



SEEDS OF CHRISTMAS

A Family Advent Guide



Hello Friends!

THANK YOU FOR JOINING US on this journey for the next 22 days through God's amazing story of Christmas. As we count down the days to Christmas, our hope is that God would give you a better understanding of His purposes in the world, grow the seeds of faith in your hearts, and plant new seeds of faith in the hearts of your children. Using the metaphor of a seed, we'll watch how God used the seeds of His Word, faith, hope, prophecy, and courage to move His plan forward toward that first Christmas morning. We'll also see how the enemy used the seeds of doubt, fear, and sin to poison the hearts of people, and how Jesus came to defeat that enemy for us!

A few thoughts on how to use this Family Advent Guide. First, just use it. Our hope is that you would make a commitment to, at the very least, read through the Scripture each day for the next 22 days. Be encouraged from the truths of God's Word that, like a seed, will never return void. We want this to be "doable" for your family, so do what is best, but do something.

Second, we have fashioned this in the tradition of "The Jesse Tree". Each day, your family will have an opportunity to draw/color an ornament to hang on the tree that tells a little piece of the Christmas story. A Jesse Tree can be something as simple as a dead branch from your yard or a small Christmas tree you buy. Either way, find a place to display the ornaments for each day over the next 22 days.

Lastly, we want to encourage you to use the music of Seeds Family Worship as a way of worshipping together as a family as well as filling your home with the truths of God's Word. Each day ends with a chance to listen to a song from either their new Seeds of Christmas album or another one. You can purchase these songs on iTunes or listen to them on Spotify (search for the playlist "Seeds of Christmas Advent Listening" on Spotify). Have these songs ready to go as you sit down to do your family reading each day (see song list).

We hope that these next 22 days will draw you closer to the Savior we sing about and worship, not just at Christmas, but all year long! May the Lord bring about an increase from the seeds of Christmas He has planted in our hearts!

Watermark Kids Team

SEEDS OF CHRISTMAS ADVENT SONG LIST

(all songs by Seeds Family Worship)

"To Us a Child Is Born" from *Seeds of Christmas*

"God Is Creator" from *The Character of God*

"The Wages and the Gift" from *Seeds of Character*

"To the Ends of the Earth" from *Seeds of Christmas*

"Call to Me" from *Seeds of Courage*

"Out of the Mud" from *Seeds of Courage*

"Teach Them" from *Seeds of Character*

"Call His Name Immanuel" from *Seeds of Christmas*

"We Trust" from *The Character of God*

"New Creation" from *Seeds of Faith*

"God Is Faithful" from *The Character of God*

"Grace (La-De-Da)" from *Seeds of Faith*

"Mary's Song of Praise" from *Seeds of Christmas*

"God with Us" from *Seeds of Christmas*

"Joy" from *Seeds of Christmas*





Seeds of Christmas Daily Scripture Readings

- ☐ December 4: Isaiah 11:1-2
- ☐ December 5: Genesis 1:24-31
- ☐ December 6: Genesis 3:1-21
- ☐ December 7: Genesis 6:5-8
- ☐ December 8: Genesis 12:1-7
- ☐ December 9: Genesis 21:1-7
- ☐ December 10: Genesis 22:1-14
- ☐ December 11: Genesis 28:10-22
- ☐ December 12: Genesis 37:31-33, 50:15-20
- ☐ December 13: Deuteronomy 5:1-22
- ☐ December 14: Ruth 1:1 – 2:3, Matthew 1:5, 16
- ☐ December 15: 1 Samuel 16:1-13
- ☐ December 16: 2 Samuel 5:1-5
- ☐ December 17: Isaiah 9:2, 6-7
- ☐ December 18: Isaiah 11:1-9
- ☐ December 19: Micah 5:2-5a
- ☐ December 20: Luke 1:5-25
- ☐ December 21: Matthew 3:1-6
- ☐ December 22: Luke 1:26-38
- ☐ December 23: Matthew 1:18-25
- ☐ December 24: Luke 2:1-5
- ☐ December 25: Luke 2:6-21



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DECEMBER 4, 2017

Scripture: Read Isaiah 11:1-2

DEVOTION:

Christmas starts with a stump. At least, that's what God tells us through Isaiah. What can we know when we see the stump of a tree? Talk about it for a minute as a family.

