

# advent readings



A REFLECTIVE COLLECTION TO GUIDE US  
BACK TO OUR CENTER, JESUS CHRIST, AND  
CELEBRATE HIS COMING TOGETHER.

BY THE COUNSELORS AT FULL LIFE CHRISTIAN COUNSELING

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# guide

TO BE USED WITH RECORDINGS

- 4. A Blessing
- 5. Remember Your Hope
- 9. Renew Your Faith
- 12. Find Your Joy
- 16. Center in Peace
- 19. Know You are Loved



# a blessing

by Kerrah Fabacher

The holidays can be a time of great joy and great sorrow. We come together with loved ones to celebrate the newborn King, and if we're honest, we're not always up for celebrating. Life has been hard lately, hasn't it? There is a tradition in the Christian liturgical calendar called Advent, where we celebrate the birth of Christ, His promised coming, and we anticipate Him coming again. But in the waiting, life can be pretty painful. Just as I'm sure it was painful for the people of God to await the first coming of our Messiah.

In the waiting, we struggle with our health, our relationships, our faith, and so many more things. These struggles often steal us away from the One who centers us, who grounds us. This collection of readings is to help you come back home, to return to the One who brings hope, faith, joy, peace, and love into our lives when those things feel far away. So here is our prayer as you partake in these readings this Advent season:

May you remember your hope  
Renew your faith  
Find your joy  
Center in peace  
And know you are loved.

Amen.

# remember your hope

Written and Recorded by Kerrah Fabacher

Featuring Aria Styles on the violin and *Background Slow Piano* by Praded on Envato

The celebration of Advent sometimes doesn't feel like a celebration at all. The waiting and anticipation of the coming Christ can be a bit tiresome, if we're honest. We celebrate His first coming, and now we anxiously await His second.

While the world burns around us. While hatred from one person to the next runs wild. While wars still happen and disease and famine and pain. While division is more prevalent than ever before, even among God's people. Especially among God's people.

In the waiting, there is often so much pain.

And that is hard.

Today, you have permission to feel it. To feel it all.

Can you take a deep breath right now, and acknowledge whatever it is you feel. In your specific situation, from your experience.

What is that you feel?

Weary?

Lifeless?

Depressed?

Lonely?

Angry?

Hopeless?

Worthless?

What is that you feel?

Will you name it with me?

We all wait and groan for Christ to return, to make good on the promise of eternity, of no more tears and no more pain. We long for him to come and make things right again.

But the beauty of the waiting, of our waiting, is that we still have hope.

The first Sunday of Advent, we light the hope candle, believing that Jesus will fulfill his promises and the prophecies of old.

If you have a candle or Advent candles, you may take a moment and light the hope candle. It is usually purple.

We have hope.

We believe it.

Not based on what we see.

Because what we see is weariness, depression, loneliness, hopeless, and worthlessness. What we see is darkness.

The life and death and resurrection of Jesus brought light back into our darkness.

In Hosea chapter 6, it says,

“Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces; now he will heal us. He has injured us; now he will bandage our wounds. In just a short time he will restore us, so that we may live in his presence.

Oh, that we might know the LORD! Let us press on to know him. He will respond to us as surely as the arrival of dawn or the coming of rains in early spring.” (Hosea 6:1-3, NLT)

Though our lives feel so hard sometimes, especially lately, we know He is our only hope. Because we choose to believe He is faithful to his promises.

That He will be ever present with us.

That He will love us no matter what.

That He will save us.

And redeem us.

And restore.

And respond.

And reconcile us to God.

And return to us again.

You may be way too acquainted with grief and pain and trauma. There may seem like much more darkness in your story than light. And there may have been and maybe still are more moments where it feels God isn't near than moments you feel his presence more clearly.

And your pain is valid. Your feelings are valid.

But your hope?

Your hope doesn't come from your circumstances.

And it doesn't change based on your circumstances.

No.

It remains steadfast.

Strong. Unmoving.

Like an anchor.

Your hope comes from Jesus.

And Him alone.

And He will breathe light back into your life.

Let me read Hebrews 6:16-20 over you.

“Now when people take an oath, they call on someone greater than themselves to hold them to it. And without any question that oath is binding. God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind. So God has given both His promise and His oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary. Jesus has already gone in there for us.” (Hebrews 6:16-20a, NLT).

