



# OUT OF TIME

ADVENT 2023

DEVOTIONAL  
RESOURCE

# *OUT OF TIME:* ADVENT DEVOTIONS

Introduction.....	i
Week of November 12.....	1
Week of November 19.....	5
Week of November 26.....	8
Week of December 3.....	11
Week of December 10.....	14
Week of December 17.....	17
Christmas Eve.....	21
Christmas Day.....	24
Resources for the Season.....	28
Other Prayers for the Season.....	32

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# INTRODUCTION

## A NOTE FOR FAITH COMMUNITY LEADERS

These devotions integrate the themes of the *Out of Time* series into a take-home devotional resource. You can print it for people to pick up, email each week's entry to them, or produce social-media content with it. If you don't need all eight entries or are observing a four-week Advent season, omit the ones you can do without.

You can also adapt the content for a host of needs at church. Do you need a devotion for tonight's finance meeting? Go to the appropriate week, read the scripture text, and choose one of the "Ideas for Devotion" to do together. Do you have an ongoing Bible study? Pull out the lectionary texts for a given week. Invite your people to notice all the time-related words or phrases in the text. Use the reflection for that week in tandem with the "Start Time" prompt as a jumping-off point for discussion. Are you looking for small-group or large-group fellowship ideas for Advent? Skim the resource section for suggestions to kickstart your brainstorming: a game night featuring time-related games, perhaps, or a book club focusing on the themes of time in poetry, a novel, or a work of nonfiction.

Long story short: adapt this resource to your needs and those of your community.

## OUT OF TIME: THE SEASON'S THEME

You know those calendar push notifications that regularly pop up on your phone? They've probably saved your reputation as someone capable of handling professional responsibilities and human relationships once or twice. Those little push notifications remind us of the birthdays, deadlines, and events that would otherwise be lost in a sea of distractions. "Oh, *that* thing!" we think as a cheery ding sounds, and we promptly send the card, write the assignment, or prepare for the event that we knew was coming, yet had completely forgotten.

When Advent arrives, it's as though a push notification appears in our collective Christian consciousness: "Jesus is coming! Would you like to plan something?"

This devotional resource offers ways to respond to the Advent season. It is a resource you can use to support your daily devotions throughout the season, and is especially suited to accompanying an Advent wreath-lighting at home. It uses the scriptures of the Advent season to invite you to reflect on how people experience time and on how God uses our temporal experience to meet us, challenge us, bless us, shape us, and call us into holy endings and new beginnings.

As a season of preparation, Advent reminds us that our time is limited. We run out of time to reconcile, to prepare, to make a change. Yet even as we are running out of time, God is out of time entirely—beyond it, outside it. God's infinite being and infinite patience cut through our fear as God enters human time to dwell with us: *Emmanuel*, God-with-us.

## IN THIS DEVOTIONAL RESOURCE

Each week, you'll find a prayer, a passage from scripture, a brief reflection, and ideas for devotion. The ideas are meant to be flexible. Do as many or as few as you want; repeat some and skip others. The best devotional activity, like the best workout, is the one you'll do again.

The ideas for the devotions always include the following elements:

**Start time** is a brief prompt for writing, reflection, or discussion about the week's theme. It is best used at or near the beginning of the week.

**Marking time** usually begins with a prompt for pulling up your calendar or calling to mind your daily rhythm and marking it in a particular way that will help you notice the week's theme.

**Making time** suggests an activity that will call your attention to how you experience an aspect of time.

**Break time** suggests something you can drop or change about your daily routine as an encouragement to break out of some time-related constraint.

**Time out** provides a suggestion for your prayer life this week as you take time out with God.

**One moment in time** is a prompt for a visual time-related diary or social-media challenge. Take a picture each day (or however often you wish) that corresponds to the weekly word prompt.

At the end of this resource, you'll find some goodies: lists of time-related literature and games and additional prayers for particular moments or circumstances.

## PREPARATION

This devotional guide invites you to use several things as part of each week's devotional time. Some of them require supplies that you might want to round up in advance. You won't have to use these every week, but if you start now, you'll be ready! The supplies are simple:

- Post-its
- Sand timer or stopwatch
- Journal, if you journal
- This and next year's calendar, if you use a calendar, in digital or hard copy
- Advent wreath with space for seven weeks (wait, what? See below.)

## Why a seven-week Advent season?

If you're already in the habit of observing Advent, then you're likely familiar with a four-week season. Where did this seven-week version come from, and why is it here in this devotional guide?

Advent was one of the latest seasons of the church year to develop, and it came into being as a corollary to Lent. Just as Lent was a time of preparation for people who would be baptized at Easter, Advent became a time of preparation for those who would be baptized at Christmas. Many churches began observing Advent as a forty-day period that started on or around November 11th, the feast day of St. Martin of Tours, earning it the nickname *St. Martin's Lent*.

Over time, Advent became standardized as a four-week season. But lately, some church leaders have been advocating for a return to a longer Advent observance. As secular culture starts its Christmas observance earlier and earlier and December schedules overflow, it's hard to honor the simplicity and devotion that are part of Advent's character. In the anecdotal experience of the Barn Geese Worship writers, people who observe an extended Advent season often share that their preparation for the coming of Christ feels less rushed and more meaningful than in a four-week observation.

## Preparing your calendar

Because this Advent series considers time, maintaining a calendar or planner—sometimes called calendaring—is a frequent practice we'll engage in these devotions. If you regularly keep a planner, we'll invite you to discover that practice as a way to engage your faith. If you don't, or if you have a calendar that alternates between extreme detail and completely blank pages, Advent is a great time to begin or reengage the practice. After all, Advent is a season for counting days.

If this sounds like a tremendous chore, forget it! Or try it and see what God will do with it. Buy a new planner (you can easily find 2024 planners that start in December). Crack the spine on that journal you bought but never used before. Or simply use the calendar on your phone.

## The Advent wreath

Bring a little fire to your devotional life with your own Advent wreath.

You can find these at almost any Christmas store, on Amazon, in the Christian bookstore, or wherever you find seasonal home decor. Most Advent wreaths will hold four candles, which you can expand to fit a longer Advent observance if desired. The Advent wreath need not actually be a literal wreath. A circle, cluster, or row of candles will do.

