

***GOD WITH US:  
RHYTHMS OF PRAYER  
AT ADVENT***

*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.  
Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and shall call his name Immanuel  
[which means "God is with us"].  
Isaiah 7:14*

A MULTI-GENERATIONAL MOVEMENT OF WOMEN  
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*GOD WITH US:  
RYTHMS OF PRAYER AT ADVENT*

**Table of Contents**

A Prayer Practice for the Advent Season (Intro) . . . . .	3
Beginning the Practice	4
Five Prayer Focuses	5
Refreshed in Planning Ahead	6
Books, Podcasts	
& Good Old Fashioned Friendship	7
Announcement-January Live Event	8

## A Prayer Practice for the Advent Season

by Jan Kern

During this season, we once again celebrate Emmanuel, “God with us,” who came in human flesh as a babe in a manger. Jesus. And yet alongside the joy and anticipation, we often experience mixed emotions and stress. Thankfully, God has given us a precious gift. We can turn to Him anytime to pray and to share our thoughts and concerns and listen for His voice speaking into our lives. He is always with us, always available, always inviting us to abide more closely with Him.

While He is always near, we might find that a regular prayer practice would help us to more deeply embrace His loving presence and guidance during these holiday weeks. The prayer structure offered here is most closely modeled after the Examen that Ignatius of Loyola practiced, yet it is a simpler adaptation.

This prayer, often practiced in the quiet of the evening, creates intentional space to step away from the noise and busy pace of our day. It can be thought of as a prayer pause. We turn our focus completely to God and ask Him to dip our mind, heart, and soul in His presence. In prayer and listening, we take in deep restorative breaths while God leads us to “examine” or “weigh carefully” the day just lived.

Refocusing and reconnection with God as a daily practice deepens our in-the-moment discernment and our awareness of His invitations. We are restored by His grace, refreshed in His presence, and strengthened for the coming new day. And in that new day, we are quicker to sense His leading to respond to people and events in life-giving ways. More as Jesus would.

*“You don’t have  
to work for the  
coming of the Lord.  
The miracle  
is always that  
God is gracious.  
Just come as you are.  
You always get your  
Christmas miracle:  
you get God with  
you.”  
~Ann Voskamp*

## Beginning the Practice

Try incorporating this prayer practice as a way to close your day in God's presence. A good starting point could be 10-15 minutes. Find or create a quiet space free of distractions and interruptions – a special place you can return to each evening during this holiday season.

Before praying, establish this time with God in grounded discernment by including a Scripture or Advent reading.

The five parts of the prayer offered on the next page are not meant to be steps through prayer. They are more like prompts for a rich time of being in God's presence.

You might discover that you nearly always begin in silence and a prayer for discernment and end looking forward to the next day, but the middle prayers interweave. Discerning God in your day can prompt gratitude. Gratitude, in turn, helps you to see where He was even present as a part of a difficult or unexpected moment. Recalling God's presence in an interaction may lead to either gratitude or asking Him for his forgiveness. Then receiving God's grace might usher you toward considering what He might be inviting you into in the new day coming.

Move through your prayer with discernment always open to God's leading. See what stirs, how He invites you to notice moments of joy you might have otherwise missed. Or perhaps you will discover ways He inspires you to offer encouragement and joy to others. Watch for how God is involved and shaping your Advent celebrations in the tiny or huge movements of His Spirit!

*"Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."  
Luke 2:10-12*

## Five Prayer Focuses

### *Prayer of Discernment and Listening*

Look to God to still your heart and mind and be silent in His presence for a few moments. In light of this holy season, reflect on God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Know He is fully with you right now where you are. Ask for Spirit-guided discernment and responsiveness as you move through your time of prayer and through this holy season.

*“And Mary said:  
My soul  
proclaims the  
greatness  
of the Lord,  
and my spirit has  
rejoiced in God my  
 Savior,  
because He has  
looked with favor  
on the humble  
condition of His  
 slave...  
he has satisfied the  
hungry with good  
 things.”*

*Luke 1:46-48, 53*

### *Prayer of gratitude*

Reflect back on your day and look for opportunities for gratitude—whether in the wonderful or difficult moments, or in the extraordinary or ordinary. Ponder how the gifts of this season touched your day. Offer prayers of thanksgiving to God—honest, authentic and faith-filled.

### *Prayer of review*

Review the thoughts and feelings you experienced alongside the significant events of the day. Ask God to show you His call to you at the intimate core of your being. What is His invitation for this season in your activities and relationships?

### *Prayer of forgiveness*

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what actions or thoughts did or did not serve God or others well. This is a time to bend your heart toward God in beautiful sorrow, to ask His forgiveness and to receive His grace.

### *Prayer of looking forward:*

With humility, renewed vision, faith, and courage, look to the new day coming. Ask God to be with you in what tomorrow holds—what is known or unknown. Ask, “Where do I need God most tomorrow?” Then with Him plan one small step or action of courage, faith or celebration.