Well, we know that for there to be a stump, there must have been a tree. And, for there to be a tree, there must have been a seed. Maybe there was an acorn or a pine cone, fallen and buried in the ground, unknown to anyone... until what was dead and buried sprouted up, proving the seed contained life! So, a stump tells us that a miracle happened! But that's not all. A stump also tells us that something terrible must have happened to the tree. Perhaps the tree got sick, or maybe there was a storm or a fire. Or, maybe, someone came along and cut down the tree. We know that something terrible must have happened, for what was once alive is now dead... but is it? Through the prophet Isaiah, God told us that a Branch bearing fruit would come from the stump of Jesse, who was the father of David, the great-great-great-great-great-grandfather of Jesus.

This is the story of Christmas. It's the story of God's amazing Creation, planted as a seed by the Word of God Himself, deemed to be very good... until something went terribly wrong. What God once called very good was corrupted by sin, and death entered into the world. For a moment it seemed as if all hope was lost... until an angel came and spoke to a girl, telling her that God has planted a seed in her womb. The angel said that the seed would be a tree that brings life to all of Creation once again: the Savior of the World. That is the TRUE story of Christmas. God wants to plant a seed of faith in your heart today so that you would believe in Jesus and have eternal life with Him.

QUESTIONS:

1. What have you watched grow from a small seed into something big? What things must happen for a tiny seed to grow into a full grown tree? What seeds do you think we might find in the Christmas story?
2. Why is Christmas such an important part of God's story? How would you tell the story of Christmas to someone? What makes you most excited about Christmas this year?

ACTIVITY:

Have your child(ren) draw a picture of the stump of a tree on today's ornament. Listen to "To Us a Child Is Born" from the *Seeds of Christmas* album and focus especially on the words of John 3:16. Challenge your kids (if they haven't already) to memorize this verse this week, and think about how much God must have loved the world that He would send His One and Only Son!



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DECEMBER 5, 2017

Scripture: Read Genesis 1:24-31

DEVOTION:

"And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good." God started the whole universe with 4 simple words: "Let there be light!" It was the seed that God planted in the formless dark void that changed everything. Suddenly, out of nothing, there was light, heaven and earth, water and dry land, trees and fruit, the sun and the moon, stars and planets, fish and birds, livestock and beasts of the jungle. It's amazing what God can do with just a small seed, isn't it!?

But God's best work was still to come. Out of the dust and springing to life from the ground, God made a man, and out of that man He created a woman. These creatures were different because, unlike the zebras, dolphins, or eagles, these creatures were made in the image of God Himself. Because they were made in His image, they could have a special relationship with Him unlike any other created being. Man and woman were given the very important job of taking care of the new world that God had planted. He put them in a garden and gave them everything they would need to do their job. God had done something wonderful, something He said was VERY GOOD! And it was!

QUESTIONS:

1. In 6 days, God made everything in the universe out of absolutely nothing! What does Creation tell us about God? How would you describe God? Who is He to you?
2. After God was done creating the earth and the garden in it He said it was "Very Good." What are some of the very good things God has made? What is your favorite thing in God's creation?

ACTIVITY:

Today, draw a picture on your ornament showing the world. Be sure to include your favorite part of God's creation in your drawing. As you draw, listen to "God Is Creator (Genesis 1:1-3)" from *The Character of God* album. Think about how amazing it must have been when God spoke and things just came to be! Listen again to "To Us a Child Is Born" to remind yourself how much God loved the world that He created!



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DECEMBER 6, 2017

Scripture: Read Genesis 3:1-21

DEVOTION:

Remember what a stump tells us? It tells us a seed was planted, a tree grew, and then something terrible happened. If you were an investigator trying to find out what happened to “the stump of Jesse,” the clues would quickly lead you to Genesis 3. Adam and Eve were placed in the perfect Garden of Eden, where God’s presence was with them every day, and where they had the important job of taking care of His creation. God told them that they could eat from every tree in the Garden except one... the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Simple enough, right? Well, knowing God’s Word and obeying it are two very different things.

