch Crackers

INGREDIENTS

- 1 1 oz. packet ranch dressing mix
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 1 tsp. garlic salt
- 1 9 oz. bag oyster crackers
- 1 bag Goldfish® crackers

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 250°F.
2. In a small bowl, add the oil, ranch dressing mix, and garlic salt. Stir until mixed through.

3. In a 1-gallon-size zipper bag, add the crackers and oil mixture.
4. Seal the bag and toss until well-coated.
5. Arrange the crackers on an ungreased half-sheet pan in a single layer.
6. Bake the crackers for 15 to 20 minutes or until golden.
7. Cool and keep in an airtight container for snacking!

Dill Crackers

INGREDIENTS

- 1 Tbs. lemon pepper
- 1 Tbs. dill weed
- 1 cup oil
- 1 package ranch dressing mix
- 1 box oyster crackers

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Stir the first four ingredients together.
2. Add crackers and stir together.
3. Pour into an air-tight container and let stand overnight.

Spicy Mini Crackers

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup of vegetable oil
- 2 Tbs. pickle juice
- 1 Tbs. paprika
- 1 Tbs. dried dill
- 1 Tbs. red pepper flakes
- 1 packet ranch dressing mix
- 1 16 oz. box mini saltine crackers

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 250°F
2. Mix first six ingredients in a large bowl.
3. Add saltines to the bowl and gently stir until crackers are well coated.
4. Spread crackers out on baking sheet and bake for about 30 minutes, stirring every 10 minutes.
5. Allow crackers to cool before serving.

FUN FOR THE JOURNEY

NAME THAT CITY

OBJECTIVE: To be the last person to name a city.

HOW TO PLAY: Start with the youngest person in the vehicle (or group) naming a city. Moving from youngest to oldest, the next person has to name a city that starts with the last letter of the previously named city. So if Player 1, says, "Denver." The next player has to name a city that starts with "R." And the game continues until a player is stumped. If a player cannot name a city in one minute, they are eliminated. Continue playing until only one player is left.

OPTION: You can set boundaries on what cities can be named. You could use just U.S. cities, or you could make it worldwide.

FIND THE FIFTY

OBJECTIVE: To identify the most U.S. license plates over the course of your trip.

HOW TO PLAY: Provide each player with a license plate score sheet that has all fifty states listed, plus some extra empty plates available in case players see license plates from outside the U.S. (Visit lifeway.com/allwhodrawnear to find a downloadable scoresheet you have permission to copy.)

When a player spots a license plate and is the first one to point it out, that player is the only one who gets to mark it off the score sheet. The player with the most plates marked off at the end of the trip is the winner.

OPTION: You can play this game in teams, or for a less competitive game, the whole group can work together to spot and mark off as many license plates as possible.

Tin Can *Lantern*





At Christmas, we're surrounded by light. Twinkling Christmas lights adorn our homes inside and out, candlelight services fill the air with collective light, and the warm glow of a fireplace permeates our homes.

This project is a simple reminder that Jesus is the Light of the world (John 8:12), and as God's children we get to shine His light and proclaim His love not only at Christmas, but every day of the year (Matt. 5:14-16).

SUPPLIES

- Recycled tin can
- Nail
- Permanent marker
- Hammer
- Tea or votive candle

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Choose a tin can to recycle for this project. You can use a soup can, coffee can, etc.
2. Empty, clean, and dry the can. If you want to paint it, you can do that before or after you punch holes in the can.

3. Use a permanent marker to add dots to make a pattern where light will shine through the sides of the can. Draw a pattern freehand or download free patterns at lifeway.com/allwhodrawnear. To use a template, cut it to the size you need, wrap it around the can, and tape it in place.
4. Carefully place a nail on each dot and hammer a hole deep enough to break all the way through the side of the can. (You can also use a drill to create the holes.)



TIP: Prevent the can from caving in while you hammer by filling it with water (leaving about an inch at the top). Freeze it overnight and hammer holes into the can with the frozen water holding its shape. Or fill the can with an old towel or blanket to support the shape as you work.



5. Place a small candle at the bottom of the can to shine through the holes you created.

TIP: *If you choose to paint your lantern and want to use a real candle, be sure to choose a paint that is safe to use around open flames. Battery-operated candles also work well!*