Place your Advent wreath somewhere you can return to it every day, like your kitchen table. Light it when you sit down at dinner for some of that seasonal ambiance. If you use smaller tapers, you'll probably burn through a candle over the course of seven weeks. That's okay!

One of the questions we receive most often about observing an extended Advent season concerns how to adapt or make an Advent wreath for a longer observance. The answer: however you want! Here are three possible options for household wreaths:

- Surround the four candles in the Advent wreath you usually use with three extra candles.
- Procure a candle holder that can hold seven candles and decorate it with your own greens. (Please do not adapt a menorah for this purpose.) The picture in the upper right shows a seven-tealight candle holder from Amazon.
- Grab seven mason jars and seven tealights, and channel your inner rustic chic. Fill the jar halfway with dry rice to raise the tealights and make them easier to light. The picture at the end of this section portrays such a setup.



Depending on what kind of Advent wreath you have, how often you light it, and how many weeks of Advent you're observing, you may find that you need to replace a candle before the Advent season has run its course. When you do, consider it an opportunity to revisit the week that candle represented and reengage a practice from that week. What has changed about how that practice feels, weeks later? What's the same? How has the passage of time affected your experience?

When the season of Advent at last gives way to Christmas, we have three suggestions for what to do with your wreath, improvised or otherwise. Which option you choose will depend on your circumstances (are you traveling for the holidays?), your attention span, and, of course, the size of your personal stockpile of candles.

*Put it away immediately:* At its basic level, an Advent wreath is a countdown clock, and it counts down toward Christmas. When it hits its version of 00:00 on Christmas Day, then the first option is simply to put it away. Before you do, however, consider lighting it on December 25. Let the flames burn themselves out safely in fiery rejoicing over this long-expected day.

*Keep it through Christmas:* Display the Advent wreath throughout the Christmas season—all of it. Let it flash its 00:00 for twelve whole days. Especially if you add a Christ candle on Christmas Day, the profusion of light offers a visual cue for the endurance of the season beyond December 25. Allow the candles to burn out safely on Twelfth Night, traditionally a time of particular rejoicing and feasting in the church.

*Use it for Epiphany:* The Christmas cycle is comprised of four seasons of the Church year: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, and the season following Epiphany. In 2024, between Epiphany (January 6) and the six Sundays that follow it (January 7 to February 11), there are seven opportunities to return to this resource. Keep your wreath out and try reversing your Advent observance throughout the season after Epiphany. Work backwards through this resource, subtracting one candle from the wreath as you go. Notice the days getting a little longer. Note the ways that the practices in this devotional guide feel different or just the same on this side of Christmas. Observe whether and how the Advent texts seem to be in conversation with the texts of the season after Epiphany. You'll arrive at your final candle on Transfiguration Sunday, the Sunday before Lent begins. The wreath will have kept you company through the entirety of the Christmas liturgical cycle, and you can put it away as you turn in the direction of Easter.



# WEEK OF NOVEMBER 12

## “THE UNCERTAIN TIME”

### SCRIPTURE READING: AMOS 5:18-24

*Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light; as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?*

*I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

### PRAYER

It's already too late, God.  
It is too late in the day  
to turn my thoughts to you;  
you could have been my companion all day.  
It's too late to redo  
everything I should have done better today.  
It is too late to savor  
the day's most wonderful moment.  
It's too late for a flickering candle  
on an Advent wreath  
to push away the night.  
It's too late in this year  
for a totally new beginning.

It's never too late  
for you to arrive in my life.  
It's never too late  
for you to deliver some peace.  
It's never too late  
for fresh perspective.  
It's never too late  
for a flicker of hope



to spread.

In this one second,  
let my faith  
feel like a small candle:  
defying the unknown,  
casting light where I cannot observe,  
yet vulnerable,  
and dependent on your spark.  
It is never too late  
for your goodness.

In this one second,  
let my faith feel like the shadow:  
glimmering with unseen possibility.  
It is too late  
to turn away from you.  
Amen.

## REFLECTION

How long will I live? What happens when I die? What is this world coming to? What will happen at the end?

When it comes to thinking about our relationship with time, these are some of the most urgent questions that spring to mind. At first glance, they're about us: as individuals, as a human community, as part of creation. But look deeper: they're also questions about God. The way we dwell with our uncertainty about the end, personal or cosmic, is tied directly to whether we believe God is involved or distant, gracious or judgmental, protecting or punishing.

*The way we relate to time is connected to the way that we relate to God.* That's the first of two big ideas that this devotional guide explores. The second is that *God uses our experience of time to connect with us*, even though God's experience of time is so different from our own. At the center of the Advent season is an immortal God who dwells in eternity, yet chose to become incarnate in a mortal body during a particular moment of history.

We see that same particularity shimmering in Amos' prophecy. Amos takes our questions about the day of the Lord and connects them to the present moment. You're wondering about justice and righteousness at the end? Amos asks. God longs for justice and righteousness now.

Imagine that: all the urgency and anxiety that we feel around endings, God feels about this moment, here, now, today. How is God inviting you to transform uncertainty about the future into concern for the present moment?

## IDEAS FOR DEVOTION

### Start time

Reflect/journal/discuss: Who do you hope that God is? Where do you see God's divine character becoming incarnate today? In this world? In the community in which you live? In your own life and actions?

### Marking time

Look at your schedule for this week and notice its uncertainties: meetings you know you'll have but you're not sure when, events you're hoping to attend but you don't know that you will, work shifts that have yet to be scheduled, and so on—what one might call *uncertain time*.

- What does it feel like to have uncertainty as a feature of your calendar? Is it stressful, liberating, neutral, or variable?
- How do you represent uncertainty in your calendar? Do you mark these moments with a pen, highlighter, Post-it note, or electronic scribble?
- This week, consider putting an asterisk or a cross (or other symbol) beside uncertain time in your calendar so you can remember that God works in these moments.
- If you don't keep a calendar or do so sporadically, choose a recent day for which you have no notes on your calendar. Using a saved email, a phone call, or other such documentation, can you reconstruct what happened that day? Consider how uncertainty affects your memories.

### Making time

Sometime this week, make time to sit with your uncertainty about the future and think about what feels most urgent to you about it. Commit to doing one thing this week that redirects your urgency outward into your community's need for justice and righteousness. For example, if you worry that you'll never be able to afford a home, take an hour to learn about unhoused people in your community and how to help them. If you worry about earning a passing grade this semester, give an hour or two to volunteering with a local literacy program, tutoring program, library, or school.