When the serpent (who we know as Satan) asked Eve, “Did God really say...?” he planted his own kind of seeds. These were seeds of doubt; seeds that made Adam and Eve wonder if God was really good or if He could be trusted to do what He said He would do. These were the seeds that would make the whole universe sick if Adam and Eve let them grow... and they did. Adam and Eve believed the serpent’s lies and ate the fruit of the one tree God had told them not to. In that moment, everything changed.

What God said was very good was now sick with sin. This didn’t just make Adam and Eve sick, it made all of Creation sick and brought death into the world. God punished Adam and Eve and sent them away from His presence, out of the Garden of Eden, but not before two very important things happened. First, God made a promise to Satan, letting him know that while he had made Adam and Eve sick with sin, God would send another

Adam who would crush his head and make Adam and Eve well again. Second, God showed grace to Adam and Eve. Though they deserved to die for their sin, God chose instead to kill an animal to make clothes for them to cover their shame. God was planting seeds again... seeds of hope and grace that His people would need for the darkness that lay ahead of them.

QUESTIONS:

1. What seeds is the enemy trying to plant in you to make you question God and His goodness? What is something you have done in the past that you know hasn’t pleased God?
2. Who is the 2nd Adam that God says is going to come? How does this second Adam give us hope to fight the seeds of doubt and trust in God’s goodness even when we do things that don’t please Him?

ACTIVITY:

Satan came into the Garden as a snake to tempt Adam and Eve. Draw a picture of a snake on your ornament for today, reminding us of the temptation that we all face to not trust God. While you do, listen to “The Wages and the Gift” from the *Seeds of Character* (Vol. 6) album. Sing along to these important verses that remind us of the penalty of Adam and Eve’s sin as well how the serpent’s head would be crushed by the gift of Jesus.



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D E C E M B E R 7 , 2 0 1 7

Scripture: Read Genesis 6:5-8

DEVOTION:

Sometimes before things can get better, they have to get worse, and that's just what happened to God's creation. Adam and Eve had children, who grew up and had children, who grew up and had more children, and suddenly the world was full of people. The only problem was that the sickness that came into the world through Adam and Eve was spreading like a wildfire over all of Creation. Wickedness was everywhere, and everyone did what they thought was right, completely ignoring God. God had to do something about the wickedness in the world, but how could He keep His promise to crush the serpent through Adam's broken family?

"But Noah found favor in the eyes of God." In Noah, God found the seed of Adam whom God would use to fulfill His great plan. By faith, Noah obeyed God and built an enormous boat in the middle of the desert that would save his family. This boat was so big it would also hold every kind of animal to keep them safe from the flood God was going to send on the earth. The flood came and destroyed the wicked, but Noah and his family were saved, just like God said.

But how could a world that was drowned and dead ever live again? Genesis 8 says, "God remembered Noah" (He never forgets the ones He loves) and sent a wind to dry the land. After 150 days, a dove flew out from the ark and returned with a leaf from an olive tree. God had done it again. He brought life out of death and gave the seeds of hope to those who loved Him!

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think it was easy for Noah and his family to stay faithful and obedient to God when everyone else around them ignored God? Why? When have you chosen to obey even when everyone else was doing the wrong thing?
2. Have you ever felt like God has forgotten about you? When? What could you tell someone else who may be feeling this way to help plant seeds of hope in their heart?

ACTIVITY:

Draw a picture today of the ark and think about this: God told Noah to use the wood from trees to build a boat that would save them from their sins. Did God use the wood of a tree in any other story in the Bible to save people from their sins? Sing "To Us a Child Is Born" once again and see who in your family can quote John 3:16 from memory. Pray and thank God for His amazing love that even though we sinned against Him, He sent Jesus to save us!