“O Soul, are you wearied and troubled?  
No light in the darkness you see?  
There’s light for a look at the Savior,  
And life more abundant and free.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in his wonderful face  
And the things  
Of earth  
Will grow strangely dim  
In the light of his glory and grace.

(Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus, written in 1922 by Helen Howarth Lemmel)

Lord Jesus,

Will you breathe hope back into my soul?  
Will you show me the light?  
Will you forgive me when I turn my eyes  
Only to my circumstances?  
Will you give me strength to turn them back to you?  
Jesus,  
I choose to trust in your hope.  
The hope that’s an anchor for my soul.  
The hope that keeps me going.  
That reminds me there is more.

In Jesus’ name,

Amen.



# reflect



1. WHAT ARE YOU FEELING RIGHT NOW ABOUT THINGS GOING ON IN YOUR LIFE OR IN THE WORLD? CAN YOU FIND A SPECIFIC NAME FOR THE FEELING(S)?

2. WHAT SITUATIONS IN YOUR LIFE FEEL HOPELESS AND WHY?

3. WHAT DOES 'HOPE' MEAN TO YOU?

4. WHICH TRUTHS ABOUT GOD DO YOU NEED TO CLING TO IN ORDER TO HAVE HOPE?

5. WHAT FEELS LIKE 'LIGHT' TO YOU IN THIS SEASON YOU'RE IN?

6. WHAT'S ONE THING YOU CAN DO TODAY TO HELP YOU FIND HOPE?



# renew your faith

Written and Recorded by Christi Hagans

Featuring *Sad Cello* by Praded on Envato and *10,000 Reasons*, sung by Christi Hagans, Lyrics by Matt Redman and Jonas Myrin

What is the Christmas season like for you? Is it bright and full of joy? Being around your people, celebrating, exchanging gifts, sharing meals, and reflecting on the last year. Or is it sorrowful? Are you reminded of someone no longer with you this Christmas season?

For those of us finding that uncomfortable place of holding joy and sorrow simultaneously, we are familiar with looking to something outside of ourselves to sustain us. In those uncomfortable places, many of us may find ourselves clinging to faith.

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we cannot see. That sounds nice and polished, but oftentimes, clinging to faith can be quite the struggle and even down right agonizing. Abraham, Sarah, and their fellow Isrealite ancestors understood this well in the Old Testament.

Abraham was promised a son that would result in ancestors that outnumbered the stars when he was well past his prime. And even though Abraham and Sarah, out of desperation, took matters into their own hands, resulting in an affair and an estranged son, Ishmael, God remained faithful to His word. Twenty-five years after God's promise, Abraham and Sarah had a son named Isaac. He was the beginning of a long line of descendants that would ultimately lead to Jesus, the promised Messiah.

We, like the Isrealites, are waiting for what is promised. We, too, wait for our Messiah to return in order that all will be restored and made right. We long and wait for a Kingdom and home run by a good God. Just as the Israelites waited for rest in their land, we wait for our ultimate rest in the presence of Jesus Christ.

We may struggle to picture this new Heaven and new earth, because we haven't experienced anything quite like it. We can't understand a relationship with someone that never lets us down, that never disappoints, that never hurts us (intentionally or unintentionally).

We may struggle to fathom rest that satisfies and doesn't need to be replenished. Can you imagine it? We will one day walk and not grow weary. We will no longer strive to make it through the days, or the months, or the years. These are the promises spoken over us.

You may currently be in a season where your faith in these promises is wavering, because you've been walking through hard things. Maybe you've lost a relationship, a loved one, a job, or gained a mental or physical ailment. All of these things are so hard. Whatever your circumstances may be, despite the strength or weakness of your faith, you can trust the God we serve and the Christ we anticipate and the Holy Spirit who empowers us, to remain faithful, even when we are faithless.

You see, in order to maintain our faith, we must rely on God, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Our faith begins with God, is held and continuously perfected by God and will ultimately find it's resting place when we meet God face to face.

Can you picture that? Sitting face to face with the Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father. Face to face with the One who intercedes for us. Face to face with the One who is able to open the scrolls. Face to face with the One who holds all glory, honor and power forever and ever, amen.

This is why we cling to our faith. We hold tightly to it, even when things seem dark or unpredictable, because we know redemption is coming. We know new mercies are coming. We know healing is coming. We know the ultimate reconciling of the broken clay and the healing hand of the Holy potter are coming. Isn't this good news of great joy?!