### Time out

In prayer this week, bring to God all your uncertainties. You don't have to ask God to give you certainty, although you can. Just be honest with God about what you don't know.

## Break time

Find a block of time in your calendar (even ten or fifteen minutes) when nothing is currently scheduled, and block it out. Don't make any plans for it. See if you can hold it as an open, uncertain time. Schedule this time as uncertain time so you can refer to it later.

- After your block of uncertain time, make a small note about what happened during that moment. You may also write how uncertain time made you feel.
- Immediately schedule another block of uncertain time for next week.
  - Can you give yourself more uncertain time?
  - This week, did you take less than you wanted?

## A moment in time

The reading from Amos invites us to hold the tension between a feeling of “It’s too late!” and “It’s never too late.” One place we experience that tension is when we are delayed: late, but maybe not *too* late? Throughout the week, take pictures of things that remind you of the word *delay*.

# WEEK OF NOVEMBER 19

## “TIME IS RELATIVE”

### SCRIPTURE READING: PSALM 90:1-6

*Lord, you have been our dwelling place  
in all generations.  
Before the mountains were brought forth,  
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.  
You turn us back to dust,  
and say, “Turn back, you mortals.”  
For a thousand years in your sight  
are like yesterday when it is past,  
or like a watch in the night.  
You sweep them away; they are like a dream,  
like grass that is renewed in the morning;  
in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;  
in the evening it fades and withers.*

### PRAYER

*As you pray this week, use sand timer, stopwatch, or countdown timer to keep track of time. You will repeat the prayer at least three times, using your timer differently each time.*

*The first time you pray: Start your timer. Watch the sand fall or the seconds tick as you pray.*

God, I am aware of this moment in my life.  
Every second sweeps away forever.  
But with you,  
there is no end to our days.  
Every sweeping second spent with you is good.  
Help me use my other time today,  
just as well as this.  
Amen.

*The second time you pray: Start the timer, but try not to pay attention to it. Stop the timer when you have finished your moment of prayer.*

*The third time you pray: Do not start the timer at all.*

## REFLECTION

When the psalmist writes about God's power to sweep away thousands of years like a dream, it shows us God's agelessness. If time is something that we experience as a force beyond our control, like a river, then God's mastery over time shows incredible divine power.

Chances are good that you know a person or two who seems to have the power to manipulate time in a much more mundane way, like the friend whose conversations make the hours seem like seconds, or a beloved partner who can re-center you with the briefest word. On the other hand, you may know someone who makes every second feel like an eternity.

In our overscheduled, busy lives, there are still some people for whom we "make time." Of course, we cannot literally create time for these people, but we will willingly compress time frames or move other appointments to see such people or collaborate with them.

This week, consider how the people you know affect your experience of time. Do they make a moment stretch? Do they make time fly?

With this in mind, how does your relationship with God change your subjective experience of time? Does time with God make the moment stretch? Make the hours disappear? Take away the pressure of the moment? Make each second feel like a lifetime (in a good way, or in a boring way)?

When we spend time with *people*, certain activities are fun with some folks and simply drag with others. Perhaps it's the same in your relationship with God, too. Consider the range of activities when you might consciously spend time with God: prayer, service to others, worship, reading scripture, volunteering at church, and so on. Which of these experiences make time simply vanish, and which of these make time drag?

## IDEAS FOR DEVOTION

### Start time

This week's theme invites awareness of the time we spend or make with people. Let's start with Jesus. Imagine Jesus sitting beside you or across from you in an empty chair. What would you say to Jesus? When would you ask Jesus to come with you? When would you ask for Jesus's help?

## Marking time

When you note appointments in your calendar this week, consider adding only the names of the people you will see at that appointment, or consider adding their names to your calendar entry. Pray for these people before the appointment. If your planner is small or if it's impractical for you to follow this suggestion, you can also take notes from any appointment on your calendar. Who was there? Write out their names after the fact. Pray for each of them.

## Making time

Consider the most recent weeks in your life. Is there anyone with whom you've missed connecting? It could be someone whose appointment you rescheduled, someone with whom you played phone tag, or someone whose email went unanswered. It could be someone closer to home: maybe you haven't spent quality time with a particular child, a partner, a close friend, that neighbor you keep meaning to chat with, or even your dog. Make time for them this week.

## Time out

As you pray this week, center your prayers on people. Write down their names. See if you can recall the exact day you met them. Pray in gratitude for the days and eras you've shared with them. Ask them how you can pray for them today.

## Break time

Schedule time to do something for yourself. If you keep a calendar, write down your own name rather than the name of the activity.

## A moment in time

Take a picture of someone who reminds you of the word *everlasting*. You may want to further describe what quality of that person feels everlasting to you: everlasting faith, everlasting joy, everlasting love, everlasting peace, etc.

# WEEK OF NOVEMBER 26

## “IN OUR TIME”

### SCRIPTURE READING: MATTHEW 25:34-40

*[Jesus said,] “Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’*

*“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’*

*“And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”*

### PRAYER

God, when did I see you  
hungry,  
thirsty,  
unwelcome,  
or unwell?  
When did I pass you by?

Tell me now.  
I need your honesty.  
People are often too kind  
to tell me  
what they need,  
and I do not always notice.  
Or they try to catch my eye,  
but I feel too busy  
or afraid  
for that kind of eye contact.

I do not pretend to be perfect,  
but please encourage me, too.  
Show me when I did  
what was good.  
Did I give a drink  
to someone who was thirsty?  
Did I visit someone  
in the moment they felt like a prisoner?

Certainly, I make unwitting mistakes.  
Fill me with such love for you  
that I share  
accidental goodness,  
unintended kindness,  
haphazard generosity.  
Amen.

## REFLECTION

This scripture from Matthew 25 might initially strike us as worrying, because the people at the king's right hand are surprised by what they are told. Is it impossible to know our own scorecard until the final judgment? But underneath, there's a comfort: Jesus is not—or at least, not *only*—far away in a distant heaven. Christ meets us in our neighbor, and so Christ is all around, always, everywhere.