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DECEMBER 8, 2017

Scripture: Read Genesis 12:1-7

DEVOTION:

Noah came and went, and his children did what Adam and Eve's children had done; they turned away from the God who created them. The sickness caused by the seeds of sin was still spreading, but God wasn't surprised. He knew this would happen, which was why He chose to speak to an ordinary man named Abram. Abram was 75 years old when God told him to leave the only home he'd ever known. God told Abram to take his wife and go to a place where God would later make a great nation out of him. But, there was a problem: Abram and his wife had never had any children. So how in the world would God build a great nation from a childless couple? Did you forget that this is the same God who made the whole universe out of nothing? All God needs is nothing and He can do everything!

Abram believed God could do it, and that seed of faith made all the difference. Abram packed up everything, took his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot, and set out for Canaan, the land of God's promise. God told Abram that through him, God would bless every family on the earth. The snake-crusher would come from Abram and Sarai to save the people from the curse and sickness of sin. The stump left after Adam and Eve's sin was still a stump, but now it seemed there might be signs of life.

QUESTIONS:

1. Abram chose to obey God through faith without seeing what was ahead. What is a hard circumstance in your life where you can't see what's ahead, but you have faith that God will be with you through it?
2. God used one man to make a great nation and bless many people. How might God be using you to make a difference in someone else's life this week?

ACTIVITY:

Abram and Sarai left their home, believing that God's plan was better than anything. Draw a picture of a tent on today's ornament showing how Abram and Sarai lived while they waited on God's promise. Listen to "To the Ends of the Earth" from the *Seeds of Christmas* album to be reminded of God's promise to Abram to bless the whole world. Go to operationworld.org/countries-alphabetically and pick a country. Read how God has already kept His promise to that country and pray even more people from that country will hear about the good news of Christmas this year!



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DECEMBER 9, 2017

Scripture: Read Genesis 21:1-7

DEVOTION:

God changed Abram's name to Abraham, which meant "father of a multitude" (that means a bunch) and Sarai's name to Sarah, which meant "mother of nations." There was just one problem: Abraham and Sarah still didn't have any children! All of God's promises of blessings and name changes were great but, without a child, how could God keep His promises and make the meaning of their names come true? And now Abraham was already 100 years old and Sarah was 90 years old, which is not the ideal time for starting a family! Sarah had even laughed when an angel of the Lord told her that she was going to have a baby. "Impossible!" she thought.

But God is all about doing the impossible to show the people He loves that He is good and can be trusted. Sarah would laugh once again, but this time it would be a laughter of complete and total joy because the God who makes promises keeps His promises and does the impossible. He planted a seed of blessing in Sarah's womb and Isaac, whose name means "laughter," was born to a 90-year-old woman and her 100-year-old husband. Maybe a Savior coming from a dead tree wasn't so impossible after all!

QUESTIONS:

1. Sarah laughed because she didn't remember that God could do the impossible. Think of something "impossible" that you wish would happen. Do you truly believe God could do this if He wanted to? Why?
2. God waited to give Abraham and Sarah a baby until they were both almost 100 years old. What is something you have waited or are waiting for? Why is it sometimes hard to trust God's perfect timing?

ACTIVITY:

Today we get to draw a picture of a baby to show how God kept His promise to Abraham and Sarah to give them a baby even in their old age. Read Jeremiah 33:3 and listen to/sing the song "Call to Me" from the *Seeds of Courage* album. Pray as a family asking God to remind you of the great things He has done for you and ask Him to show you more great things that He wants to do in your family this year.



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DECEMBER 10, 2017

Scripture: Read Genesis 22:1-14

DEVOTION:

Several years went by and the boy named "Laughter" lived up to his name, bringing great joy to Abraham and Sarah. So, why would God ask this? Why would God want Abraham to kill his only son as a sacrifice? It must have been so hard for Abraham and Sarah, but the couple had seen God provide them with a baby in their old age and He had planted in them the seeds of faith. They believed God was big enough to bring Isaac back from the dead if He wanted. So, Abraham took his boy, placed the wood on his back, grabbed a knife and the fire and headed up the mountain to give God the hardest sacrifice of his life.

