

Use this devotion guide each night — on your own, with a partner, or with your family. Follow the five FAITH5 steps: **Share, Read, Talk, Pray, and Bless.**

Doing these devotions on your own? Adapt any “partner” references to reflect on a meaningful relationship in your life — a friend, sibling, parent, or someone you’re praying for.

DEVOTION ONE

Signs of the Son

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

— Mark 13:24–25

3 TALK

Earthquakes, scientists say, call ahead to let the world know they're coming. Low frequency vibrations flow from the epicenter as an alarm saying, "Look out! Here it comes!" Animals often sense the vibrations and become extremely agitated hours ahead of the actual quake.

Electrical storms also give advanced signs. The sky changes color, barometric pressure shifts rapidly, birds begin to gather and chirp out their warnings. Dogs will bark at the sky or run and hide under beds even before the first raindrops fall. Human beings, however, are often caught off guard by these natural phenomena. Even with their advanced seismographic technology and Doppler radar, thousands of people lose their homes and lives every year because they don't heed the signs.

There were great signs in the heavens and on earth when Jesus first appeared. A star glittered in the heavens. A virgin conceived. A king trembled. The angels sang. The Bible says there will also be great signs when Jesus returns to claim His own.

As you prepare for Christ's coming this Advent, be aware of the signs. They point to something great that is right around the corner for you!

Questions:

1. What do you hear God's voice saying to you in the Bible verse? In the quote?
2. Think about a time you got caught off guard by the weather — a storm, an earthquake. How did it feel? Record your thoughts in your journal.
3. What signs do you see in the world that let you know Jesus is coming?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for sending many signals announcing Jesus' arrival.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for entering into your life. Thank Him for today's "highs."

Ask:

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see the signs of Christ's presence in your world. Bring your "lows" to God. Close in Jesus' name.

5 BLESS

Make the sign of the cross — on yourself or on one another — and say:

"May your eyes be open to the signs of Christ's coming."

"The future you shall know when it has come; before then, forget it."

— Aeschylus

DEVOTION TWO

Son in the Clouds

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

— Mark 13:26–27

3 TALK

Quick Quiz: How many different kinds of clouds can you name?

Meteorologists classify clouds as noctilucent, cirrus, cirrostratus, cirrocumulus, stratus, stratocumulus, nimbostratus, cumulus, cumulonimbus, altostratus and altocumulus. Did you get them all?

Clouds circle the globe, gathering the moisture and returning it to the earth. They shift constantly, changing shape and size, forming out of nothing and evaporating just as fast. They're unpredictable. Sometimes they're dangerous.

The Bible says when Jesus comes again, He'll come "in clouds" with great power and glory. Jesus told His friends that He would come when they least expected it. Like a thief in the night, like a storm without warning, He will suddenly appear and gather His own. When He comes, things will change quickly. The end of this world will usher in a new heaven and new earth. The Bible doesn't tell when, where and how all of this will happen, but one thing is clear: Jesus is coming back and, when He does, the whole world will see Him.

The future of eternity belongs to Jesus. He's coming in the clouds. Get ready!

Questions:

1. What do you hear God's voice saying to you in the Bible verse? In the quote?
2. Have you ever looked down on the clouds from an airplane? What was that like?
3. How is Jesus' return as unpredictable as the clouds? Write a poem or paragraph on this in your journal.

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for the beauty of the clouds and the promise of eternity.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for being the solid Rock of truth in an unpredictable world. Thank Him for today's "highs."

Ask:

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you stay alert and to keep your eye on the clouds swirling in your life. Bring your "lows" to God. Close in Jesus' name.

5 BLESS

Make the sign of the cross — on yourself or on one another — and say:

"May your eyes be open to the signs of Christ's coming."

"We steal if we touch tomorrow. It is God's."

— Henry Ward Beecher

DEVOTION THREE

Fig Tree Prophecy

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

— Mark 13:28–29

3 TALK

Spring arrives before you see it. You can feel it. People who live in climates where spring is an act of resurrection from winter's snowy tomb often claim to be able to sense spring's arrival in a moment. "Winter People" often sense spring's arrival before they see it. They can feel it in their bones. It's a snap, they say. No leaves or buds may have appeared, none of the songbirds have returned, but they can feel spring's arrival.

Jesus said His arrival on earth will be very much the same. The signs of His coming will be known not by sight, but by faith. The signs will be born in hearts even before there is proof – maybe even before the cold snow of death has melted. "Jesus People" will know His arrival before they see it.

Spring's arrival is unstoppable. It pushes the gnawing winter back and ushers in its time of warmth and rebirth. When Jesus is on His way, there will be no stopping Him, either. He will push the gnawing winter of death back forever and usher in the spring of eternity.

