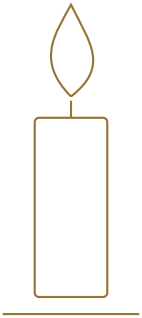
JOURNEY CHURCH



Advent

Hope for Everyone

26 READINGS TO PREPARE YOUR HEART FOR JESUS

HOPE / PEACE / JOY / LOVE / CHRIST

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BEGIN HERE

Make room for Jesus

Christmas can fill our schedules while leaving little space for our souls. These readings invite you to slow down, open Scripture, and respond to Jesus in the life you actually have.

At Journey, we want to lead people on a journey of transformation in Jesus. That includes ordinary mornings, difficult conversations, quiet acts of service, and the decisions no one else sees.

This booklet contains five readings on each of five themes, followed by a Christmas Day devotion. The five themes are a devotional framework, not five traditional calendar weeks of Advent.

To finish on Christmas Day, complete readings 1–25 beforehand. Begin early enough for your preferred pace. Five readings a week will take five preparatory weeks; you may also read more often or use selected weekend days.

Open your Bible first. Read the passages in full, using the ESV or another trusted translation. The reflections retell and apply Scripture; they do not replace it.

Pause to listen. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand and obey. Use the daily question for journaling or conversation, pray honestly, and take the practical step.

If you use candles, Hope is often called the Prophecy Candle, followed by Peace, Joy, and Love. The Christ candle is traditionally lit at Christmas. You can read the Christ section beforehand as preparation; candles are optional.

Miss a day? Begin again. Let this become a way to draw near to Jesus, and invite someone to walk with you.

YOUR READING JOURNEY

26 days with Jesus

HOPE

01 Light in the Waiting 4
02 God Keeps His Word 5
03 Faithful While We Wait 6
04 Your Past Is Not the End 7
05 Hope That Crosses Walls 8

PEACE

06 Peace Begins with God 9
07 When the Boat Still Rocks 10
08 An Open Hand 11
09 The Courage to Make Peace 12
10 Rest at His Feet 13

JOY

11 Good News for Ordinary People 14
12 Joy with Tears 15
13 Remember What God Has Done 16
14 Better Together 17
15 The Celebration of Coming Home 18

LOVE

16 Loved Before You Perform 19
17 Love Takes the Lower Place 20
18 The Neighbor in Front of You 21
19 Making Room at the Table 22
20 Love That Keeps Showing Up 23

CHRIST

21 God with Us 24
22 The Word Made Flesh 25
23 Following the Light 26
24 The Savior We Need 27
25 Room for the King 28

CHRISTMAS DAY

26 Christ Has Come 29

Light in the Waiting

READ Isaiah 9:2–7; John 1:1–5

If you have an Advent candle, light it. Watch the flame. It does not show you everything ahead, but it gives you enough light to notice what was hidden.

Perhaps that is where you find yourself this Christmas. You love Jesus, but you are tired. You believe God answers prayer, but you are still waiting. People around you are celebrating while you carry something that does not feel very merry.

Advent makes room for you, too.

Isaiah spoke into a world shadowed by fear, conflict, and judgment. Into that darkness, God promised light. Read Isaiah 9:6–7 again. The promise centers on a child, a King whose righteous reign will never end. The people could not rescue themselves. Their hope rested on what God would do.

John introduces us to that light: Jesus. The One who made the world entered it. Darkness could not defeat Him.

Our hope rests in this Savior. He went to the cross for our sins and rose from the dead. We can trust His character while we wait for answers we cannot yet see. This does not make every desired outcome a promise from God. It gives us someone faithful to hold onto through every outcome.

At Journey, we say there is hope for everyone. Let that reach you personally today. You do not have to manufacture a cheerful Christmas feeling before you come to Jesus. Bring Him your actual heart. Open His Word. Ask for help. Take the next step He makes clear.

The darkness around you has not placed you beyond His reach.

REFLECT Where do you need hope today? What does this passage reveal about Jesus that you can trust?

RESPOND Write down one burden. Beside it, write one truth about Jesus from today's reading. Pray over both.

PRAY Jesus, I bring You what feels dark and uncertain. Help me trust what You have revealed about Yourself. Holy Spirit, give me courage to take today's next step. Amen.

God Keeps His Word

READ Genesis 12:1–3; Galatians 4:4–7

Waiting has a way of making us rewrite the story. A delayed answer becomes, “God has forgotten me.” A closed door becomes, “Nothing will ever change.” Before long, our disappointment begins speaking with more authority than God's Word.

Read God's promise to Abraham. Through him, blessing would reach the nations. Abraham could not see the whole road ahead. Scripture would unfold through generations of wandering, failure, judgment, and mercy before the promised Messiah arrived.

Then Galatians tells us that God sent His Son at the appointed time. Jesus entered human history, born of a woman and under the law, to redeem us and bring us into God's family.

The long wait had not canceled God's faithfulness.

We need to distinguish between God's promises and our preferred schedule. He has not promised that every plan will succeed or every prayer will receive our chosen answer. He has promised redemption in Christ and the gift of belonging to Him. Those who trust Jesus are welcomed as children, with His Spirit assuring them of that relationship.

That changes how we wait. We can bring honest questions to a Father who has already demonstrated His love. We can obey without having the whole explanation. We can release the demand that He prove Himself by meeting our deadline.

Think about the story you have been telling yourself. Is it shaped by what God has said, or by the conclusion you reached on a difficult day? Let today's Scripture have the first word again.

Your Father knows the road you cannot see. Stay close enough to keep walking with Him.

REFLECT Have you mistaken a personal expectation for a promise from God? What has He actually promised here?

RESPOND Read Galatians 4:4–7 aloud. Write one sentence describing what it means to belong to God's family.

PRAY Father, forgive me for treating my timetable as Your obligation. Thank You for sending Jesus and welcoming me through Him. Teach me to wait as Your loved child. Amen.