Isaac was confused when he didn't see the lamb for the sacrifice, yet he trusted his father when Abraham told him, "God will provide the lamb, my son." But the top of the mountain provided no lamb. Abraham, trusting God, tied up his son, laid him on the altar and raised the knife to plunge it into the heart of his only beloved son. "Abraham, Abraham!!!" the angel shouted, and everything changed. Isaac was as good as dead, some might say like a tree stump, until God provided a substitute. Isaac was saved from certain death and God's promise to Adam, to Noah, and to Abraham was still alive.

A Savior would come from the line of Isaac so that every family of the earth would be blessed. This Savior would also walk up a hill, carrying wood on his back, trusting His Father to provide the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. There would be no substitute for Him because He is our substitute. He would die and be buried in the ground, like a seed, and the serpent would think that he won. Of course, everyone knows that seeds that go in the ground tend to bring new life!

QUESTIONS:

1. God asked Abraham to do a very hard thing, and because Abraham knew God was trustworthy, he obeyed. Talk about a time you obeyed God, even when it was hard. What can you remember is true about God even when obeying is hard?
2. God met Abraham's need and provided a substitute for Isaac. Talk about a time God has provided for you when you were in need. Who is the perfect substitute who came to die in our place for our sins?

ACTIVITY:

The ram died so that Isaac could live. God provided a sacrifice! Draw a picture of a ram on today's ornament, showing how God provided for Isaac and gave him life. Once again, listen to "The Wages and The Gift" from the *Seeds of Character* (vol. 6) album. Challenge your family to memorize both of these verses (Romans 3:23 & 6:23) this week. Pray together, thanking God that even though our sins deserve death, He has given us the free gift of eternal life through Jesus.



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DECEMBER 11, 2017

Scripture: Read Genesis 28:10-22

DEVOTION:

The boy who lived, Isaac, grew up, got married, and had a son. Actually, he had twins, Jacob and Esau. Esau was the first-born and could not have been more different than his younger brother, Jacob. Over a tricky bowl of soup, Jacob (whose name means deceiver) stole his brother's birth-right and later the blessing of their father Isaac. Jacob went on the run from a very angry brother and probably wondered if he should be running from God, too. It may have looked like Jacob was messing up God's plan to rescue people from the sickness caused by the seeds of sin.

Instead, God followed Jacob into the desert night. With a rock for a pillow, Jacob had a dream from God. God gave Jacob the same seed of promise He gave to Abraham, that through his family all the families of the earth would be blessed. Once again, when all hope seemed lost, God showed that He is bigger than Jacob's mess-ups, bigger than people's plans, and that He is faithful even when no one else is. Nothing can stop God's mission to repair what sin had broken or bring to life what appears to be dead. In his dream, Jacob saw a ladder set up on Earth and reaching up into Heaven. God showed Jacob that He was going to fix the most important thing that sin had broken—His perfect relationship with the people He had created.

QUESTIONS:

1. How did God show that He still loved Jacob even though he had tricked Isaac and Esau? Talk about a time when you made a bad choice. What can you remember is true about God even when you sin and make mistakes?
2. Talk about Jacob's dream. What do you think the ladder symbolizes? How did God fix the gap between Heaven and Earth for those of us who believe in Him?

ACTIVITY:

Draw a ladder on today's ornament, showing the dream that Jacob had and talk about how it shows that God was making a way for all the people of the world to return to God. Once again, listen to "To the Ends of the Earth" and sing it loud, thanking God that He is still saving people all over the world from their sins! Practice Romans 3:23 and 6:23 again, and pray for someone by name that you know who needs to hear about the free gift of eternal life through Jesus.



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DECEMBER 12, 2017

Scripture: Read Genesis 37:31-33; 50:15-20

DEVOTION:

While Jacob dreamt of ladders reaching up into Heaven, his son Joseph had dreams of his 11 brothers along with his mom and dad bowing down to him. As you can imagine, these dreams didn't make Joseph very popular with his brothers, but these were dreams given to him by God Himself. Joseph knew that if God says it's going to happen, it's going to happen. But Joseph's dreams were shattered when his brothers beat him up, stole his special coat, sold him to slave traders, and told Jacob that his beloved son was dead. "That will put an end to those dreams!" his brothers must have thought.