Just as God spoke "let there be light" in the beginning, at the end the Lamb will say "Behold, I am making all things new" and we will walk into a beautiful eternity. Amen and amen and amen.





# reflect

1. JUST AS THE ISRALITES WERE WAITING FOR THE PROMISED MESSIAH, WE ARE WAITING FOR OUR ETERNAL REST IN OUR NEW HOME, LED BY A GOOD GOD. WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU TO PERSONALLY WAIT FOR THE LORD AND TRUST HIM WITH FAITH?
  
2. WHAT OBSTACLES MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO WAIT AND CLING TO THE FAITHFUL PROMISES FOUND IN SCRIPTURE?
  
3. WHAT PROMISES ARE YOU WAITING FOR GOD TO FULFILL?
  
4. HEBREWS REMINDS US OF CHRIST'S PLACE, INTERCEDING FOR HIS PEOPLE TO THE FATHER. HOW WOULD YOUR FAITH (AND LIFE) BE IMPACTED IF YOU REMEMBERED CHRIST INTERCEDES ON YOUR BEHALF?

# find your joy

Written and Recorded by Kendall Knowles

Featuring *Piano Dreams* by Amandasounds on Envato and *I've Got Peace Like a River* with Mark Anthony Thomas

Joy. As we come to the midpoint of Advent, we focus on joy. We light the pink candle, sing joy to the world, and praise God for His “tidings of comfort and joy.”

But what is it that we are really looking for?

Joy feels hard to find.

It feels illusive even. Like it is hiding from us, refusing to be found. Refusing to make itself known.

When we think of joy, we think of sunshine, happiness.... All the warm and fuzzy things.

In Luke 2, the gospel writer is telling us the story of Jesus' birth. Mary and Joseph have traveled to Bethlehem and Mary gives birth to Jesus while they are there.

Scripture says:

“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, **‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.’** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

‘Glory to God in the highest,

and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!’ “ (Luke 2:8-14)

Having joy in advent is a balancing act.

In one hand we hold the joy, excitement, and relief we feel at the news of the coming Savior.

In the other hand we hold the sorrow of all we have lost and all we eagerly wait for.

James 1 commands us to “consider it pure joy when we face trials of many kinds”. This joy is only possible when it is anchored in the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ.

As we hold the tension of joy and disappointment, hurt, sadness, confusion... whatever it may be... turn your attention to your body. Take a deep breath... the kind that makes your belly move. Take a moment to notice the sensations you feel in your body as you continue taking those deep breaths. What do you feel as you think of loss? Disappointment? Despair?

Now notice what you feel when you think about the birth of Christ. What do you feel in your body? There is no right or wrong answer to either of these questions... it is not good, bad, right, or wrong. It just is.

Can you feel them both at the same time?

Both are present.

Both deserve to be acknowledged.

But here is the good news: pain will end and joy lasts. Pain will end and joy lasts!

In Psalm 16 the Psalmist declares that his heart is glad and his whole being rejoices because the Lord is with Him! "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." (vs. 11)

Matthew 1:21-23 says:

"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. And all this took place to fulfill what the Lord has spoken by the prophet: behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us)."

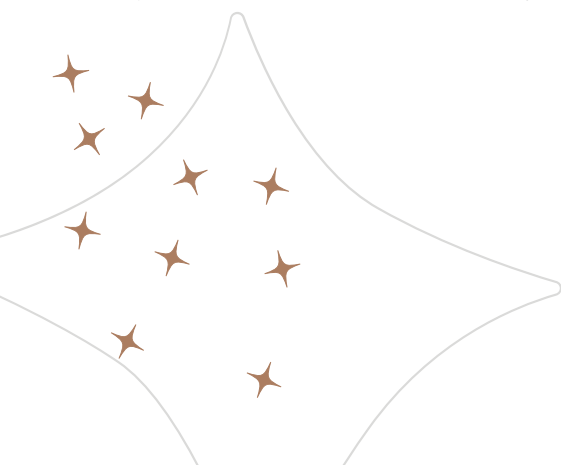
We have joy in advent because God Himself came to earth and dwelt among us. When we are in His presence we have the fullness of joy. That is why the coming of Jesus was good news of great joy to all people--all people could now encounter the fullness of Joy through the presence of Jesus.