Many of us may find that our flesh-and-blood neighbor is more complicated and much more human than we like to imagine Jesus was. Anne Lamott writes, “You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.”<sup>1</sup> The convicting corollary is that we've created Jesus in our own image when Jesus no longer annoys us, disappoints us, frustrates us, or challenges us the way that some people do (and as we undoubtedly do for other people). One of the challenges of Christian life is learning to discern Jesus' presence in the challenging relationships that we would rather avoid. How can you seek Jesus in your flesh-and-blood neighbor this week?

## IDEAS FOR DEVOTION

### Start time

Discuss, reflect on, or journal about the people in your life who remind you of Jesus' presence, whether they comfort you or challenge you. Spend some time thinking about who might need you

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 21. Anne says that she heard this from her priest friend, Tom Weston.



to embody Jesus' presence for them. If you did last week's devotional activity of taking a picture of someone who reminded you of the word *everlasting*, consider focusing on this person. How can you reflect Jesus' presence to them?

## Marking time

Think about the time that you might not otherwise schedule in your calendar: driving, waiting in line, walking to a meeting, walking the dog, getting coffee. You don't generally schedule any of these activities. But this week, notice: Who did you pass during moments like these? How did God use them to minister to you? How can you use such unscheduled moments to bring some godly joy to the world?

## Making time

Choose one of these two options.

- Do the act of kindness you've been putting off. Buy food for your church's food pantry and deliver it the same day. Pull unused clothes out of the closet and take them straight to the donation center.
- Take time to show appreciation to those who serve you. Write a check for the ministry that means the most to you. Write your pastor a thank-you card. Take treats to your local schoolteachers.

## Time out

One of the themes running throughout this week's text is the idea of ownership. This time, this life, is a gift God has given us: it is ours, and we decide how to spend it. This week, nurture a sense of protectiveness and ownership around your time of prayer. Set an alarm for it; block out time in your schedule. That is *your* time with God. Nothing is more important!

## Break time

What feels missing from your daily rhythm? Is it daily scripture reading? A daily workout? Eating with the family? A bit more sleep? What do you need to drop from your schedule to make this possible? How can you disrupt your schedule for one week or even one day so that you can satisfy this missing desire? Once you try it, consider how God speaks to you in this disruption. How has this change connected you more closely with the image of God you bear?

## A moment in time

This week's scripture text draws our attention to ultimate things. What will happen at the end of our lives? What kind of legacy will we leave? Throughout the week, take pictures of things that remind you of the word *last*.

# WEEK OF DECEMBER 3

## “RUNNING OUT OF TIME”

### SCRIPTURE READING: ISAIAH 64:1-4

*O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him.*

### PRAYER

“Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down!”  
The prophet could have taken those words  
right out of my mouth.

Jesus, the situation is desperate—  
you know the one—  
and I need you.  
Here.  
Now.  
Whatever is going to happen,  
I think it will hurt.

Jesus, it feels like  
I'm riding a roller coaster  
as it clicks up a hill.  
Every second that passes  
inches me off the ground,  
and makes the impending fall  
even farther.

I know it's coming, Jesus,  
I just don't know when:  
the sudden release—  
the immediate weightlessness—

and then the swooping crush  
of gravity.

I can't avoid it.  
But Jesus, I wonder—  
could you show me  
how to enjoy it?

Come sit beside me.  
Put your hands in the air.  
Let the wind rush across your wounds,  
and teach me how to laugh  
as time runs out.  
Amen.

## REFLECTION

Yearning is our desire for something we hope will change our lives. The dream of home ownership. A new job. A new knee. A child, or a lifelong partner.

Anything worth yearning for will likely come with massive implications, rewriting fundamental assumptions or patterns in our lives. That new home has a lawn you have to mow and things you have to repair. That new job requires that period of learning new systems, rules, expectations, and coworkers. That lifelong partner will pinch you as much as they shape you. That new knee—oh, the physical therapy! And let's not get started on everything the longed-for child requires.

We know that big yearnings lead to big life changes, and we're willing to accept this because a positive change is worth the effort.

What kind of social change makes you yearn? A fairer world, or one where everyone has enough food to eat? A society where people can speak to each other with respect? A Thanksgiving table that doesn't descend into pure family madness? A season where you can slow down enough to enjoy your life and the people around you?

In Isaiah's vision, such large social changes come from God, and they are to be both feared and desired. They bring about trembling like shaking mountains and combustions like igniting brushwood. In this Advent season of yearning, prophets like Isaiah let us know that change, like peace on earth, is going to require at least as much from us as, say, the birth of a child or the painful physical therapy of a knee replacement.

Our faith tells us that God can accomplish such changes whether we are ready or not, and God will. Yet how often do we find ourselves resisting the change because we fear the pain? And how is God drawing us forward into yearning?

## IDEAS FOR DEVOTION

### **Start time**

This week, start by identifying something for which you yearn. You may need to take a day or two to ponder it. Once you've figured it out, consider what will need to end to bring about this desired change. Would you look forward to this ending with anticipation or with dread? Does this ending feel far away or easily in reach? You may want to recall another time when you experienced a dramatic change—one you either yearned for or dreaded. Discuss, reflect, or journal about what it feels like to be running out of time—and maybe even to be liking it.

### **Marking time**

Bring up your calendar or your schedule for the coming week, and find something you're looking forward to. Set a timer on your phone that counts down to the moment that event arrives.

### **Making time**

Watch a movie or read a piece of literature about time, or play a game that uses time as an element—see “Resources for the Season” that follows the weekly devotions. After, discuss or reflect on how this experience treats time: What does it feel like to run out of time (in this game, or for these characters) or to interact with time as a sort of character? How does this experience connect to or contrast with what it feels like to run out of time in our day-to-day schedules?

### **Time out**

This week, when the end of your day comes, try praying “A Prayer for the End of the Day” under the “Other Prayers for This Season” section of these weekly devotions, or pray your own prayer acknowledging the day's conclusion. What's done is done. What isn't done now isn't getting done today. Hand it all over, finished and unfinished, to God.

### **Break time**

Quit something this week. You know, the thing you've been wanting to quit. The habit that hurts you. The committee that eats up too much of your time. The toxic relationship. This is the week. If it's a big commitment, you may not be able to just quit it, but start to make your exit plan.