By now you can probably guess that God, who promised a Savior would come out of a dead stump, was not too worried about the selfish plans of some angry brothers. Joseph didn't have it easy though. Thrown into a pit. A slave in Egypt. Blamed for something he didn't do. Thrown in jail where he was forgotten by everyone. Everyone except the one who matters most. So, when Pharaoh, king of Egypt, had a scary dream one night, guess who God had already brought to Egypt to help? And guess who Pharaoh put in charge of the whole land of Egypt when he told him about his dream? And guess whose brothers came to Egypt when their food ran out back home and bowed down to him? If you answered Joseph, give yourself a high five!

Amazingly, Joseph, who had the power to kill his brothers for what they had done to him, or at least let them starve to death, chose instead to forgive them. He told them, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." Joseph was thrown into that pit by his brothers, like a seed tossed into the ground, and once again, God used that seed to save the lives of Joseph's brothers and parents so that they could be a blessing to all the families of the earth.

QUESTIONS:

1. Sometimes God's plan is for us to go through difficult times, like Joseph, for His glory. What problem do you have right now that God might be using to bring glory to His name? What is still true about God even when we're going through hard times?
2. Talk about some of the ways you see Joseph's story act like a sneak peek for Jesus' story. How did God bring both men back to life to save many people?

ACTIVITY:

Jacob gave Joseph a beautiful coat of many colors which made his brothers jealous and angry along with his dreams. Draw a picture of Joseph's beautiful coat on your ornament for today. While you're drawing your picture, listen to the song "Out of the Mud" from the *Seeds of Courage* album (sing along if you know it). Pray, thanking God that He still takes hard things, painful things and uses them to show us His goodness and to set our feet on the rock!



SEEDS OF CHRISTMAS

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DECEMBER 13, 2017

Scripture: Read Deuteronomy 5:1-22

DEVOTION:

Joseph's family stayed in Egypt for a long time (400 years to be exact), but their time in Egypt wasn't all good. Not long after Joseph died, a new Pharaoh forgot how God had blessed Egypt through Joseph and his brothers. Pharaoh decided to make them slaves instead of friends. The Hebrews, as God's people were called, suffered at the hands of the Egyptians and wondered if God had forgotten them.

But God never forgets the people He loves, and He raised up a deliverer named Moses to lead the people out of Egypt. After 10 plagues and a trip through the middle of the Red Sea, God's people were finally free. Still, God knew there was something worse than the Egyptian slave drivers. It was the sickness of sin still deep in the hearts of His people that led them to ignore God and do what they thought was right.

Because God is kind, He spoke to His people out of the fire of the mountain (IMAGINE THAT!!) and told them the right way to live. He told them to be careful to follow His commandments, to be obedient to Him, so that they might live and prosper in the Promised Land He was giving them. This seed of truth from the mouth of God showed them the way to live and have a relationship with Him. It also showed them how far short they fell of God's glorious standard and how badly they needed a Savior to rescue them from their sin.

QUESTIONS:

1. God doesn't always use fire out of a mountain to speak to us, but God still communicates with us all the time. What are some ways that God speaks to us now? How can we be better listeners to the ways God speaks to us?
2. Sometimes it is easy for us to forget God's promises like the Israelites. What are some promises God has made to you? Name at least three and see if you can find where those promises are in Scripture.

ACTIVITY:

God told His people the way they should go, and wrote the law, the 10 Commandments, on 2 stone tablets. Draw a picture of the stone tablets on today's ornament, and while you do, listen to the song "Teach Them" from the *Seeds of Character* (vol 6) album. Pray that God would give your family the strength to follow God's greatest command to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Parents, pray asking the Lord to use you to teach your children the way of the Lord so they might walk in His ways all of their lives.



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DECEMBER 14, 2017

Scripture: Read Ruth 1:1-2:3; Matthew 1:5, 16

DEVOTION:

The people of God made it to the Promised Land, but as you might have guessed, the seeds of sin planted by Satan in the Garden of Eden still plagued the people. Instead of listening to, trusting, and obeying God, the people all did what they thought was right in their own eyes and the results were disastrous. The people didn't prosper in the land. They suffered the consequences of their sin.

