

INTRODUCTION

The word “advent” comes from a Latin word (“adventus”) which means “coming.” Traditionally, the church has taken the weeks leading up to Christmas to “live into” the story of waiting for Messiah to appear. Advent is a season that reminds us of our longing and desire.

Advent is a time of waiting. A line from the Christmas hymn, *Joy to the World*, says it so well: “Let every heart prepare him room.” During these days of Advent, we are challenged to consider that part of the waiting is preparing ... preparing room in our hearts to experience anew the One true object of our longing and desire.

In the midst of the busyness of the season, slow down and prepare room in your heart. Over the next four weeks, we’ll walk through four movements related to preparing room in our hearts as we listen to His voice.

How will you listen this Advent season?

PREPARATION

Let Every Heart Prepare Him Room

On Christmas, we sing *Joy to the World* with the phrase, “let every heart prepare Him room.” Quite often, these are simply sentimental words. They are words we like and words we want to be true. However, preparation takes time and we can’t wish our way into preparing room for God in our lives.

In our world of “instant everything”, we can easily transfer the idea of “instant” into our lives with God. We desire to be able to “say the word” and experience relationship with Him. On the one hand, He is always present in our lives but often not in an experiential way. We might “know” that He is near but not experience that nearness in the daily moments of life. The invitation to “prepare Him room” is an invitation to experience Him at the heart level, at the level of our conscious awareness and not simply at the level of theological assent. This doesn’t happen in an instant ... it requires preparation in the same way we might prepare to have a house guest.

For many of us, our hearts are like the homes on the television show *Hoarders*. Every square inch of our hearts is filled with things that we believe will make us happy: relationships, jobs, activities, possessions, even “religious” activities. None of these is “bad”, but they aren’t meant to satisfy our souls. And then, we frequently hold hurts, grudges, habits, or other desires in our hearts. Throw in the busyness of life and

there just isn't any room for a visitor.

On *Hoarders*, the cleaning project begins with a humble acknowledgement that there is a need for change. Over these next three and a half weeks of Advent, we'll walk through a process for making room in our hearts for Christ.

Our life with God is always an adventure in what Eugene Peterson calls the "middle voice". In the English language, we understand "active voice" in which we do something and the "passive voice" in which something is done to us. Other languages have the "middle voice" in which one is active and passive at the same time. Peterson writes:

Prayer and spirituality feature participation, the complex participation of God and the human, his will and our wills. We do not abandon ourselves to drown in the ocean of love, losing identity. We do not pull the strings that activate God's operations in our lives, subjecting God to our assertive identity. We neither manipulate God (active voice) nor are we manipulated by God (passive voice). We are involved in the action and participate in its results but do not control or define it (middle voice). Prayer takes place in the middle voice.

The middle voice means that we wait ... actively, and that is what advent is all about. There is tension in the waiting but there is no other way. So, the idea is that we allow Him to prepare room in our hearts but we also participate. How will this work? As we allow Him to prepare the room, what is our role? Over these next weeks of the Advent Season, we'll walk through the following:

Week 1: He humbles our hearts as we *wait*

Week 2: He softens our hearts as we *listen*

Week 3: He expands our hearts as we *release*

Week 4: He occupies our hearts as we *open*

Let's journey together in these days of Advent as we learn to wait, listen, release, open, and finally celebrate the one who comes to live in our hearts!

Advent comes from a Latin word which means "coming" or "arrival" and the days of Advent challenge us to prepare and be in waiting mode. We may have come to know Jesus years ago, but Advent once again allows us to go deeper into the joy of a Savior who dwells with us and in us. He alone is the One for whom we were made. It was Augustine who prayed, "Our heart is restless until it rests in you." Let's pray his prayer as we begin living into this Season of Advent ...

Great are you, O Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise; your power is immense, and your wisdom beyond reckoning. And so we, who are a due part of your creation, long to praise you – we also carry our mortality about with us, carry the evidence of our sin and with it the proof that you thwart the proud. You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you. Amen.

Spend some time with that prayer and make it your own.

Tomorrow, we begin with learning to wait ... that He might humble our heart

DECEMBER 1

He Humbles Our Hearts as We Wait Day 1

The preparation of our hearts begins with waiting. Waiting? That dreaded word! We don't like to wait. Why? Because waiting humbles us ... it reminds us that we aren't in control ... that we can't save ourselves. It puts us in a place of depending on someone else. We don't like it because it strips us down to simply "being" rather than "doing." Most of our "doing" is about clothing ourselves so we don't have to feel naked and vulnerable. Our "doings" are generally an attempt to clothe ourselves with relationships, possessions, or achievements.

To just "be" feels vulnerable, but it is in our vulnerability that He meets us. It is not in our attempts to control things that we experience Him but in our weakness and dependence. When we feel vulnerable, with a lack of security or power or respect, we try to make things happen. We try to save ourselves. And that is our undoing ...

It is when we wait that a Savior can appear. When we strike out on our own, we never sense our need and never cry out for help. We might ask him to help us save ourselves but He desires to save us into life with Him, being clothed in Him, not saving us with the clothes we think we want.

Initially, when we come to faith, it is because we stopped and believed that we couldn't save ourselves. Then, day by day, we experience His salvation in our lives when we wait for Him to keep on saving us.

In Psalm 25:1-3, David cries out to God:

To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in You I trust, Do not let me be ashamed; Do not let my enemies exult over me. Indeed, none of those who wait for You will be ashamed; Those who deal treacherously without cause will be ashamed. (NASB)

Why does he pray “do not let me be ashamed”? Because David was face to face with his need, his nakedness. He knew he needed to be clothed. He expresses the faith of waiting, knowing that God will clothe Him. Those who “deal treacherously” speaks of those times when we take matters into our own hands. David affirms that this always leads to shame because we simply can't clothe ourselves adequately. We are always left with incompleteness.

When we wait, we experience the God who has always been there. It requires stopping and waiting to notice what has been ours all along. When we wait, we become aware ... aware of the ways we try to save ourselves and aware of the Savior who is always with us.

Make it a goal to wait today. When you feel that urge to take control of a situation, stop and wait for your Savior. Feel that sense of nakedness but let it be an invitation to trust, not action.

We'll pray this prayer together throughout this week of asking the Father to humble our hearts as we wait:

Gracious Father, humble my heart as I wait on you. Give me the strength to stop and wait so that you can be the One who saves me. Give me eyes to see my nakedness today but then to trust that You alone can clothe me. Use your Word, the world around me, and the words of others that I might see You alone as my savior all the day long. Amen.