### **A moment in time**

This week's texts call to mind the changes for which we yearn. Throughout the week, take pictures of things that remind you of the word *ready*.

# WEEK OF DECEMBER 10

## “TIME FLIES”

### SCRIPTURE READING: 2 PETER 3:9-12

*The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.*

*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.*

*Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire?*

### PRAYER

Make me patient today.

*Sit in silence as long as you are able.*

Holy Spirit, make me ready  
to leap into action for you.  
How can I hasten  
your mission today?

*Stay silent, listening.*

Amen.

### REFLECTION

So far this season, we've been considering our personal experience of time—the days, hours, minutes, and seconds that flow together under human observation. Accordingly, this week's scripture pulls us to consider our tendency toward inconstancy: our fickle nature, our changing emotions, our irregular devotion. By contrast, God shows us utter consistency, divine reliability.

So how do we find our way to a steady, consistent God when all things around us, including our hearts, change from day to day?

We might consider the ancient navigators who explored unknown territory. They looked to the stars for a stable point of reference in contrast to the unfamiliar landscape around them. Yet these stars changed, too. Constellations are different in winter than in summer. The sky shifts depending on latitude, with different constellations in the northern and southern skies. The moon cycles differently than the sun.

Ancient navigators could use the celestial map for guidance because they had inherited generations of careful observation. Previous scientists observed the sky from year to year, and their observations made the celestial cycle predictable. Having inherited this knowledge, ancient navigators could understand the movement of the stars on specific days, even when the terrain they explored remained mysterious.

When we feel lost or as if we are changing, we may turn to our “changeless” steady God. But we rarely find God in the same place as the day before. In such moments, it helps to remember that humankind is capable of observing the world over generations, and that the observations of previous generations can inform our experiences today.

Our scriptures function a bit like those ancient star charts: they contain generational observations about the God we have come to know, recognition of the patterns of change God prefers, and the zigzag movements and risings and fallings that God injects into our human experience.

These observations demonstrate that God is mobile. God moves around us, even as we pivot around God. If we seek God today, we might not find God in exactly the same place we found God yesterday. Yet our ancestors watched God for generations through many changes, and their observations provide great insight into where we might find God today.

The landscape around us shifts. Our spiritual life ebbs and flows. Our connection to our churches deepens or grows more shallow. Especially in unexplored territory, ancient observations from scripture help us understand where to look for God now.

## IDEAS FOR DEVOTION

### Start time

When have you felt unreliable lately? When have you disappointed yourself or others with a lack of dedication or dependability? Discuss, reflect, or journal about those moments, and then reflect on moments when you *have* shown up, been faithful, shown dedication. Where did you learn how to do that?

## Marking time

Pull up your calendar, schedule, or daily rhythm. What standing commitments carry over from week to week? In what ways does this consistency enrich your life?

## Making time

Pick a day to pull out old journals or old photos. Look at the person you were. What's different now? What have you gained? What have you lost? What do you miss about the person you were? What makes you grateful for the passage of time? How has your faith changed between that day and this one?

## Break time

Use this week to disrupt your own experience of time by broadening your perspective. Seek out wisdom from the past that guides and steadies you. It could be your favorite scripture, a family artifact, or the hymn you want people to sing at your funeral. Use this to zoom out on your own life until you feel your perspective shifting.

If you did last week's break time activity (quitting something), evaluate how it went, or revisit your exit plan as a way to honor a new commitment to yourself. If you are made to choose between a commitment you made to yourself and a commitment you made to someone else, which will you pick? How does this tendency affect your ability to honor your commitments to God?

## Time out

Try returning to the prayer above every day this week. Does anything change each time you engage with this prayer? What do you notice about your capacity to wait? If you *have* been praying these prayers every day, take time to reflect on how this practice of repetition has affected your faith life throughout the season.

## A moment in time

This week's texts call our attention to the contrast between our sense of time's passing and God's sense of time passing. Throughout the week, take pictures of things that remind you of the word *age*.

# WEEK OF DECEMBER 17

## “DREAMLIKE TIME”

### SCRIPTURE READING: PSALM 126

*When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,  
we were like those who dream.  
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,  
and our tongue with shouts of joy;  
then it was said among the nations,  
"The Lord has done great things for them."  
The Lord has done great things for us,  
and we rejoiced.  
Restore our fortunes, O Lord,  
like the watercourses in the Negeb.  
May those who sow in tears  
reap with shouts of joy.  
Those who go out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
carrying their sheaves.*

### PRAYER

God, let me dream with you  
without concern for what feels possible.  
You offer transformative joy.  
Help me envision my place in that picture.  
You desire peace.  
Show me the role I play to create it.

Once the vision is clear to me,  
once I return to the world as I know it today,  
your vision might fade  
from my memory.  
I have already forgotten  
other dreams that felt so real.



Return to me  
with new clarity and purpose.  
I want to live in the world you imagine.  
I want to make it my own.  
Amen.

## REFLECTION

Dreams have a way of messing with time. The events of one dream span a week's worth of waking time. In other dreams, a single instant stretches like taffy across several hours of sleep. Dreams demonstrate that while the measure of a minute may be stable, our experience of those sixty seconds is not. Time is both fixed and flexible.

The fixed flexibility of dreamlike time has much to teach us about our faithful imagination, our sense of what God can make possible in this reality. The prophets and psalmists in scripture often catch that visionary, dreamlike glimpse of God's future reality: the restoration of fortunes, the release from captivity, the reunion of the living and the dead. These visions reveal a reality changed by God's power where God transfigures our tears into shouts of joy. Yet no matter how utterly tangible they seem at the moment, these visions—like our dreams—feel flimsy when we rub the sleep out of our eyes and creakily rise to face the grit of today's challenges.

During the Advent season, we remember that people in scripture cling to godly dreams. Faith means painting the vision, writing it in large letters, keeping it ever before you so it does not fade in the too-bright light of day. Faith is Mary's belief that God will give her a child, because God said so. Faith is Joseph's acceptance of the literal dreams that explained what seemed unexplainable. John the Baptist preaches and teaches his vision for repentance as though it has actually broken out of dreams and into reality (because it has!). Mary, Joseph, and John join other biblical dreamers: Abram and Sarai, who caught a vision for an impossible baby of their own; Noah, who was told to build the ark; Moses, who dreamed of freedom from slavery—on and on it goes.

