



1. On a piece of paper, write down the name of someone currently experiencing despair. Maybe you've noticed them at the playground, in the office, at church, or in a far away land. Or maybe it's you.
2. Write down a sentence or two about how they're/you're experiencing it.
3. What is there to be hopeful for in each situation? Where can you see God shepherding us through despair?

The first thing to do during the first week of Advent is to reconcile the shadows before moving into the light. Let's sit together in the shade, and use the art of writing to help:

Practice

Hope doesn't exist in a vacuum; we need something to be hopeful for, as well as something to be hopeful from. Hope isn't hope without despair; just as light is not light without shadows. And stay awake, for we know not when our God is coming – and it's often at a time we least expect.

Reflect

Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Humanity is coming at an unexpected hour. + Matthew 24:44

Read

Light one candle.



WEEK ONE: HOPE

Hygge for Your Holiday

This is the darkest week of Advent. With only one candle lit, we're at the opposite end of the progression towards the brightness of Christmas Eve. But just because shadows abound doesn't mean we have to oppose them. In Denmark, the peak of *hygge* (pronounced HOO-GA, and sometimes translated as "the art of coziness") is during the darkest days of the year. In this way, the darkness serves as a beautiful and necessary companion to the light.

With each candle you light and notice throughout the days ahead (*hygge* requires as much candlelight as you can muster!), reflect on moments where you've been helped or rescued so far in your life. How has God's hope shone through in your past, in others and in you?

Pray

Dear God, enfold in your love and grace everyone who is experiencing despair. Even in places of thick shadows, may we feel your warm arms embracing, and may your light of hope shine, if ever so faintly. This we pray, in Jesus's name, Amen.



1. On a slip of paper ('peace paper'), write down a conflict or area of life that you're having trouble with lately.
2. Go around the table and share what you wrote. After each person shares, everyone's invited to take a deep breath and repeat this sentence with sincere intention (like, really mean it!): *We release this burden to God.*

Practice

One of the greatest forms of peace can be found in relinquishing, in letting go, in giving things over to God. Where in your life are you holding on too tightly? Where could you benefit from letting go, from opening up your hands and heart to divine presence and grace?

Reflect

The one who is coming after me is stronger than I am. I'm not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. + Matthew 3:11

Read

Light two candles.

Ignite Peace



WEEK TWO: PEACE

Hygge for Your Holiday

The Danes have been known to call the night sky the 'duvet of darkness,' seeing it as a heavy blanket that enhances *hygge*.

Pick a night this week to go out under the winter sky. Bundle up if need be. Bring warm drinks (coffee, tea, cocoa with marshmallows), your 'peace candle,' and your slip of 'peace paper' from this week's practice. Get comfy. Then look up. Notice how big God's universe is, and how small you are, and then embrace the duvet of darkness around you. Burn your 'peace papers' together and rest under God's sky, in silence or with warm conversation.

Pray

Dear God, creator of worlds and kindler of peace, life can be so full of strife and struggle. May your night sky be a reminder of your vastness and comforting embrace. Bear our burdens, transform our conflicts, and grant us a peace that passes all understanding. In Jesus's name, Amen.





- A local organization fighting homelessness.
- Call someone who is lonely, buy less and give more to sing carols online with someone who could use a lift.
- Find the joy of Christ in the wilderness of vulnerability - with the joy of nature.
- Take a walk or hike out in God's creation and reconnect with joy for who you are: Beloved, child of God!
- Fast from comparing yourself to others, and start being filled with the joy of Advent.
- Unplugging (or lessening) screen time, especially social media, for the

figuratively:

Commit to going 'into the wilderness' this week, literally and/or

Practice

The 'holiday cheer' this time of year can be materialistic and shallow, blaring from ads and social media. In this week's reading, Jesus suggests we must go to the margins, to the wilderness, in order to seek both truth and authentic joy. How are the distractions of the commercial holiday season wearing on you? What are some ways you can escape the noise to find more authentic forms of joy?

Reflect

Look, those who wear refined clothes
are in royal palaces. What did you go
out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you,
and more than a prophet.
+ Matthew 11:8-9

Read

Light three candles.

Ignite Joy



WEEK THREE: JOY

Hygge for Your Holiday

In Danish, *hygge* translates as 'a nook,' a comfy space you set aside from the rest of the home. Elements of a good *hygge* are soft lighting, cushions, and blankets. If you can situate it by a windowsill, that's great. Danes also enjoy having small animal hides present (we prefer faux hides in our apartment!). Then set up a nativity in your nook, remembering that Jesus is born among the animals.