Faithful While We Wait

READ Luke 2:25–35; Psalm 130:5–8

Simeon was waiting for consolation in Israel. The Holy Spirit had revealed that he would see the Messiah before he died. Scripture does not tell us how many years passed. It shows us a man whose waiting remained open to God's leading.

When the Spirit led him into the temple, Mary and Joseph arrived with Jesus. Simeon took the child in his arms and praised God. He recognized salvation in a baby while the world around him still looked troubled.

Rome still ruled. Suffering remained. Simeon even spoke to Mary about the sorrow ahead. Hope did not require him to ignore any of that. He could see God's faithfulness in the middle of an unfinished story.

We often put obedience on hold while we wait for circumstances to improve. We will pray when we feel stronger. Reconnect with church when life settles down. Serve when the season becomes easier. Waiting gradually becomes withdrawal.

Psalm 130 offers another way. We wait with attention to God's Word, trusting His steadfast love. We stay available to Him in ordinary places and ordinary responsibilities.

You can keep bringing your questions to Scripture. You can gather with your church family when you feel weary. You can ask someone to pray when your own words feel thin. These are ways of remaining present to the God who is present to you.

We cannot turn Simeon's particular promise into a guarantee that every dream will happen in our lifetime. We can follow his posture: listening, available, ready to recognize Jesus.

Ask the Holy Spirit what faithfulness looks like today. Then begin there.

REFLECT Where has waiting become an excuse to withdraw? What simple act of obedience is still available to you?

RESPOND Take one step you have postponed: open your Bible, contact your group, or ask someone to pray with you.

PRAY Holy Spirit, keep my heart attentive while I wait. Help me recognize Jesus in ordinary days. Give me grace to obey without needing to know the whole story. Amen.

Your Past Is Not the End

READ 2 Corinthians 5:14–21; Luke 19:1–10

Journey's story includes a former downtown strip club becoming a sanctuary. A place with one history began serving a new purpose as people gathered to worship Jesus. Our church's beginnings remind us that transformation can take root in unlikely places.

Zacchaeus was an unlikely person, too. As a chief tax collector, he was wealthy and despised. When Jesus called him down from a tree and went to his home, the crowd saw a scandal. Jesus saw a man He had come to seek and save.

Notice what grace produced. Zacchaeus began speaking about generosity and restitution. He wanted to make things right with people he had wronged. An encounter with Jesus changed the direction of his life.

Second Corinthians describes the new creation we become in Christ. We are reconciled to God through Jesus, and then entrusted with the work of pointing others toward Him.

This hope reaches further than a fresh image or a better reputation. Jesus addresses the sin we cannot undo on our own. His forgiveness gives us a new beginning, and His Spirit leads us into a different way of living.

Perhaps you keep rehearsing a chapter you wish you could erase. Bring it to Jesus. Confess specifically. Receive His mercy. Ask what repentance requires next. There may be an apology to make, help to seek, or a pattern to interrupt.

You do not earn forgiveness through those actions. They become the fruit of turning toward the Savior who forgives.

The past may explain how you arrived here. In Christ, it does not have the authority to decide every step ahead.

REFLECT What part of your past feels beyond redemption? What would repentance look like in that area today?

RESPOND Confess honestly to Jesus. If you need support, arrange a conversation with a trusted pastor or mature believer.

PRAY Jesus, I stop hiding the part of my story that brings me shame. Forgive me and change me. Give me courage to receive Your grace and walk in a new direction. Amen.

Hope That Crosses Walls

READ Acts 16:22–34; Romans 15:13

Journey's Deer Ridge campus began in 2023, bringing church community inside a correctional institution. Worship, Scripture, and relationships can reach people whose circumstances many of us never see. The gospel belongs on both sides of a prison wall.

In Acts 16, Paul and Silas prayed and sang after being beaten and imprisoned. Their bodies hurt. Their movement was restricted. Yet they could still turn toward God, and other prisoners could hear them.

When an earthquake opened the prison doors, the story became about more than escape. Paul intervened to protect the jailer. The man who had guarded their confinement heard the good news of Jesus. He and his household received the Word, and baptism followed.

Hope changed the way Paul and Silas treated the person in front of them.

We may read this story and focus entirely on the miracle. But consider the mercy. They stayed long enough to care about someone who needed salvation. Their suffering had not made them indifferent to his life.

Romans 15:13 directs us to the God who fills believers with joy and peace, causing hope to overflow through the Holy Spirit. We do not have to generate that overflow through personality or optimism. We ask God to supply what we need as we trust Him.

Who have you quietly placed outside the reach of grace? A relative? Someone with a record? Someone whose choices have hurt you? You can maintain wise boundaries and still pray for their redemption.

Hope for everyone stretches us beyond the people we already find easy to love.

REFLECT Whom have you stopped praying for? How might God's hope change the way you see that person?

RESPOND Pray for one person you have written off. Ask God for a wise, practical way to express His care.

PRAY God of hope, fill me by Your Spirit. Rescue me from cynicism. Help our church carry the gospel wherever people need Jesus, and teach me to notice the person in front of me. Amen.

Peace Begins with God

READ Romans 5:1–11; Luke 2:8–14

We often ask for peace when we mean a quieter schedule. Fewer demands. Less tension. A day when nothing goes wrong. Those things can be welcome gifts, but the peace Jesus brings reaches a deeper place.

Romans 5 begins with our relationship to God. Through faith in Jesus, we are justified and brought into peace with Him. Sin had made us His enemies. Christ's death made reconciliation possible. We receive this grace through faith rather than earning it through religious performance.

That is good news for the person who comes to December already exhausted from trying to be enough.

You cannot repair your relationship with God by hosting a perfect Christmas, volunteering for everything, or keeping your struggles invisible. Jesus has done what you could not do. Come to Him with repentance and trust.