These dreamers clung to flexible, flimsy visions amid a ragged, vicious world. But even when their faith was weak, they learned that when God makes a plan, God sticks to it. What seems flimsy to us is, through God's power, inevitable. Time itself warps around God's plans. What once seemed entirely unlikely becomes the way things were always meant to be.

When she is first approached with God's idea, Mary accepts it because she believes nothing is impossible with God. After that first moment, she certainly endures days when that vision must have seemed crazy, unbelievable, tenuous, and uncertain.

Then she cradles the baby in her arms.

## IDEAS FOR DEVOTION

### Start time

Discuss, reflect, or journal about some of the most memorable dreams you've had. How did time behave in those dreams?

### Marking time

Christmas is right around the corner. So is a new year.

- Pull out your calendar and write down your dreams for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. What do you hope this time will be like? What do you hope to experience? What do you most eagerly anticipate? What do you dread?
- Try the same for 2024. What do you dream for the year ahead? If you already have your planner or calendar for 2024, consider writing down these dreams throughout the year so you will encounter them in the future.

### Making time

Make a commitment to try to achieve a milestone goal that seems impossible. What would you have to do to accomplish this goal? Some examples:

- Run a marathon (or maybe a half-marathon, 5k, or 1k!)
- Write your book: Commit to National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) next November
- Read through the whole Bible (find a daily or weekly schedule for what you would have to read)
- Travel out of the country
- Change career tracks
- Move to a new home
- Retire
- Graduate
- Begin a new ministry at your church
- Foster or mentor a child
- Learn to do something new (cook, dance, speak a different language, change the oil in your car, keep a houseplant alive for more than a month)

### Break time

What part of your day feels most lacking of God's presence? Take a day or two to ponder the question. Then, pause during that part of your day. Find a way to use that moment to reconnect to God in prayer, in silence, or through scripture.

### Time out

This week, write a dream journal, even if only for one night. Keep a pad of paper beside your bed and write down your dreams as soon as you wake. Think about the biblical characters to whom God speaks in dreams and visions. Ask God in prayer if God is speaking to you in this way.

## **A moment in time**

This week's texts ask us to keep godly dreams before us, holding them as tangible possibilities that God can make real. Throughout the week, take pictures of things that remind you of the word *soon*.

# CHRISTMAS EVE

## “NO TIME”

### SCRIPTURE READING: TITUS 2:11-13

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.*

### PRAYER

God, a Christmas Eve confession:

I'm stuck in prep mode.

There are meals to organize,

and gifts to wrap,

and miles to travel,

and, and, and . . .

I lose touch

with what I'm getting ready *for*.

When the moment arrives,

will I miss it?

God, please don't let me.

Lift my head up from the flocks I've been tending

so I hear the angels sing.

Draw my gaze down from the star I've been tracking

so I see the stable.

Drag me away from the food prep

and into the feast.

Why am I so worried about wrapping paper

when the most important gift is you?

Carry me from

*almost ready,*

*one minute more,*

*this is the last thing, I promise!*  
and into the everlasting instant  
when there is no more time:  
because the world has grown quiet,  
because the busyness is hushed,  
because there is nothing more to  
accomplish except  
to marvel,  
because you have arrived,  
because you are with us,  
Emmanuel.  
Amen.

## REFLECTION

Think back to a time when someone told you something that changed everything—including you.

Perhaps you can remember a moment from when you were young, when a parent told you, “You’re going to be a big brother [or sister]!” or a coach said, “You made the team!” or a director announced, “You got the part!”

Maybe it’s a moment in your adulthood that comes to you. The acceptance letter from the dream school. The job offer for your first professional position. The doctor’s call telling you that the cancer is in remission. The person who looks at you from across an aisle and says, “I do.” The call from the adoption agency that a young woman has chosen you to be her baby’s parents.

In an instant, with just a handful of words, you changed. You became someone different. A sibling. Part of a team. A spouse, a survivor, a parent.

Sometimes instant changes come after long periods of hard work and waiting on your part or on someone else’s. Education, training, applications, qualifications—these all take tremendous time and effort. But the transformation itself often happens in no time at all. “To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” (Luke 2:11) These are words that the angels sang to the shepherds. To those shepherds, the news was sudden! Astonishing! But that instantaneous proclamation followed the creation of a whole universe, eons of preparation, lifetimes of promise, and nine months of pregnancy. Even Mary, who had time to prepare for the birth of this savior, still found herself changed in the instant of the baby’s first cry. That was the same moment God changed in an instant, for it was the first moment God needed us.

We have been counting down the weeks, days, and moments until this night, but when this night arrives, it arrives in no time at all. Here it is: a savior has been born *for you*.

Of all the declarations that change us—into siblings, spouses, survivors—here is one that unites us:  
*A savior. For you.*

## IDEAS FOR DEVOTION

### **Start time**

Unlike the other weeks in this devotional resource, where you have as many as seven days to think about a particular aspect of time, now you have just one. There's no more time to prepare for Jesus' coming. All that's left to do is worship.

### **Marking time**

Pull up your calendar. Cross out every day leading up to this one.

### **Making time**

Write "worship Jesus" on today's date.

### **Break time**

Go to church this evening. Worship Jesus.

### **Time out**

Today you will feel tempted to rush headlong into last-minute Christmas prep. First and last, worship Jesus.

### **A moment in time**

Today, take pictures of things that remind you of the word *present*.

# CHRISTMAS DAY

## “THE END TIME IS THE BEGINNING”

### SCRIPTURE READING: JOHN 1:1-5

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

### PRAYER

God,  
here's a funny thing about babies:  
we prepare so hard for their arrival—  
take the classes,  
stockpile the diapers,  
read the books,  
ready the nursery—  
but there is nevertheless a moment when we first hold one  
(so small! so fragile!)  
and realize:  
*I have no idea what I'm doing.*

God,  
you handed us yourself as an infant.  
You came,  
and the kingdom came near with you.  
You arrived,  
and now we're holding you:  
the Body of Christ  
is somehow holding  
the body of Christ.

And we have no idea what we're doing.

Help us, God.

Be both Parent and Child.  
Teach us to walk the ways we should go.  
Repeat to us the words we should speak.  
Hold us when we fall.  
Kiss us better with your peace.  
Sing us to sleep with the stories  
of your adventures with your chosen people.  
Wake us in the morning  
with the song that our hearts yearn to sing.