Questions:

1. What do you hear God's voice saying to you in the Bible verse? In the quote?
2. Write about the way spring arrives in your area. Is it subtle or obvious? What are the signs?
3. How is Christ's coming like the arrival of spring?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for offering you the resurrection of spring in Jesus Christ every day.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for teaching you to look for the signs of His arrival in your life. Thank Him for today's "highs."

Ask:

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see the signs of Christ and know Him when He enters your world. Bring your “lows” to God. Close in Jesus’ name and mark yourself with the sign of the cross.

5 BLESS

Make the sign of the cross — on yourself or on one another — and say:

“May your eyes be open to the signs of Christ’s coming.”

“Don’t ever prophesy: for if you prophesy wrong, nobody will forget it; and if you prophesy right, nobody will remember it.”

— Josh Billings

DEVOTION FOUR

The Father Knows Best

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

— Mark 13:32

3 TALK

Do you know what is going to happen tomorrow? Can you predict the future? In the ancient world people would often pay priests to slaughter sheep and dig through their entrails to gain divine insight into the future. Hard to imagine, right?

Today people use all kinds of other silly devices to try to find out what is going to happen to them. Some pay psychic friends, palm readers and astrologers for a glimpse into tomorrow. Some read fortune cookies and horoscopes for advice. Some even believe the local meteorologists! (With all of their fancy Doppler, they are only right 70% of the time.) Who really knows what will happen tomorrow?

As we live in uncertain times, many people have come forward claiming to have divine insight about end times. They pull out obscure verses from Daniel and John's Revelation to build entire arguments about the "when" and "where" of Jesus' return. They warn you that unless you believe you'll be marked by the beast and left behind when Jesus comes. Some sound rather convinced and convincing. Are they right?

Before you go believing any of them and sell your house, remember this: When Jesus' followers asked Him to pinpoint the coming of the end, He wouldn't do it. He said "no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." If someone says they have an inside track on the end of the world, they're saying they know more than Jesus!

Questions:

1. What do you hear God's voice saying to you in the Bible verse? In the quote?
2. Look up your horoscope online. Is it accurate? Why or why not?
3. Write your thoughts about psychics, horoscopes and palm readers in your journal.

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for always being in control of the future, even of Jesus' arrival on earth.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for arriving in your life. Thank Him for today's "highs."

Ask:

Ask the Spirit to help you stay dependent on God and aware of Jesus' coming. Bring your "lows" to God. Close in Jesus' name and mark yourself with a cross.

5 BLESS

Make the sign of the cross — on yourself or on one another — and say:

"May your eyes be open to the signs of Christ's coming."

"Life is a gamble at terrible odds; if it was a bet you wouldn't take it."

— Tom Stoppard

DEVOTION FIVE

Keep Awake

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

"Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake — for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at the cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all; Keep awake."

— Mark 13:33–37

3 TALK

People with insomnia can be overwhelmed by frustrations mounting from every facet of life — their job, personal issues and illness. When the body is deprived of the sleep it needs, it will shut down. The brain starts magnifying everything, contributing to a cycle of sleep deprivation. What the body needs most, it cannot have — sleep. Although you're physically awake, the rest of the body is shut down. It's of no use. It's impossible to remain alert even though you're wide awake.

Spiritual renewal comes from a prayerful life — bringing both joy and prayer to God. The body needs sleep to refresh it. The spirit needs prayer to be alert and ready for that "ordinary day when Christ will come." Find alertness in Christ and the holy peace to slumber in Him. Watch with Him. Rest in Him. Keep awake by staying centered on and in Christ.

Questions:

1. What do you hear God saying to you in the Bible verse? In the quote?
2. What signs tell you your body is tired? What signs tell you your spirit is tired? Write about this in your journal.
3. How can you stay spiritually awake this Advent?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise* / *Thank* / *Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for watching over you. Praise God for the gift of sleep.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for giving you an alert mind. Thank Him for your "highs" today.

Ask:

Ask the Holy Spirit to keep you alert and ready for the unexpected. Bring your “lows” to God. Close in Jesus’ name and mark yourself with the sign of the cross.

5 BLESS

Make the sign of the cross — on yourself or on one another — and say:

“May your eyes be open to the signs of Christ’s coming.”

“Some time, some ordinary day will come — a busy day like this — filled to the brim with ordinary tasks — perhaps so full that we have little thought or care of Him, and there will be no hint from the silent skies, no sign, no clash of cymbals, roll of drums; and yet that ordinary day will be the very day in which our Lord will come.”