A *hygge* is a refuge, a little slice of wilderness in the comfort of your own home. It's a place to bring a good book (paper is always more *hyggelig* than digital) and a warm drink. If you have a fireplace nearby, you've hit the *hygge* jackpot. Slip on some *hyggesokker* (your fave comfy socks with holes), and soak in God's joy – fuel for the 'wilderness.'

Pray

Dear God, you are the ultimate source of joy in this shadow-filled world. Make us nooks and beacons of that same joy. Carry our feet to the farthest reaches so that we might extend your warmth to everyone we meet. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



Write and send the most radical love letter you can muster to the person you know needs to hear it most (perhaps this 'someone' is you). If it's handwritten, all the better, but digital works, too. The one requirement is it has to scare you a little, or at least make you nervous. Practice leaning on God's love – the source of all radical, vulnerable, rule-breaking love – as Joseph did. The worst that can happen (and the best that can happen) isn't up to you. And that's good news!

Practice

Love is hardly ever synonymous with 'easy.' By marrying a pregnant Mary, Joseph's love and vulnerability broke 'all the rules' – and that's just where the radical love of God leads us. Have you seen love break down barriers? Are there areas in your life (or in the world) that could use that kind of love?

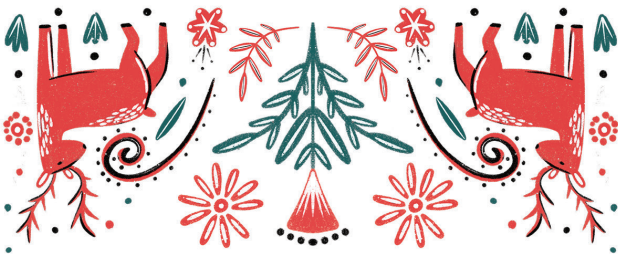
Reflect

When Joseph woke up, he did just as the angel of God commanded and took Mary as his wife. + Matthew 1:24

Read

Ignite Love

Light four candles.



WEEK FOUR: LOVE

Hygge for Your Holiday

The word *hygge* comes from Norwegian and old Nordic words that mean seeking refuge, protection, and shelter from the raging of the outside elements. The Danes have another term – *hyggesnak* – which describes chitchat or 'cozy conversation' that doesn't engage controversial issues.

We're so politically charged in this country these days, bombarded with culture-dividing headlines all day long. Create a safe space of controversy-free togetherness – a *hyggesnak* – where you can be free from 'the elements' for a short while. Maybe it's a board game night, an impromptu fireside session, or some popcorn together on the couch. Make it yours and embrace the love of Christ that is a refuge for all.

Pray

Loving God, though we divide ourselves from each other, your love for us never fails. In you, we are warmed by the fire of your Holy Spirit. In you, we are sheltered from the storm. Make your love known, and give us the courage and grace to extend that love to others. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.





This week, we'll combine the practice, the *hygge*, and the prayer: turn off the lights in the rest of your home and have a picnic dinner in the glow of the Christmas tree.

Practice

And here we are! In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word became flesh and slipped into the world to be with us. This is the good news the angels are singing about: God loves all of creation, redeems it, and will restore it, from the war-torn refugee family, to the single mother struggling to find a place to live, to the wealthy couple across town. Everything is illuminated in the humble, beautiful light of Emmanuel, God with us!

Reflect

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people: unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, God with us." + Luke 2:10-11

Read

Light all five candles.

Ignite



CHRISTMAS EVE: EMMANUEL

Hygge for Your Holiday

The Danes have a word for Christmas *hygge*. It's called *julehygge*. Though ample candlepower is encouraged (especially for your Christmas tree picnic), *hygge* is more about the feeling than the things. All that anxious rushing around we've been doing this season? Tonight we're invited to set that stuff down. Don't stress about not stressing, though! Just go slower. Smile more deeply. Listen more fully. Speak more slowly. Eat, drink, and be present to the light of Christ shining in it all.

Pray

As you dine in the soft glow of your Christmas tree this week, you're going to write your own prayer. On a piece of paper, write one sentence and then pass it around, with everyone adding a sentence to it. Include not only your friends and family but the whole world, from the earth and all of nature to the marginalized, lonely, sick, and imprisoned. Keep passing the paper around until you all feel it's done. Close the prayer with a spirit of thanks, read it aloud, and sing a favorite carol!