Do it over and over, O God,  
so that we learn our family story,  
the one that has circled through eternity,  
telling us who and whose we are.

Raise us, O God,  
So that we can, in turn, raise you:  
a living dream for a broken world  
of redemption, peace, and love.  
Amen.

## REFLECTION

Mary knew her scriptures—look no further than the Magnificat for proof. Handed an angelic pronouncement about what God was going to do, Mary gave back a song about what God had already done: “God has helped Israel according to the promise God made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his descendants forever” (Luke 1:54-55). The woman who would become Jesus’ mother recognized God in what was happening to her and through her because she knew the stories of how God had worked before.

We, too, learn to recognize God’s presence in our own time and place as we dwell in the stories of the Bible. With repetition, scripture seeps into our life like dye into fabric, infusing it with sacred color. The circumstances of the present moment take on the shades of the past and the tints of God’s promised future.

During this Christmas season, we retell the story of the Word that has been with us from the beginning and that became enfleshed two thousand years ago in Palestine. Divine, immortal power emptied itself and took on the meek and vulnerable body of a squalling infant who cried and pooped and needed us. Can you even imagine? God *needed* us. Let the astonishment of the story reach you despite the well-worn words: “The Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14).



Wherever you are this Christmas, whoever you're with, and however you feel about it, may it be that when you hear the familiar story about a baby born and laid in a manger, you look at the world around you and know exactly where you are: held in the midst of a sacred story that is still unfolding for this weary world, astonishing even those who have long expected it.

## IDEAS FOR DEVOTION

### Start time

You have come to the end of a time of sustained attention to your experience of time and the ways in which God is present in that experience. Take a moment and reflect, journal or discuss. What did you notice during these past few weeks about time and about God? What new awareness do you want to take with you into the future? What habits might you leave behind?

### Marking time

If you haven't already, decide what you will do with your Advent wreath now that the Advent season is over (return to the introduction to this devotional resource for ideas). Will you add a Christ candle for the Christmas season? Will you let it burn itself out in a fiery (yet safe!) conflagration of joy on December 25 or on the last day of the Christmas season, January 5? Will you continue to display it throughout the season after Epiphany, using each of those weeks to revisit a theme from the Advent season?

### Making time

When the shepherds came to see the infant Jesus, they told Mary what the angels had said about Jesus, and she "pondered these things in her heart" (Luke 2:19). Ponder who in your life reveals God's good news to you. Write them a Christmas card with a note to tell them so.

### Break time

Often, it feels like Christmas is over on December 26. This year, stay in the season and ponder for a while. If you are someone who finds reminders helpful, then set an alarm labeled "Christmas" on your phone for the same time each day until January 5, or mark your calendar to remind yourself that every day of these twelve is Christmas. If reminders don't exactly evoke Christmas to you, then make your holiday deliberate. As much as possible, set aside timekeeping for these twelve days and hold your schedule more loosely as you ponder how our eternal God entered into our time.

### Time out

A proverb often attributed to St. Augustine says, "The one who sings prays twice." This week, incorporate Christmas carols into your prayer time. Whether you sing along or listen in silent contemplation, let the soaring notes, prayerful lyrics, and solemn chords intertwine with your own petitions throughout the season.

## **A moment in time**

Collect your favorite images that you captured throughout Advent and assemble them into a collage. What themes do you notice emerging across this visual diary of devotion?

# RESOURCES FOR THE SEASON

As Barn Geese Worship writers began to brainstorm about this devotional resource, we quickly realized something: humans think about time *a lot*. This is evident from the sheer volume of songs, games, books, stories, video games, and TV shows where time—the manipulation of it, the passing of it, the patterns within it—plays a crucial role.

A fair representation of options in each genre is way beyond our reach, so the lists that follow are an *unfair* representation. They bend toward our limited preferences and experiences, and they are not meant to be exhaustive. Our goal is to help you to get your own wheels turning about how time presents, and is presented, in our cultural world.

Think we missed something we should have included? We have no doubt you're right. You can remedy this by adding it yourself to the living version of this resource section posted in our Community Feed Bin, a Facebook group accessible through our Facebook page: (<https://www.facebook.com/barngeeseworship>).

## GAMES

### Games that have a timer

*Celebrity* (no board or deck needed)

*Pictionary* (Mattel, 1985)

*Pit* (Hasbro, 1904)

*Taboo* (Hasbro, 1989)

*Time's Up!* (R&R Games, 2008)

### Games where play happens in real time

Escape-room games

*Galaxy Trucker* (Vlaada Chvátil, Czech Games Edition, 2007)

*Space Alert* (Vlaada Chvátil, Czech Games Edition, 2008)

### Games where time is a thematic element

*Anachrony* (Mindclash Games, 2017)

*Fields of Arle* (Feuerland Spiele, 2014)

*In The Year of the Dragon* (Ravensburger Games, 2007)

*Thebes* (Queen Games, 2007)

*Through the Ages* (Vlaada Chvátil, Czech Board Games, 2007)

*T.I.M.E. Stories* (Space Cowboys, 2015)

*Tragedy Looper* (Z-Man Games, 2011)

## MOVIES

*1917* (2019)  
*12 Monkeys* (1995)  
*About Time* (2013)  
*Back to the Future* (1985)  
*Before Sunrise* (1995)  
*Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* (1989)  
*The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008)  
*Doctor Strange* (2016)  
*Dunkirk* (2017)  
*Edge of Tomorrow* (2014)  
*Freaky Friday* (2003)  
*Groundhog Day* (1993)  
*Inception* (2010)  
*Jurassic Park* (1993)  
*The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988)  
*Locke* (2013)  
*Looper* (2012)  
*Love Actually* (2003)  
*Memento* (2000)  
*Minority Report* (2002)  
*Palm Springs* (2020)  
*Planet of the Apes* (1968)  
*Run Lola Run* (1998)  
*Scrooged* (1988)  
*See You Yesterday* (2019)  
*Source Code* (2011)  
*Terminator* (1984)  
*Thirteen Going on Thirty* (2004)  
*Time After Time* (1971)  
*Time Bandits* (1981)