The angels announced the Savior's birth to shepherds keeping watch at night. Ordinary work became the setting for extraordinary news. God's peace was entering the world through the child in Bethlehem.

Let that announcement interrupt your efforts to prove yourself. If you belong to Jesus, you do not need to approach the Father as though every prayer were an audition. You come through the Son who gave His life for you.

And if you have never trusted Him, you can begin today. Tell Jesus the truth about your sin. Ask for His forgiveness. Entrust your life to the risen Savior. Speak with someone in your church family about following Him.

There will still be responsibilities to carry and relationships to tend. But reconciliation with God gives you a place to stand while you face them.

REFLECT Are you trying to earn God's welcome? What does Romans 5 say Jesus has already done for sinners?

RESPOND Read Romans 5:1 slowly. Thank God for access to Him through Jesus before you ask for anything else.

PRAY Father, thank You that peace with You comes through Jesus. I turn from my sin and trust His saving work. Help me live from the welcome He has made possible. Amen.

When the Boat Still Rocks

READ Mark 4:35–41; Psalm 46:1–3, 10–11

The disciples were doing what Jesus had told them to do. They were crossing the lake with Him. Then a storm rose, waves entered the boat, and fear took over.

Obedience had not kept them from trouble.

That detail matters when we assume a hard season proves we have missed God. Sometimes following Jesus takes us through circumstances we would never choose. The disciples' greatest need was to understand the One who was with them.

They woke Him with a question about whether He cared. Jesus rebuked the wind and addressed their fear. The storm revealed His authority, but it also exposed how little they yet understood Him.

We can bring our frightened questions to Jesus, too. He is not surprised by the prayer you can barely get out. His presence gives you someone to turn toward when your own strength fails.

This story does not promise that every crisis will end as quickly as that storm did. It reveals the Savior whose authority is greater than what frightens us. Psalm 46 invites us to find refuge in God even when the world feels unstable.

Pause before you read the next sentence. Notice the place where you are holding tension. Unclench your hands. Take a breath. Tell Jesus what has been making you afraid.

Then consider who could help you carry it. Prayer, practical care, and honest conversation can all be ways our church family walks together through a storm.

You do not have to pretend the waves are small. You can ask Jesus to help you trust Him while the boat still rocks.

REFLECT What has your fear led you to believe about Jesus? How does this passage challenge that belief?

RESPOND Name your fear in prayer. Tell a trusted person one specific way they can support you this week.

PRAY Jesus, You see the storm I cannot control. Help me bring my fear to You. Give me wisdom for the next decision and courage to receive the support You provide. Amen.

An Open Hand

READ Philippians 4:4–9; 1 Peter 5:6–7

Some burdens travel everywhere with us. We carry a conversation into the grocery store, tomorrow's problem into tonight's dinner, and next month's uncertainty into bed. Our bodies arrive in one place while our thoughts remain somewhere else.

Peter tells believers to humble themselves before God and entrust their anxieties to Him because He cares for them. Releasing a burden begins with recognizing that we were never able to control everything it touches.

Paul gives the Philippians a practical pattern: pray, make requests, give thanks. Bring the actual concern to God. Remember His care. Ask His peace to guard your heart and mind in Christ.

This is an invitation you can return to repeatedly. A worry may surface again after you have prayed about it. That does not make your first prayer false or prove your faith has failed. Bring it back. Learn the rhythm of returning to your Father.

Then notice what Paul says about thought and practice. What we dwell on matters. So does what we do with the truth we have received. We can limit the voices that continually inflame fear and give deliberate attention to what is true, honorable, and worthy of praise.

Perhaps peace today includes turning off the screen, asking for help, keeping a needed appointment, or making one responsible decision you have avoided. Trusting God can free us to take useful action without pretending we control the outcome.

Open your hands for a moment. Let the posture become a prayer. Your Father cares about what you are carrying, and you are invited to bring it to Him.

REFLECT Which concern keeps following you? What truth deserves more room in your thoughts today?

RESPOND Write a prayer with three parts: your request, one reason for gratitude, and one next step within your responsibility.

PRAY Father, I place this concern in Your care. Guard my heart in Christ. Help me recognize what I can responsibly do and release the outcome I cannot control. Amen.

The Courage to Make Peace

READ Matthew 5:9, 23–24; Romans 12:18–21

Christmas can bring people into the same room without resolving what stands between them. We may know how to exchange gifts while avoiding the conversation that matters.

Jesus calls His followers to make peace. In Matthew 5, reconciliation is important enough to interrupt an act of worship. Love for God reaches into the way we treat the person we have offended.

That can require a costly sentence: “I was wrong.” We often weaken it by explaining how the other person contributed or how our intentions were misunderstood. Repentance becomes clearer when we name our own conduct and take responsibility for the harm.

Romans 12 also gives us a needed boundary. We are responsible for what depends on us. We cannot force someone else to repent, forgive, or restore trust. Pursuing peace does not mean returning to an unsafe situation or pretending harmful behavior is acceptable.

Ask God for wisdom about your part. You may need to apologize, return something, stop repeating a story, or seek counsel before beginning a difficult conversation. Forgiveness and the rebuilding of trust may take different amounts of time.

At Journey, walking together means learning to address tension with truth and love. A healthy church family needs people willing to repair what they can and ask for help when they cannot do it alone.

Do not begin by rehearsing everything someone else should say. Let the Holy Spirit search your heart first. We honor the Prince of Peace when His mercy changes the way we handle conflict.

One honest step may open a door that avoidance has kept closed.

REFLECT Is there someone you have harmed? What part of making peace is actually within your responsibility?

RESPOND Write an apology without the word “but.” If contact would be unsafe, seek wise support about a different next step.

PRAY Prince of Peace, expose my pride and teach me to take responsibility. Give me courage to speak truth with humility and wisdom to pursue peace with healthy boundaries. Amen.