— Horatius Bonar

DEVOTION SIX

Who Is the Star?

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

"The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

— Mark 1:1–3

3 TALK

John the Baptist had all of the talent and passion of a star. He had the voice, the charisma and the look that would attract attention. When he appeared in the wilderness preaching repentance, people emptied the cities and traveled long distances to see him. He had a powerful message and a powerful way of getting it across — dunking them in the river Jordan. But John didn't spend much time in the spotlight. His ego didn't take over the show. Instead, he knew his place and happily pointed the people to the true star — the main event — who was just around the corner.

Jesus is the main event of history. All of time is measured by His birth. God created the world through Him and will bring the world to a close upon His return. Jesus is the first and the last, the Alpha and Omega, the King of creation. He alone deserves top billing, prime-time honor and first place in your life.

It is difficult to try out for a lead role only to be assigned to a lesser task. John could have complained and sulked for not being the star, but he knew his part. He was not the main actor, but he had been chosen by God to be the best supporting actor for the brightest and biggest star in history: Jesus, the Morningstar of Creation.

Maybe playing the part of a supporting cast member isn't so bad when the star is Jesus. You are guaranteed a good spot in a show that will never be canceled!

Questions:

1. What do you hear God's voice saying to you in the Bible verse? In the quote?
2. Write about how you might play a supporting role in bringing Christ to the world.
3. What are you doing to prepare your home and heart for Christ's "play" this Advent?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for people who point the way to Jesus.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for giving His life so that you might have eternal life.

Ask:

Ask the Spirit to help you play a supporting role to bring Christ to the world. Bring your highs and lows to God and close in Jesus' name.

5 BLESS

Make the sign of the cross — on yourself or on one another — and say:

“May your eyes be open to the signs of Christ's coming.”

“No longer lend your strength to that which you wish to be free from. Fill your lives with love and bravery, and you will lead a life uncommon.”

— Jewel — “Life Uncommon”

DEVOTION SEVEN

House Cleaning, John's Style

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

— Mark 1:4

3 TALK

Would you rather hear a sermon that makes you feel good or a sermon that makes you uncomfortable? Would you rather a sermon pats you on the head like a good child or slaps you in the face like a call to action? Would you rather a preacher tell you your dirty house is clean or tell you the truth and hand you a broom?

John the Baptist wasn't interested in comforting people. He jolted them out of their comfort zones by proclaiming a baptism of repentance and challenged them to admit their sins and turn to right living. Like a flash flood in the desert, he appeared suddenly and threatened the status quo. He didn't confront them to make them comfortable. He didn't expect any "nice sermon today, pastor" responses. He confronted them to make them ready for God's Messiah. To him, ready and clean went hand in hand. To John, the only way to get ready for God was to clean house!

John didn't give people any easy outs. After hearing the Baptist, people always had a decision to make. Were they going to stand with God or continue in their sinful lives? Were they going to hit the river and be cleansed or hit the road and go home, unchanged?

John is still calling. He is calling you, asking if you are ready to repent of your sins. He wants to clean your house and heart this Advent. How will you answer?

Questions:

1. What do you hear God's voice saying to you in the Bible verse? In the quote?
2. Think about a time when life surprised you and you had to make a tough choice. How did you feel?
3. Write about the "rooms" in your spiritual house that need a good cleaning.

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for surprising you with love.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for giving you the opportunity to repent. Thank Him for promising forgiveness, no matter how you have sinned. Thank Him for today's "highs."

Ask:

Ask the Spirit to forgive your sins. Ask for help to make good choices in your life. Ask for strength to forgive. Bring your "lows" to God. Close in Jesus' name.

5 BLESS

Make the sign of the cross — on yourself or on one another — and say:

"May your eyes be open to the signs of Christ's coming."

"There is no better measure of a person than what he does when he is absolutely free to choose."

— Wilma Askinas

DEVOTION EIGHT

A Show or a Doctor?

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

— Mark 1:5

3 TALK

How far would you travel to see a great show? Would you leave your town, your county or your state? If you were deathly ill, how far would you go to see a specialist who had a high success rate with your disease? Some of the people who went to see John the Baptist were just looking for a great show. In a day before radio, television and movies, the traveling preacher was often the only show in town. For them, the message took second place to the entertainment factor. The camel hair coat, the “bug eating” routine and the wild-eyed eccentric were worth the time and the price of admission.

Some of the people who went to see John were looking for a doctor. Their lives, their land and their dreams were sick. They desperately needed to know hope. They deeply desired to see a future. If they took his remedy – the harsh pill of repentance – and were baptized, they had a chance for life. This was what they wanted and needed.