## TV SHOWS

*24* (2001-2010, 2014)  
*Class of '09* (2023-present)  
*Doctor Who* (1963-1989, 2005-present)  
*How I Met Your Mother* (2005-2014)

*Lost* (2004-2010)  
*Outlander* (2014-present)  
*Russian Doll* (2019, 2022)  
*Twilight Zone* (1959-1964, 1985-1989, 2002-2003, 2019-2020)  
*Wheel of Time* (2021-present)

## BOOKS

*Before the Coffee Gets Cold* (Toshikazu Kawaguchi, 2015)  
*A Christmas Carol* (Charles Dickens, 1843)  
*Confessions* (Augustine of Hippo, 397)  
*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (J.K. Rowling, 1999)  
*The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue* (V.E. Schwab, 2020)  
*Kindred* (Octavia Butler, 1979)  
*The Midnight Library* (Matt Haig, 2020)  
*The Phantom Tollbooth* (Norton Juster, 1961)  
*The Sound and the Fury* (William Faulkner, 1929)  
*Thief of Time* (Terry Pratchett, 2001)  
*This Is How You Lose the Time War* (Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone, 2019)  
*The Time Machine* (H.G. Wells, 1895)  
*Time Travel: A History* (James Gleick, 2016)  
*The Time Traveller's Wife* (Audrey Niffenegger, 2003)  
*To Say Nothing of the Dog* (Connie Willis, 1997)  
*Winter's Tale* (Mark Helprin, 2005)  
*A Winter's Tale* (William Shakespeare, 1623)  
*A Wrinkle in Time* (Madeleine L'Engle, 1962)  
*Your Brain is a Time Machine* (Dean Buonomano, 2017)

## SHORT STORIES

"The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" (Scott F. Fitzgerald, 1922)  
"Fortunately, the Milk" (Neil Gaiman, 2013)  
"Girl" (Jamaica Kincaid, 1978)  
"John Martin's Universe" (Bill Adler, 2021)  
"The Minority Report" (Philip K. Dick, 1954)  
"An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (Ambrose Bierce, 1890)  
"Rip Van Winkle" (Washington Irving, 1809)  
"The Story of an Hour" (Kate Chopin, 1854)  
"A Telephone Call" (Dorothy Parker, 1930)

## POEMS

“Burnt Norton” (T.S. Eliot, 1936)

“A Clock Stopped—” (Emily Dickinson, 1861)

“Clocks” (Carl Sandberg, 1918)

“Days” (Philip Larkin, 1953)

“Good Bones” (Maggie Smith, 2016)

“The Hill We Climb” (Amanda Gorman, 2021)

“I Look Into My Glass” (Thomas Hardy, 1899)

“Little Gidding” (T.S. Eliot, 1942)

“Passing Time” (Maya Angelou, 1975)

“Sonnet 19,” (William Shakespeare, 1609)

“Timer” (Tony Harrison, 1981)

“To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time” (Robert Herrick, 1648)

# OTHER PRAYERS FOR THE SEASON

## A PRAYER FOR LIVING IN THE MOMENT

God, you were here before me,  
in this place.

You were with me yesterday  
when I made my mistakes  
and celebrated my victories.

But I cannot repeat  
any single event  
in my history.

You have swept away  
every old day.

Yet you have given me this day,  
this hour,  
this moment in prayer.  
And I cannot return to this moment.

Help me savor it  
like the best, finest meal,  
which I can enjoy  
knowing I will feel hungry again tomorrow.

God, you will be here  
when I leave.  
Amen.

## A PRAYER FOR THE PERSON WHO HAS TOO LITTLE TIME TO PRAY

God, every moment  
I spend in this prayer  
is a moment I could do  
something else.

Let me make a list today  
for everything I must do.

But maybe later,  
because right now  
I am praying.

Maybe I should start  
on the many tasks I want to accomplish.  
But not right now,  
because right now  
I am praying.

God, I should exercise my body today.  
I should move my muscles,  
and elevate my heart rate.  
But not right now,  
because right now I am praying.

God, I should worry about this or that.  
I'm probably starting to think  
about all those things  
I normally worry about,  
just because I started to think about  
worry.  
I have worried about not praying enough.  
But not right now,  
because right now I am praying.  
Amen.

## A PRAYER FOR THE END OF THE DAY

Lord, the day is coming to an end.  
When darkness falls so early,  
it's easy to lose track of that.  
Guide us into the night.  
Move us from *doing* to *done*.  
Give us rest.  
Give us dreams  
that move us to new places,  
disturb us for new understandings,  
change us with new wisdom.



When tomorrow begins,  
wake us,  
and awaken in us  
hope for what it holds.  
Moment to moment,  
make us instruments  
of holy expectation.  
Amen.

## A PRAYER FOR PONDERING THE ADVENT WREATH

Lord, here we go,  
lighting Advent candles.  
It's tradition.  
For a very long time,  
humankind has figured you  
for a God  
who likes to light things on fire.  
Is that,  
actually,  
who you are?

Or is it just humanity  
who long for flames?  
Especially now,  
when it's cold out  
and getting darker.  
We use fire  
to count down the days  
until this tilting world  
stops its cosmic free fall.  
Until the night stops lengthening.  
Until the sun rises.  
Until the Son rises.

Maybe the fire  
is a stand-in for certainty,  
a way to keep away the shadows  
of everything we don't know

about who you are,  
where you are,  
when you'll come again,  
to make all things well.

But flames only go so far.  
Meet us, Jesus,  
in the glimmering shadows  
of everything we know  
and everything we don't,  
and everything we can't.

May every flame lead us deeper into shades of mystery,  
and every flicker of doubt lead us closer to your Light.  
Amen.

## A PRAYER FOR PEOPLE WHO ENJOY CHRISTMAS SURPRISES

Dear Jesus,  
It's Christmas!  
We've been waiting  
and waiting  
and somehow it still feels  
like you snuck up behind us.

How do you do that?  
How is it  
that it feels  
like you arrive  
all of a sudden,  
when I also know  
you've been here all along?  
Since the very beginning.

You know what?

Don't tell me.

The truth,  
Jesus,

is that for all this expectation,  
what I really want this Christmas  
is to be surprised.

Surprised by you:  
your grace,  
your reality,  
your presence here  
once again  
and  
all along.

Welcome.  
Amen.