Rest at His Feet

READ Luke 10:38–42; John 14:25–27

Martha welcomed Jesus into her home. Her service mattered, but it became tangled in distraction and resentment. Mary sat listening to Him. Eventually Martha asked Jesus to make her sister help.

We may recognize ourselves in that room. We serve people we love while quietly keeping score. We become irritated that no one seems to notice everything we are doing. Even good responsibilities can crowd out attention to the Lord we want to honor.

Jesus spoke tenderly and directly to Martha. He named her anxious distraction and affirmed Mary's choice to listen. She was receiving something that would endure.

There is room in discipleship for both listening and service. But service becomes strained when we continually refuse to receive from Jesus. We need His Word to correct our assumptions, restore our perspective, and remind us whose approval matters most.

In John 14, Jesus prepared His disciples for His departure. He promised the Holy Spirit and gave them His peace. They would need His help in a world that remained troubled. So do we.

Before you add another Christmas responsibility, take a few quiet minutes with Him. Read slowly. Tell Him where you have become resentful. Ask whether you need to simplify a plan, share a task, or release an expectation.

You do not need to create a perfectly quiet house before you begin. A chair, an open Bible, and a willing heart are a good place to start.

Your church needs your gifts. Your family needs your love. And you need time to listen to Jesus, who knows how to lead you in both.

REFLECT Where has serving become resentful? What would help you listen to Jesus before responding to another demand?

RESPOND Set aside ten minutes without multitasking. Read today's passages and ask Jesus to reorder one expectation.

PRAY Jesus, I welcome You into the busyness of my life. Forgive my resentment. Holy Spirit, help me listen, receive Your peace, and serve from a heart that stays close to You. Amen.

Good News for Ordinary People

READ Luke 2:8–20; Isaiah 52:7–10

The shepherds were working when the announcement came. They were not gathered at a palace or waiting for someone important to notice them. They were keeping watch over sheep in the dark.

God sent the news of Jesus into an ordinary night.

The angel announced great joy because a Savior had been born. The shepherds were given a place to go and a child to find. They went, saw, and began telling others what they had heard. Their return to work carried worship with it.

Notice what grounds their joy: God's saving action. Their lives had been interrupted by news worth receiving and sharing.

Many of us keep postponing joy until life feels more impressive. When the promotion arrives. When the house is finished. When the family photograph looks the way we hoped. Meanwhile, ordinary days pass with little attention to what God has already given.

The news of Jesus meets us in those days. He is Savior while you wash dishes, answer another email, or drive through Bend on a dark morning. His birth, death, and resurrection give ordinary lives an eternal future.

You do not need to become someone more important before He welcomes you. Come as you are, and let Him change you as you follow.

Then consider the person beside you. They may be waiting for someone to offer a simple invitation or explain why Jesus matters. The shepherds shared what they had received. You can do that, too.

Ask God to help you carry the good news back into your ordinary places. There is room for worship on the way home from work.

REFLECT Have you been postponing joy until life improves? What about Jesus is good news in your ordinary life today?

RESPOND Tell one person something you are grateful Jesus has done. Keep it honest, specific, and simple.

PRAY Jesus, thank You for coming near to ordinary people. Open my eyes to Your grace in today's routine. Give me joy in Your salvation and courage to share the good news. Amen.

Joy with Tears

READ Habakkuk 3:17–19; John 11:32–36

Habakkuk imagined a devastating scene: crops failing, empty fields, and no livestock in the stalls. These were losses that threatened survival. Yet he chose to rejoice in the God who saved him.

His worship did not make the losses imaginary. He brought his real circumstances into a relationship with a faithful God.

Christmas can hold that same tension. You may be grateful for Jesus and still ache over an empty chair. You may sing with your church family and cry on the drive home. Grief does not disqualify you from faith.

John 11 shows Jesus weeping beside people He loved. He knew He would raise Lazarus, yet He entered their sorrow. His tears reveal compassion that does not hurry people past their pain.

So bring Him yours. You do not need to apologize for the way this season feels. You can ask for strength without pretending you have already found it.

Joy grows as we recognize that Jesus remains worthy of trust within our sorrow. His resurrection gives us a future death cannot finally take away. Until that future is fully seen, we can receive small gifts without feeling that we have betrayed the people or seasons we miss.

A shared meal. A familiar hymn. A child's laughter. An honest conversation. Receive what is given today, and let someone help you carry what still hurts.

Our church can make room for both celebration and lament. We can sit beside one another without demanding a quick explanation. We can trust Jesus together while the tears are still fresh.

REFLECT What sorrow do you need to bring to Jesus? What small gift can you receive today without denying that sorrow?

RESPOND Tell a trusted person what this season feels like. Ask for one specific kind of companionship or care.

PRAY Jesus, You wept with people You loved. Meet me in my grief. Help me receive today's gifts and hold onto the future You have secured through Your resurrection. Amen.

Remember What God Has Done

READ Psalm 103:1–14; Luke 17:11–19

We remember some things with painful accuracy. The criticism from years ago. The unanswered message. The moment we felt overlooked. Yet gifts can fade from memory surprisingly quickly.

Psalm 103 calls the soul to remember God's benefits. Forgiveness. Mercy. Compassion. Faithful love. The psalmist deliberately brings God's character back into view.

In Luke 17, ten people with leprosy asked Jesus for mercy. As they followed His instruction, they were cleansed. One returned, praising God and thanking Jesus. His gratitude drew him back to the One who had shown him mercy.

Gratitude can do that for us. It helps us move beyond enjoying a gift to recognizing the Giver. We begin to notice how much of life we have received rather than achieved.

This does not require us to call painful events good. We can be grateful for God's care within a difficult year without being grateful for the harm itself. Honesty and thanksgiving belong together in prayer.

Make your gratitude specific. Who stayed when life became complicated? What Scripture steadied you? Where did God expose something that needed to change? When did He provide help through another person?