Did anyone in the crowd know what John really offered that day? Did anyone know how very close they were to God's promised Messiah when they went down to the river to repent? John wasn't simply a side show. He wasn't simply a soul doctor. He was the voice the prophet Isaiah had predicted hundreds of years earlier. He was the herald of the Messiah who would change the world forever.

Don't go to church looking for a show this Advent. Don't pray the prayers of confession for a momentary “feel-good fix.” Go looking for Jesus. He's right around the corner.

Questions:

1. What do you hear God's voice saying in the Bible verse? In the quote?
2. If you were ill, how far would you travel for a doctor with a cure?
3. How much of your church experience is a “show” and how much is an encounter with Christ? Write about this in your journal.

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for calling you out of the ordinary to meet the living Christ.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for the gift of life. Thank Him for your “highs” this day.

Ask:

Ask the Spirit to bring you to true repentance. Bring your “lows” to God in prayer.

5 BLESS

Make the sign of the cross — on yourself or on one another — and say:

“May your eyes be open to the signs of Christ’s coming.”

“If the people don’t want to come, you can’t stop them.”

— Yogi Berra

DEVOTION NINE

The Radical's Message

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals.'

— Mark 1:6–7

3 TALK

What's the difference between being focused and being obsessed? A focused person can keep their mission a secret. An obsessed person displays their obsession wherever they go. They only care for one thing and it shows.

John the Baptist cared for only one thing. His look, his style and his message all focused on the obsession of his life. God's Messiah was coming. Nothing else mattered.

John didn't dress like the fashionable, educated teachers of the day. Instead, he was completely out of style, donning the scratchy, heavy clothing Elijah wore 900 years earlier. (II Kings 1:8) Clothes didn't matter. All that mattered was his mission. All that mattered was Christ.

There are plenty of wealthy folks who talk about the blessings of poverty, then retreat to their expensive homes. There are lots of fine people who preach that something must be done for the poor without skipping a single meal themselves. The power of John's message came from the fact that the man lived the message he taught. There was no gap between the man and the message. That's called integrity. "The time is urgent," he said with his words and his deeds. "Get ready!"

Questions:

1. What do you hear God's voice saying to you in the Bible verses above?
2. Do your friends know your mission? Write about your life focus in your journal.
3. How can your words and your deeds have more integrity this Advent?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for the ability to see and to live the truth.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for people who practice what they preach and for today's "highs."

Ask:

Ask the Holy Spirit to keep you focused on what matters. Pray for your "lows."

5 BLESS

Make the sign of the cross — on yourself or on one another — and say:

"May your eyes be open to the signs of Christ's coming."

"There is nothing more dangerous than a person who only cares for one thing."

— Anonymous

DEVOTION TEN

Water and the Holy Spirit

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

"I have baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

— Mark 1:8

3 TALK

Have you ever prepared a preliminary report for someone at work, only to find your name omitted on the final draft? Have you ever done the dirty work on the initial stages of a project, only to be left out of the recognition on the end product?

In the early days of the telephone, operators sat at huge walls of plugs and made connections by hand. Often, if the connection was taking a long time, the operator would break in on the line and say, "I'm trying to connect you," to assure the waiting caller that they were not forgotten. Once the call was connected, the operator would simply fade away and leave the people to their call.

John the Baptist knew his role. He was on earth to connect God's people to God's Messiah. He told the people around him that he wasn't the Messiah. He wasn't even worthy to untie the sandal of the Messiah. (Untying sandals was the job of a lowly slave.) Instead, he was the conduit of the connection, the tool God was using to prepare a world to meet its Savior. It is difficult to do one's work without recognition. It takes a deep level of maturity to prepare something for someone else, then fade from view. John wasn't in it for his own glory. He did it all for the glory of God's Messiah.

As you prepare for Christmas, remember John. He knew what mattered and who mattered as the Messiah approached.

Questions:

1. What do you hear God's voice saying in the Bible verse? In the quote?
2. Why is it sometimes difficult to give others the credit they are due?
3. Who are some people who have helped connect you to God? Have you thanked them? Do they know how important they are to you? Write about them in your journal.

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for sending the Messiah, Jesus, to save you.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for people who have helped connect you to God. Name them in thanks. Thank Him for the “highs” you experienced this day.

Ask:

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you give God the glory in every aspect of your life. Ask for help with the “lows” you experienced this day. Close in Jesus' name.

5 BLESS

Make the sign of the cross — on yourself or on one another — and say:

“May your eyes be open to the signs of Christ's coming.”

“God's mercy is open to the person who is so ashamed that he can tell his shame to no one except God.”

— William Barclay

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