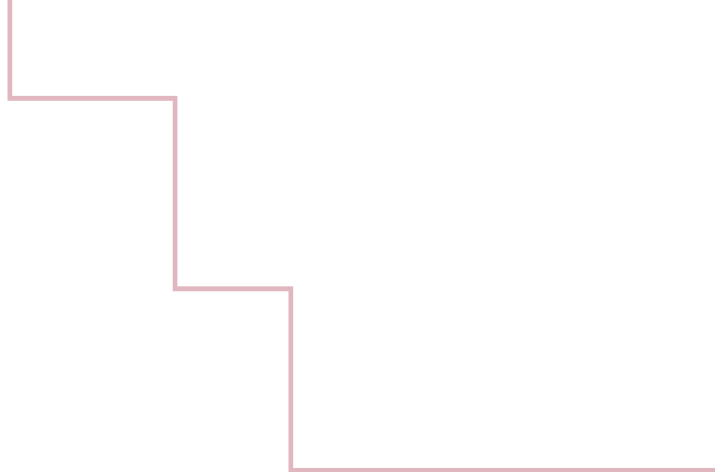
Take a deep breath. Invite God to be with you in this moment. Notice His presence around you. And just be there. Be fully present in this moment with Jesus-- your Immanuel.

As we walk through sorrow, we have joy within our souls because the spirit of God dwells with us, and one day we will be in perfect union with Him. Until then, we live in the tension. We press on to know Him and experience Him on this side of eternity. We fight to hold on to the joy.

When it seems hard to find the joy, we can rest assured in the promise that His presence brings the purest form of joy. And that He is always with us. He has promised to always be with us.

As we reflect on Joy in advent... in the waiting, close your eyes and picture that physical sensation of joy. [Maybe you feel your shoulders relax, your body feels a little more settled... maybe your chest feels relaxed... maybe your cheeks feel warm.] Now imagine Jesus sitting next to you. Notice what changes about that sensation of joy. Rest in Him. Your joy is secure in His presence.





To close, I want to share part of a liturgy for you:

Let us not deny sadness,  
but transform it into fertile soil for more joy.

Let us not deny the darkness,  
but choose to live in the light.

Cynics seek darkness wherever they go,  
but joy is the mark of the people of God.

Help us discipline ourselves to choose joy  
for the reward is joy itself.

Help us renew our minds until they default to joy and not fear,  
for there is so much to frighten us.

Help us believe that the Light can be trusted,  
for there is so much darkness to mislead us.

Jesus, you are both the Man of Sorrows and the Man of Complete Joy,  
help us to hold both sorrow and joy in the ways you've shown us.

Help us to remain in your love  
so that your joy may be in us  
and our joy may be complete.

Liturgy: <https://liturgies.nyc/A-Liturgy-for-Those-Looking-for-Joy>

# reflect



1. COMPARE AND CONTRAST THE DIFFERENT PHYSICAL SENSATIONS YOU NOTICED. WHICH ARE MOST FAMILIAR? DID ANY OF THEM SURPRISE YOU?

2. ARE THERE SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES, EXPERIENCES, OR RELATIONSHIPS THAT MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO FEEL JOY?

3. IF JESUS CAME THAT WE MIGHT HAVE JOY, HE WANTS TO HELP YOU BALANCE THE TENSION. IN WHAT WAY DO YOU NEED THE MOST HELP HOLDING ON TO JOY?

4. HOW CAN YOU REMAIN IN GOD'S LOVE SO THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE COMPLETE?

# center in peace

Written and Recorded by Travis Pollard

Featuring *Peacefulness* by Mikestown on Envato and *It Is Well With My Soul* with Evan Bergeron

We read that God created the world and all that is in it in six days, then on the seventh He rested. God looked at all He had created and said that it was good. Everything operated in the way it was designed. All of creation dwelled together in perfect peace. This might sound like a far off story, but it is what we were all crafted to experience. Can you imagine what this peace must have felt like?

Maybe take a step closer and begin to imagine the most peaceful moment you can remember. Notice with curiosity what you are sensing. What do you see? What can you feel? Are there any sounds? Do you notice the scent of the scene? I wonder if you could taste something soothing. This is but a glimpse of the Peace experienced in the Garden.

Imagining such peace might be difficult for you to engage with because you might not have any memories you can recall that resemble peace. Our perfect peace was broken and distorted in the same place it was brought together. After the Fall in Genesis 3, we have been cursed with pain, suffering, toil, enmity, and great tension. These curses are a direct disruption of the peace God orchestrated in His creation. You have been affected by this directly. Your pain, sorrow, trauma, broken relationships, and suffering are all real experiences. They scream loud that there is an absence of peace on Earth. They scream loud that we yearn for peace once again.