At Journey, transformation is the journey we are on together. Remembering grace helps us recognize that we are still being led, still being formed, and still receiving mercy.

Before you ask God for the next thing, thank Him for something you might otherwise overlook. Let remembrance interrupt the assumption that He has never shown up for you.

There may be more evidence of His care than your tired heart has been able to notice.

REFLECT Which gifts have faded from your attention? What does remembering them reveal about God's character?

RESPOND Write three specific thank-you statements to God. Send one sincere thank-you message to someone He has used in your life.

PRAY Father, help me remember Your mercy. Forgive my entitlement and open my eyes to gifts I have overlooked. Let gratitude deepen my love for You and my generosity toward others. Amen.

Better Together

READ Luke 1:39–45; Romans 12:9–16

Mary went to visit Elizabeth carrying news that would change her life. Elizabeth welcomed her, and the Holy Spirit filled their meeting with recognition and joy. Mary did not have to carry her extraordinary calling in isolation.

There is something strengthening about being with someone who helps you recognize God's work.

Some conversations leave us more cynical than when we arrived. Others give us courage to keep following Jesus. We need relationships where we can speak honestly, receive prayer, and celebrate grace without pretending everything is easy.

Romans 12 describes a church family that enters one another's lives. We rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Love becomes attentive enough to notice what kind of moment the other person is in.

Journey's Rooted experience makes space for Scripture, questions, prayer, service, and celebration in community. Its purpose reminds us that spiritual growth needs more than collecting information alone. We need people who can walk with us as truth becomes practice.

Perhaps you have been attending church while remaining mostly unknown. Or perhaps disappointment has convinced you that keeping your distance is safer. Begin with one wise step toward someone trustworthy. Connection can grow slowly.

And if your life feels full, consider who might need an invitation into it. The person standing alone after service may need someone to learn their name. A meal around your table could become an answer to prayer.

You cannot provide the depth of every relationship someone needs. You can offer a genuine beginning. Joy often grows when we stop holding our lives at a distance from one another.

REFLECT Who helps you notice God's work? Who might need you to make room for them this week?

RESPOND Arrange one meaningful conversation. Ask, “Where have you seen God's grace, and where do you need support?”

PRAY Holy Spirit, lead me into honest community. Give me courage to be known and generosity to welcome others. Help our church celebrate faithfully and carry one another with compassion. Amen.

The Celebration of Coming Home

READ Luke 15:11–32; Psalm 51:10–12

The younger son rehearsed a speech on the way home. He had wasted what his father gave him, and hunger had exposed how far he had fallen. He hoped there might still be room for him as a servant.

His father ran to meet him. The return became a celebration.

Jesus told this story while religious people objected to His welcome of sinners. The father's joy revealed the generous heart of God toward those who repent. The older brother's resentment exposed how easily we can stand near the father's house while missing the father's heart.

There is a question here for each of us. Do we need to come home, or do we need to learn how to welcome someone who does?

Perhaps sin has drawn you into secrecy. Come into the light. Be specific with God. Seek help where you need it. Repentance opens your hands to receive the grace you cannot earn.

Or perhaps you have been faithful in visible ways but have become bitter about the mercy someone else receives. Ask the Father to change that hardness. Another person's restoration does not reduce His love for you.

At Journey, baptism gives us an opportunity to celebrate people publicly identifying with Jesus in His death and resurrection. Their new beginning invites our gratitude. We have all needed mercy.

Psalm 51 gives us language for asking God to restore the joy of salvation. You can pray that whether you have wandered far or grown cold close to home.

The Father's welcome is worth returning to. His joy is worth sharing.

REFLECT Do you identify more with the younger brother or the older one today? What needs to change in your response to grace?

RESPOND Confess one place of wandering or resentment. If you have trusted Jesus and have not been baptized, ask about that next step.

PRAY Father, bring me home wherever my heart has wandered. Cleanse me and restore my joy in Your salvation. Teach me to celebrate Your mercy toward others. Amen.

Loved Before You Perform

READ 1 John 4:7–19; Romans 5:6–8

You may know how to serve without knowing how to receive love. You can notice every need in a room, take responsibility quickly, and keep going long after you are tired. Underneath it all, you may fear that being needed is what makes you worth keeping.

The gospel meets that fear directly.

God demonstrated His love by sending His Son while we were still sinners. Jesus did not wait until we became useful, impressive, or spiritually mature. His sacrifice reveals love that begins in God's character.

First John explains that our love is a response to His. We receive what He has done, and then His love takes shape in the way we treat others.

This changes the ground beneath our service. We can help without making every task a test of our worth. We can admit limitations. We can celebrate someone else's contribution without feeling replaced.

God's love also calls us out of the sin that harms us and the people around us. Grace gives us a secure place from which to repent. We do not have to defend what Jesus came to redeem.

Think about the ways you measure yourself. Productivity? Approval? The number of people who depend on you? Bring those measures before the cross. Ask Jesus to teach you the difference between responding to His love and trying to purchase it.

You are invited to trust the Savior who gave Himself for you. Let His love reach the tired place beneath your performance. Then serve with the freedom of someone who has already received mercy.

There is nothing more important on today's list than receiving what God has made known in His Son.

REFLECT Where are you using performance to seek security? How does God's initiative in loving sinners challenge that pattern?

RESPOND Spend five quiet minutes thanking Jesus for His love before offering Him a task or promising to improve.

PRAY Father, help me receive Your love through Jesus. Free me from using achievement to prove my worth. Let my service grow from gratitude, and give me courage to repent where needed. Amen.

Love Takes the Lower Place

READ John 13:1–17; Philippians 2:3–11

Jesus knew who He was. He knew where He had come from and where He was going. Then He took a towel and began washing His disciples' feet.

His security made room for service.

The Lord did a task His followers were reluctant to take. He touched dirty feet in a room where He would soon speak about betrayal. His love moved toward people who did not fully understand Him and would soon fail Him.