Naomi was one of those who suffered most when her husband and only two sons died. Ruth was married to one of Naomi's sons, and when her husband died, Naomi told her she was free to leave and go back to her family to find a new husband. Ruth, however, chose to stay with Naomi and she chose to trust in Naomi's God. The God of the people of Israel. The One and Only True God. It was a scary thing for a woman to be without a husband at this time in the Old Testament, but Ruth chose to trust that God had a plan.

And what a plan He had! Soon, Ruth met Boaz, one of Naomi's relatives. Boaz saw her suffering and showed kindness to her and Naomi. Boaz instructed his men to leave seeds of grain behind for Ruth to gather for food. Soon, Boaz married Ruth, giving her and Naomi a brand new life. What once seemed hopeless was now filled with promise and seeds of hope! And with this new life, God blessed Ruth and Boaz with a son named Obed, who would have a son named Jesse, who would have a son named David. "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse." The tree is taking shape!

QUESTIONS:

1. Think of a time when you did something you thought was right but then realized it was a mistake. What did you do? Is there anything you can do that God can't forgive? Why not?
2. Share about a time when you had to persevere and trust God, not knowing what might happen. How did God remind you that He is faithful?

ACTIVITY:

Boaz showed kindness to Ruth by making sure she had enough grain from the wheat harvest to feed her and Naomi. Today, draw a picture of a stalk of wheat or a field of wheat on your ornament to remind you how God sees what we need and always provides for us. Listen to "Call His Name Immanuel" from the *Seeds of Christmas* album to see how God provided for us by becoming "God with us". Pray, thanking Jesus for His promise to be with us always.



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DECEMBER 15, 2017

Scripture: Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13

DEVOTION:

Have you ever wanted exactly what you think all your neighbors have? God's people did, and one of the things they were convinced they needed was a fancy king like all the other nations. God told them that He was the only King they needed, but they still wanted what they thought was right in their own eyes. Like Adam and Eve, the people chose the serpent's whispers over the voice of God. So, God let them have what they asked for... and they quickly learned that you should be careful what you ask for. King Saul was selfish, weak, and cowardly. When he rejected God's way, God rejected Him as king and told the prophet Samuel to look for another.

God led Samuel to the little town of Bethlehem, to the home of a man named Jesse who had 8 sons. When Samuel saw the first one he was sure he had found the new king of Israel! But God reminded Samuel that God isn't looking for the tallest, strongest, or handsomest. He's looking to see what's planted in the heart of the man. Are there seeds of selfishness and pride like Saul or seeds of obedience and faith? It wasn't until the youngest son, David, came in from tending the sheep, that God told Samuel, "That's the one! The one who has a heart like mine!" When the oil ran down David's head, the Spirit of God rushed into David's heart and the tree of Jesse grew stronger and taller!

QUESTIONS:

1. Sometimes we ask for things that we think will be good for us, like God's people asking for a king. What is something that you're asking God for but haven't received? How can you be sure God is good even when He's not giving you what you want?
2. The Lord does not look at our outward appearance, instead He looks at our hearts. How do you sometimes try to look good on the outside? What seeds might God say are growing in your heart right now?

ACTIVITY:

Draw a jar of oil to remind you of the oil Samuel used to anoint David as King. Listen to the song "We Trust" from *The Character of God* album. Just like Israel was tempted to trust in a king to give them what they needed, we are tempted to trust in other things to give us what we need. Pray that God would strengthen your faith in the Lord as family so that your trust is always in the name of the Lord and not in anything else.



SEEDS OF CHRISTMAS

A Family Advent Guide

DECEMBER 16, 2017

Scripture: Read 2 Samuel 5:1-5

DEVOTION:

King Saul obviously was not happy that God had chosen David as the new king. He set out to stop God's plan, chasing David all over the country, and even trying to kill him. Of course, we know God's plan cannot be stopped. When Saul died at the hands of the Philistines, God's people looked to David, the little shepherd boy turned mighty warrior, to lead them.