Advent season is a great celebration of the most intrusive infiltration of peace the Earth has experienced since the dawn of creation.

If you have a candle near you, or Advent candles, take a moment to light the Peace candle. It is usually purple to represent the royalty and sovereignty of Christ. That night when Jesus was born, the Scriptures say, a host of Angels proclaimed that Peace was brought to Earth.

Even the Angels knew the Earth had suffered without any peace for so many years, as they celebrated their announcement. A glimpse of hope. God will restore His peace back to His creation. The savior of the world is here. The only savior that will bring us peace.

The savior of the world is here. He has brought with him peace. Abounding peace. His word says that we are to shod our feet with the Gospel of Peace. This Gospel infiltrates all of existence; nothing is not affected by it. With the Gospel comes peace. In your own story, as you walk in the truth of the Gospel, notice how peace ensues.

We celebrate the first coming of the Christ this Advent season, while we anticipate earnestly his second coming. You have the ability to experience peace here on Earth because Jesus came to redeem us.



You may revel in the graciousness of God that He would grant you peace in your specific circumstances. He knows your story. As you remember His story, meditate on His peace. While here on Earth, we will not experience perfect peace. You will still face trials and suffering. There will be moments where you cry out for peace. Moments of sickness, chronic pain, great loss and grief, distorted or even abusive relationships, and deep sorrow or anxiety. In these moments we look to the promise of Christ's return. He is coming back. He will restore the righteous and all of creation to His perfect peace. Listen to what the prophet Isaiah says in Chapter 11:

6And the wolf will dwell with the lamb,  
And the leopard will lie down with the young goat,  
And the calf and the young lion [a]and the fattened steer will be together;  
And a little boy will lead them.

7Also the cow and the bear will graze,  
Their young will lie down together,  
And the lion will eat straw like the ox.

8The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra,  
And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.

9They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,  
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD  
As the waters cover the sea.

10Then on that day

The nations will resort to the root of Jesse,  
Who will stand as a signal flag for the peoples;  
And His resting place will be [b]glorious.

Peace will be fulfilled once again. For you, your neighbor, and all of creation. There will be no more enmity, no more pain, no more suffering.

There will be peace.

Abounding peace.

### *A Liturgy*

We praise you, O God, for the promise of Peace you have embodied in Christ

For You have not turned your face from our toil and suffering

Bless you, O Lord, for the grace you have gifted us in the flesh of Jesus

We eagerly anticipate His long-awaited arrival

Indeed, a day is coming where we shall embrace your perfect peace

A day in which every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the savior of the world

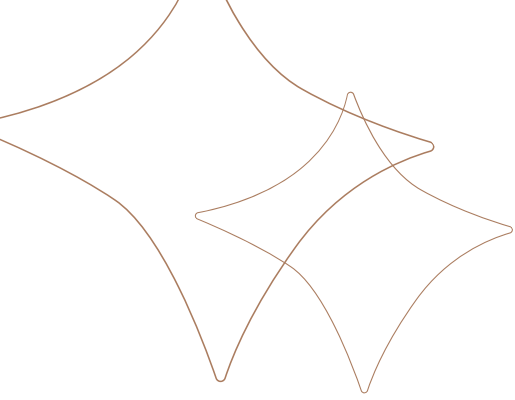
Until then, grant us, O Lord, the awareness of the peace you have already brought in the midst of the tension

Teach us to rest in You until that glorious day in which you will restore Your creation

Let our lives be a testimony of Your greater narrative as we yearn for Your presence

Praise be to God for the already established and not yet attained peace on earth

Amen.



# reflect

1. WHAT DOES THE PRESENCE OF PEACE FEEL LIKE IN YOUR BODY? WHAT DOES THE ABSENCE OF PEACE FEEL LIKE IN YOUR BODY?

2. REFLECT ON THIS PAST YEAR: WHAT HAS STOOD OUT AS A MEMORABLE MOMENT OF PEACE?

3. WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT A MOMENT IN WHICH YOU DID NOT FEEL PEACE?

4. HOW CAN YOU SEEK THE PEACE OF THE GARDEN IN YOUR CURRENT CONTEXT?

5. WHAT IMAGES DO YOU NOTICE WHEN YOU THINK OF THE PROCLAMATION THAT JESUS IS PEACE ON EARTH?

6. TAKE A MOMENT TO REFLECT ON THE PRESENTATION OF PEACE AFTER 400 YEARS OF SILENCE FROM GOD. WHAT MUST THAT CONTRAST HAVE BEEN LIKE?