Philippians directs us to the humility of Christ. The eternal Son took the place of a servant and obeyed the Father all the way to the cross. Following Him reshapes our hunger for status.

We tend to notice service when it is visible. God also sees the person stacking chairs, caring for a child, preparing a meal, or quietly making a room ready for someone else. At Journey, we call our volunteers Superheroes. Their service can help another person feel welcomed enough to listen, ask a question, or take a step toward Jesus.

Yet humble service is not limited to a church assignment. It belongs in the kitchen after the gathering, in the conversation where you stop trying to win, and in the moment you choose to give someone else credit.

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal one place where pride has made you unwilling to serve. Then ask for love that can move your hands.

You do not become less valuable by taking a lower place. You become more willing to resemble the Savior you follow.

Today, pay attention to the work you usually hope someone else will do.

REFLECT Which unnoticed task do you tend to avoid? What does your resistance reveal about the recognition you want?

RESPOND Do one needed task without announcing it. Pray for the person who will benefit from it.

PRAY Jesus, thank You for serving people who could never repay You. Confront my pride and make me willing to love with my hands. Help me honor those who serve quietly. Amen.

The Neighbor in Front of You

READ Luke 10:25–37; James 2:14–17

The wounded man lay beside a road while travelers passed. Two people who might have been expected to help kept moving. A Samaritan stopped, came near, and took responsibility for practical care.

Jesus told this story in response to a question about who counted as a neighbor. His answer directed attention toward the kind of neighbor we are willing to become.

Compassion interrupted the Samaritan's plans. He used what he had, made room in his schedule, and accepted a cost. Love became concrete.

Journey calls one expression of this Guerrilla Love: surprising people with kindness when they least expect it. A practical need becomes an opportunity to honor someone made in God's image.

We do not have to wait for a dramatic assignment. There may be someone in your ordinary path who needs a meal, a ride, help carrying a burden, or time to be heard. Ask a question before assuming you know the need. Receive their answer with respect.

James reminds us that words about faith need a living expression. If we speak warmly while ignoring needs we can responsibly address, something is missing.

We cannot meet every need, and wisdom matters in how we help. But limited capacity does not require an indifferent heart. Ask God what love looks like with the resources you actually have.

You may need to slow down enough to notice. Compassion often begins when another person's inconvenience becomes worth your attention.

As you move through Bend today, ask Jesus to interrupt your hurry. The person He puts in front of you is worth more than a passing good intention.

REFLECT Who is near you but easy to overlook? What practical help could you offer with dignity and wisdom?

RESPOND Ask someone what would help this week. Meet one appropriate need quietly, without making their hardship a public story.

PRAY Holy Spirit, interrupt my indifference. Help me notice people as Jesus does. Show me how to offer practical care with humility, wisdom, and respect. Amen.

Making Room at the Table

READ Luke 14:12–24; Hebrews 13:1–3

Some invitations feel easy. We know the people, understand the conversation, and expect to enjoy ourselves. Other invitations require us to make room for someone outside our familiar circle.

Jesus challenged a host to consider people who could not repay his hospitality. His teaching exposed how easily generosity becomes an exchange: I welcome you because you can benefit me.

The kingdom forms a more generous kind of welcome.

Think about how much God has given us that we could never repay. We come to His table by grace. That grace can reshape the guest list in our own lives.

Hebrews calls believers to continue in love, show hospitality, and remember people in prison as though sharing their situation. These instructions draw us beyond relationships that are convenient or socially rewarding.

For a church family, making room may begin long before someone enters our home. Learn the new person's name. Introduce them to someone else. Ask whether they have plans for Christmas. Include the person who has difficulty entering a conversation.

Hospitality does not require a magazine-worthy house or an elaborate meal. It requires some willingness to let another person matter inside your plans. Keep your invitations appropriate and your boundaries wise, but do not let the fear of imperfection make every door stay closed.

If you are the one longing for connection, you can take a step, too. Tell someone you would value time together. Accept a sincere invitation when you can.

We are learning to live as a family formed by Jesus. A place at the table can become a simple, powerful expression of His welcome.

REFLECT Who falls outside your usual circle? What keeps you from making room for that person?

RESPOND Offer one specific invitation: coffee, a simple meal, a walk, or attending a church gathering together.

PRAY Father, thank You for welcoming me by grace. Expand my concern beyond familiar people. Show me one wise way to make room for someone who needs belonging. Amen.

Love That Keeps Showing Up

READ Ruth 1:6–18; Galatians 6:9–10

Naomi was returning home carrying deep loss. Ruth had lost her husband, too. When Naomi urged her daughters-in-law to remain behind, Ruth chose to stay with her and enter an uncertain future.

Her commitment took the shape of a shared road.

Ruth's story unfolds through ordinary faithfulness: traveling, working, listening, and providing. God's redemptive purpose would reach beyond what either woman could see. Ruth would become part of the family line leading to Jesus.

We often recognize love in a powerful moment. Lasting care also depends on what happens after the moment passes. The meal a month after the funeral. The question asked again when everyone assumes life has returned to normal. The prayer that continues after the first conversation.

Galatians encourages us to keep doing good and to take opportunities to care for others. That perseverance grows best when we remain dependent on God and willing to receive help ourselves.

Faithful love does not mean promising unlimited availability or remaining in harm's way. It means being truthful about what we can offer and dependable within that commitment. A small promise kept can be more loving than a dramatic promise we cannot sustain.

Who needs steady care in this season? You may not be able to solve what they face. You can remember, listen, pray, and help connect them with support.

Our church can become a place where compassion lasts beyond an announcement. Ask the Holy Spirit how your love can have a next chapter.

Then choose something you can faithfully carry, and keep showing up.

REFLECT Who might still need care after others have moved on? What sustainable commitment could you make?