## Refreshed in Planning Ahead

by Jan Kern

Instead of holiday survival tips, look toward these weeks with *thriving* in mind and with being *refreshed*. Here are a few ideas that you can either take and personalize for the uniqueness of your upcoming holiday activities and celebrations or use to inspire other creative ideas for you and your family.

*“I don’t want a  
Christmas  
you can buy.  
I don’t want a  
Christmas  
you can make.  
What I want is  
a Christmas  
you can hold.  
A Christmas that  
holds me, remakes  
me, revives me. I  
want a Christmas  
that whispers,  
Jesus.”  
~Ann Voskamp*

- When planning an activity or event, begin by praying specifically for those who will be participating. Ask God what His heart is for each one. Let this guide the logistics, rather than the other way around.
- Design how you can step away when the schedule gets crazy. Create intentional time for your family to rest, relax, and celebrate in quiet ways too. Keep individual personalities and needs in mind.
- Have one of those family gatherings coming up where you suspect perspective or personality clashes might happen? Pray up! Then create a few simple responses that can help keep the atmosphere nonjudgmental, gracious and focused on the substance of this season – God’s love!
- Think ahead in planning your family traditions or start a new one that includes building community. One of our traditions has been to create a Christmas gift basket including breakfast drinks (coffee, tea, cocoa, cider) and homemade cinnamon rolls that we give to an individual or family who has had a tough year or recent loss. If it works well for their schedule, we drop the basket by on Christmas Eve or Christmas morning.

## Books, Podcasts & Good Old Fashioned Friendship

by Sarah Bond

During these holiday weeks, enjoy some time for you, doing something that refreshes your heart in a small way, so you can re-engage with loved ones with the emotional energy you need. Take a break, dive into a book or podcast, or take a walk with a friend who refreshes your heart and spirit!

Podcasts can be a great resource to provide some humor and refreshment while cooking, wrapping gifts, or getting out for a brisk walk! The [Grit 'n Grace Podcast Holiday Series](#) is one you might try.

In each episode, the hosts, Cheri and Amy, encourage listeners to step into new boldness and areas of our lives where we can break bad rules and grow in grace. One recommendation I love is from their meal preparation episode: Spread out the holiday cooking throughout the month and take breaks to just go into a room alone and kick up your feet so you can refill and love your family well.

Carve out time for heart-centering conversations with young and big kids alike. Consider using a book guide like, **Unwrapping the Greatest Gift: A Family Celebration of Christmas, by Ann Voskamp**. I found this beautiful book yesterday and it was a direct answer to my prayer that I would see through some of the distracting frenzy that has begun to infiltrate my heart in this season to His heart and lead my family in doing the same. This gem of a book has daily scriptures, devotions, questions, and simple, love-inspired activities for December 1-25 that will open your family's heart to notice where He's inviting you to love and serve others in this season.

*"Then the Grinch  
thought of something  
he hadn't before.  
What if Christmas,  
he thought, doesn't  
come from a store.  
What if Christmas,  
perhaps, means a  
little bit more?"*

*~Dr. Seuss,  
How the Grinch  
Stole Christmas!*

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If you're looking for your own guide to scripture and prayer through this Advent season, these two are excellent:

*"God isn't standing  
on the other side of  
the holiday season  
waiting for our  
Christmas cheer and  
bolder faith. No,  
God is near, and  
Christ was born  
for this."  
~SheReadsTruth*

**Christ Was Born for This - Advent Series:**

Created by SheReadsTruth - an online Advent resource available starting Sunday 11/27/16. (Click on the underlined title above.)

**A Guide to Prayer for All Who Seek God,  
by Norman Shawchuck and Rueben P. Job.**

This book is available from Upper Room Books and is a year-long prayer guide that provides scripture, inspiring excerpts from Christian authors, and questions. We (Sarah and Jan) have both used this book for years now and it begins, as the

*Join us mid-January for a Facebook Live event on our Voice of Courage Facebook page (date to be announced). During this event, we'll explore your live questions around your vision for 2017 and ways you seek to follow God's heart, honoring what you've heard from him during the Advent season. We'll also share about brand new coaching packages at a special New Year's rate you won't want to miss! Follow us on our Voice of Courage Facebook page to find updates for this event.*

[CLICK](#) to subscribe to Voice of Courage Blog for holiday and year-round inspiration.

***Have a Blessed Christmas Holiday  
and Advent Season!***

***~from Sarah and Jan***

*And suddenly there was  
with the angel a multitude of  
the heavenly host  
praising God and saying,  
“Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace among those  
with whom he is pleased!”*

*Luke 2:13-14*

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the Voice of Courage community as together we  
encourage one another to  
cultivate, deepen and unleash our lives and leadership  
in our organizations, ministries. communities.***

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