# know you are loved

Written and Recorded by Carianne Pritchett

Featuring *Acoustic Inspiring* by Olexandr Ignatov on Envato and *Behold Our God* with Sean Toler

Merry Christmas.

Whatever didn't get done for today, that's okay.

This day is not about perfectly executing the best day ever.

Instead, this day is about Jesus and turning our attention to Him.

Happy Birthday, Jesus.

Today is the day we traditionally celebrate the birth of our Savior. The birth of Jesus Christ.

Love came to us in the form of an innocent baby.

Let this really sink in.

The King of kings was born as a helpless babe needing the arms of another. Jesus needed the love of another. The irony - the physical manifestation of love needed love in order to grow and thrive.

If Jesus Christ, the Rock of the Ages, needed love, then we can know for sure that we need it too.

We need the same, attentive love.

You need this same, attentive love.

Jesus Christ came to give you this type of love.

A love that sees you where you are  
and comforts you when you cry

A love that is patient when you get distracted  
and is kind when you return to Him

A love that wants to share good things with you  
and is never trying to boast about how much better He is than you.

A love that has opened his arms to you on the cross. And, as my friend says, "those arms never close."  
Those arms are never crossed as if to say it's too late for you to come home.

The love of Christ is pure and perfect and will never do you wrong.

Let me say that again, *the love of Christ is pure and perfect and will never do you wrong.*

Dane Ortlund says it this way in his book *Gentle & Lowly*:

“God didn’t meet us halfway. He refused to hold back, cautious, assessing our worth. That is not his heart. He and his Son took the initiative. On terms of grace and grace alone. In defiance of what we deserved.” (p. 191)

This type of love does not make Jesus weak. Instead, this type of love is the strongest love we could ever imagine. You see, the love of Christ can hold my burden and your burden and never grow tired. Even when we take our troubles and cares to Christ over and over and over again, Jesus is never thinking “here we go again.” Your friend might think that. Your loved one might think that. Even you might think that at times. But, Jesus. No. Jesus is still there, ready to listen. He might not want you to stay in that trouble or continue to be overwhelmed with that care. But He does not demand you figure it out without Him. And He doesn’t need you to figure it out for Him to love you. He loves you even with your troubles and cares.

This is the love of God.

And it is this love that goes the length for us. This love is slow to anger, intentional with its rebuke, and clear in its teaching.

Receiving this love from Jesus Christ is what helps us to grow and thrive.

I’d like to end with the story of Jesus washing His disciples feet.

John 13 says that Jesus and his disciples were in the upper room, eating a meal together in celebration of the Passover. And during this meal, verses 4 and 5 tell us that Jesus “got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” The scripture continues by telling us that Peter did not want Jesus to wash his feet, because he did not think Jesus should waste his time with such a menial task that he or others could easily do.

I don’t know about you, but I’ve heard this story many times. And usually, the application lands somewhere on the continuum of serving others like Jesus. Let me be clear, this takeaway is a wonderful place to land. But I’d like for us to consider something else today.

How often do you think your troubles or cares waste Jesus’s time?

Do you allow Jesus to serve you?

Do you really understand how much Jesus loves serving you?

Can you, even if it’s a little awkward, sit still and receive the service of Christ. The disciples did not fully know what to make of Jesus’s symbolic act that evening. But, they allowed Him to serve them anyways.

Christ, the King of kings, wants to serve you too.

Jesus loves you.

Sit and receive His love.

You don’t have to do anything but let. Him. love. you.



# reflect

1. HOW OFTEN DO YOU THINK YOUR TROUBLES OR CARES WASTE JESUS'S TIME?

2. IF YOU TRULY BELIEVED THAT YOUR TROUBLES OR CARES DID NOT WASTE JESUS'S TIME, THEN WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?

3. WHAT MAKES IT HARD TO SIT AND ALLOW JESUS TO  
"WASH YOUR FEET?"

4. WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU TO GIVE LOVE TODAY?

5. WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU TO RECEIVE LOVE TODAY?