RESPOND Offer one specific act of follow-through this week. Write it down and do what you have promised.

PRAY Faithful God, strengthen my love beyond a first response. Help me keep wise commitments and receive help where I need it. Make our church dependable in compassion. Amen.

God with Us

READ Matthew 1:18–25; Isaiah 7:14

Joseph faced a future he had not planned. Mary's pregnancy raised questions he could not answer, and his decision carried real consequences. Into that confusion, God gave him a word about the child she carried.

Jesus would save His people from their sins. His birth would fulfill the promise of Immanuel, God with us.

Let those words slow you down. The eternal Son entered human life. He came near enough to be held, fed, and carried. The One we worship knows the vulnerability of the world He came to redeem.

We often assume that God's nearness should remove every uncomfortable question. Joseph's obedience tells a different story. He received God's word and acted on it while much of the future remained beyond his sight.

Following Jesus may require that same trust from us. We can know who He is without knowing every detail of the road ahead. We can obey the next clear instruction while asking for wisdom about what comes after it.

God with us reaches into ordinary rooms. The room where you wait for news. The kitchen where you wonder how to face another hard conversation. The place where you quietly admit that you need help.

You do not have to stage a spiritual experience to be heard by Him. Open His Word. Pray honestly. Invite a trusted believer to pray beside you. Ask what obedience looks like in this actual situation.

Joseph woke and did what God had directed. Consider the next step Jesus has already made clear to you. His presence gives you someone to trust as you take it.

REFLECT Where are you waiting for complete certainty before obeying? What has God already made clear in Scripture?

RESPOND Take one clear step of obedience you have been avoiding. Ask someone to pray for courage and wisdom.

PRAY Jesus, Immanuel, thank You for coming near. Help me trust You in the questions I cannot resolve. Give me courage to obey what You have already made clear. Amen.

The Word Made Flesh

READ John 1:1–18; Hebrews 1:1–4

Words can change a room. A diagnosis, a confession, an apology, a promise: a few sentences may alter the course of a life. Yet even our best words remain limited.

John introduces Jesus as the eternal Word. He was with God, and He was God. All things were made through Him. Then this same Word took on flesh and lived among us.

The child in the manger is the eternal Son through whom the world exists.

Christmas calls us to worship with a clearer understanding of who Jesus is. We cannot reduce Him to a wise teacher whose advice we occasionally borrow. Hebrews describes the Son as revealing God's glory and sustaining creation. He has made purification for sins and reigns in exalted authority.

To know Him, give attention to His Word. Read what He said. Watch whom He welcomed, what He confronted, and how He obeyed the Father. Allow Scripture to correct the smaller version of Jesus you may have found easier to manage.

Ask the Holy Spirit for understanding and a willing heart. He helps us receive truth that changes our actual choices. Information about Jesus becomes fruitful as we trust Him and respond in obedience.

Perhaps your Bible has become something you reach for mainly when you need reassurance. Today, come ready to be taught. Let Jesus ask questions of your assumptions, habits, and desires.

The Word became flesh so we could know the Father through Him. Make room to listen to the One who has made God known.

Your next step may begin with opening a page and staying long enough to pay attention.

REFLECT What part of today's reading enlarges your understanding of Jesus? Where do His words challenge your current habits?

RESPOND Read John 1:1–18 again slowly. Write one thing it reveals about Jesus and one response it calls for.

PRAY Holy Spirit, help me understand the Scriptures and recognize the glory of Jesus. Correct what I have misunderstood. Give me a heart that listens and a life that responds. Amen.

Following the Light

READ John 8:12; Ephesians 5:8–14

A light can comfort us, but it can also reveal what we would rather keep hidden. When Jesus calls Himself the light of the world, He invites us to follow Him into a life shaped by His truth.

Following requires movement. We cannot keep insisting on our own direction while asking Jesus to illuminate only the parts of the road we prefer.

Ephesians describes the change that comes through belonging to Him. Believers are called to live in a way that reflects goodness, righteousness, and truth. We learn to discern what pleases the Lord and bring hidden darkness into the light.

That can become very practical. A private habit. An exaggerated story. A financial decision kept secret. The resentment we continue to feed while calling it discernment. The Holy Spirit may draw our attention to something we have spent considerable energy defending.

His conviction gives us an opportunity to respond. We can confess, turn, seek help, and begin walking differently. Shame urges us to hide. The gospel gives us a Savior to come to when our sin is exposed.

Ask Jesus for the courage to be specific. Then involve trustworthy support where needed. Some patterns require ongoing accountability, wise counsel, and patient work. Asking for help is a step into the light.

As Jesus changes us, our lives can become more credible witnesses in our homes, workplaces, and city. People see the difference when we tell the truth, repair harm, and keep learning to obey.

Let today's prayer reach the place you have been protecting. Jesus is worthy of your whole life, including the part no one else can see.

REFLECT What are you reluctant to let Jesus examine? What would one honest step into the light look like?

RESPOND Confess one specific sin to God. Choose a concrete act of repentance and seek trustworthy support where appropriate.

PRAY Jesus, shine Your light into the places I have hidden. Forgive me and lead me into truth. Holy Spirit, strengthen me to repent, seek help, and keep following. Amen.

The Savior We Need

READ Matthew 1:21; 1 Peter 2:21–25

We bring many needs to Jesus. A relationship to mend. A body to heal. A situation to change. He welcomes our prayers, and He cares about the whole of our lives.

Yet the angel's announcement to Joseph identifies the central reason for His coming: Jesus would save His people from their sins.

Sin reaches deeper than a few mistakes. We have resisted God's rule, harmed others, and failed to love Him as we should. We cannot undo our guilt by becoming more respectable or balancing the scale with good deeds.

We need the Savior who came for us.

First Peter directs our attention to the cross. Jesus bore our sins in His body so that we could turn from sin and live in righteousness. His suffering accomplished what our efforts could never achieve. He brings wandering people back under His care.

The manger points toward that costly mission. The child Mary held would give His life and rise again. His mercy invites a response of repentance and faith.

If you have followed Jesus for years, do not let familiarity make this small. Remember what He has forgiven. Let gratitude renew your obedience and deepen your concern for those who do not yet know Him.

If you have never trusted Him, you can begin now. Admit your sin. Believe that He died and rose again. Entrust yourself to Him as Savior and Lord. You do not need impressive words. Come honestly.

Then tell someone who can help you take the next step. Following Jesus grows in the company of His people.

The Savior we celebrate at Christmas is the Savior we need every day.

REFLECT Are you trusting Jesus for forgiveness, or relying on your own goodness? What response is He calling for today?

RESPOND If you are beginning to follow Jesus, tell a trusted Christian or contact Journey. Ask about discipleship and baptism.

PRAY Jesus, I confess that I have sinned. I believe You died and rose again. Forgive me and lead my life. Teach me to follow You as my Savior and Lord. Amen.

Room for the King

READ Matthew 2:1–12; Revelation 21:1–5

The wise men traveled to worship a king. When they found Jesus, they bowed and offered their gifts. Their journey reached its purpose in surrender before Him.

Herod heard about the same child and responded with fear for his own power. The arrival of another king threatened the life he wanted to control.

We can recognize both responses within ourselves. There are places where we gladly worship Jesus and places where His authority feels inconvenient. We want His comfort while holding tightly to a choice we do not want Him to address.

Preparing room for Christ involves more than adding a religious moment to December. It means acknowledging His claim on the life we already have. Our relationships, money, time, words, and hidden motives all belong before Him.

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal one area you have kept under your own rule. Surrender may require a changed plan, a truthful conversation, generosity, or an act of obedience you have delayed.

We also worship as people looking ahead. Revelation 21 gives us a vision of God dwelling with His people, ending death and mourning, and making all things new. The King who came in humility will complete His redemptive work.

That future strengthens our faithfulness now. We can live for something larger than protecting our comfort. We can seek God's kingdom in our homes and carry the good news into Bend.

Bring Jesus more than a seasonal greeting. Bring Him your willing response. Bow before the King whose coming gives this season its meaning.

Ask what belongs at His feet today, and begin there.

REFLECT Where does Jesus' authority feel inconvenient? What would surrender change in one decision you are facing?

RESPOND Write one area you need to surrender. Take a specific step that places it under Jesus' teaching and authority.

PRAY King Jesus, I bring You the parts of my life I have tried to control. Teach me willing obedience. Keep my hope fixed on Your coming kingdom and make me faithful today. Amen.

Christ Has Come

READ Luke 2:1–20; Titus 3:3–7

Before you move into the plans of this day, pause. Whether your home is full of noise or unusually quiet, make room to remember what we are celebrating.

Christ has come.

Mary gave birth to Jesus and laid Him in a manger. Shepherds received the news and went to find Him. Heaven's announcement entered the world through a child who could be held in human arms.

God's saving mercy had arrived.

Titus reminds us why that mercy matters. We were caught in sin, unable to rescue ourselves. God saved us because of His kindness, through the renewing work of the Holy Spirit and the grace made available in Jesus Christ. Those who trust Him receive hope that extends into eternal life.

This is the gift at the center of Christmas. The Son came for people who needed forgiveness and a new beginning. He would bear our sins, rise from death, and welcome us into life with God.

Across these readings, we have considered hope, peace, joy, and love. They find their deepest meaning in Jesus Himself. Keep coming to Him as this season gives way to ordinary days.

If you have never entrusted your life to Jesus, you can respond today. Admit your sin. Trust His death and resurrection. Ask Him to forgive you and lead you. Tell a trusted believer, and let your church family help you grow.

If you already follow Him, worship with fresh gratitude. Notice someone who needs kindness. Make room for a person who feels alone. Carry the good news beyond this day.

Journey family, there is hope for everyone because Jesus has come. May His light reach our homes and our city through lives that keep turning toward Him.

REFLECT What have you learned about Jesus through this journey? What response will you carry beyond Christmas Day?

RESPOND Read Luke 2 aloud, alone or with others. Thank Jesus for His salvation and choose one way to share His love today.

PRAY Jesus, thank You for coming to save us. I turn from sin and place my trust in You. Fill me with Your Spirit, help me follow You, and make my life a witness to Your grace. Amen.

KEEP RESPONDING

What is Jesus changing

A truth I want to remember

A step I need to take

Someone I am praying for

Where I have seen God at work

Your next step with Jesus

If you have begun following Jesus, tell someone. Ask your church family to help you learn to pray, read Scripture, and walk in obedience. Ask about baptism as a public expression of your faith.

If you need prayer or support, you do not have to carry this season alone. Reach out to Journey through journeyinbend.com and ask to connect with a pastor or prayer team.

Consider who could walk with you after Christmas. A group, a serving team, or one trusted believer can help you keep putting the Word into practice. Transformation continues in ordinary days.

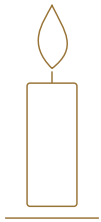
About these readings

Prepared for Journey Church in Bend, Oregon. Biblical stories are retold in devotional language. Read the listed passages in their context.

Journey references: church history and purpose (day 4 and introduction), Deer Ridge campus (day 5), Rooted (day 14), Superheroes volunteers (day 17), and Guerrilla Love (day 18). Public website pages were consulted November 11, 2026.

journeyinbend.com/about
journeyinbend.com/serve/outreach
journeyinbend.com/rooted
journeyinbend.com/serve

Scripture readings are references for use with your own Bible. The English Standard Version (ESV) is recommended. Reflection and prayer language is original devotional prose, not a Bible translation.



Hope for everyone.

May the hope of Jesus take root in your heart and reach others through your life.

JOURNEY CHURCH

Bend, Oregon

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