While David was an excellent warrior, he was most comfortable as a shepherd, not just because he knew how to be a shepherd, but because that's how he best understood God. God had been a good shepherd to David, leading him beside still waters, walking with him through the valley of the shadow of death, and even preparing a table for him in the presence of his enemies. And now, God was asking David to be that shepherd for His people, a loving, servant-hearted protector over the sheep of Israel.

So, Jesse's son, the man after God's own heart, became Israel's king, and God promised King David that his throne would last forever and never come to an end. The Jesse Tree that God had planted was looking sturdy and invincible, which makes what happens next so very unexpected and sad.

QUESTIONS:

1. How do you think King Saul and King David ruled God's people differently? How did David's job as a shepherd help get him ready to be king?
2. We all have chances to be leaders in our lives. Talk about a few ways you can be a leader this week. What kind of leader do you want to be? What kind of leadership do you want to follow?

ACTIVITY:

Today, draw a picture of crown to put on your ornament to remind you of God's promise to David that his throne would last forever. Listen again to the song "To The Ends of the Earth" from *Seeds of Christmas* to be reminded of the promise of God of a greater Shepherd than David who would be the peace of the whole world. Pray for people that your family knows who need the peace of Jesus right now. Ask Jesus to show Himself to them as their loving Shepherd who brings peace.



SEEDS OF CHRISTMAS

A Family Advent Guide

DECEMBER 17, 2017

Scripture: Read Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

DEVOTION:

While David was a good king for Israel, he was far from perfect. David made some pretty huge mistakes, sinning against God in some pretty terrible ways, a fruit of the seed of sin passed down to him from Adam and Eve. What made David great was his willingness to admit his mistakes, confess them to God, and seek forgiveness. Unfortunately, this wasn't something that his sons, grandsons or great grandsons learned from him. While a few kings that came after David were good, most were selfish, weak, and cowardly like Saul. They ignored God's warnings about the consequences their sin would bring.

These kings led the people of Israel to abandon God and His commandments for little "g" or false gods whose ways and commands were easier and seemingly more fun. The one true God had defeated Israel's enemies so He could give His people the Promised Land. Now, however, the seeds of rebellion were growing in the hearts of the people and the Israelites were worshipping the gods of their enemies, Baal and Asherah, instead of the one true God. Suddenly, the tree of Jesse that was once so strong, started to look weak and sick.

But God wasn't through and His plan wasn't over. The seed of promise was still alive. Isaiah, a prophet from God, spoke for God, promising that though the people would walk in darkness for a while, God would send a Light. He would be called the Wonderful Counselor and the Prince of Peace, and His reign would never end! But how long, O Lord? How long until this Prince of Peace comes? And could He possibly defeat the greatest enemy God's people had ever faced — their own sinfulness?

QUESTIONS:

1. Talk about the different names Isaiah uses to describe the coming Messiah. What do you think of when you hear them? Why can each one be used to describe Jesus?
2. How will the Prince of Peace rule differently than any other leader in history? How can we be praying for our government leaders and country this Christmas? Take time to pray through these things together.

ACTIVITY:

For today's ornament, draw a picture of the sun, reminding your family how God promised the light would shine in the darkness once again. As a family, sing "To Us a Child Is Born" from *Seeds of Christmas*, reminding your family that Jesus is the Son who brought light into the darkness. Pray for specific things going on in our world today where people need the light of Jesus to shine into their darkness.



SEEDS OF CHRISTMAS

A Family Advent Guide

DECEMBER 18, 2017

Scripture: Read Isaiah 11:1-9

DEVOTION:

The tree of Jesse was looking sicker and sicker. God made it clear that it was only a matter of time before the tree of Jesse, Israel and her kings, would be chopped down as a result of their sins. God, however, was not through with His people, not able to or willing to break His promise. This was a promise He made a long time ago to Abraham and David, a promise that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through a King whose throne would never come to an end. This is when God spoke of a branch coming out of the dead stump of Jesse that would bear fruit. But what would this branch, this King, look like? What would His kingdom be like?

Isaiah described a King marked by wisdom, understanding, strength, and fear of the Lord. His decisions will be based on righteousness and fairness, He will be faithful to His people, and mighty to destroy wickedness and hate. His kingdom will be a kingdom of peace where even natural arch enemies, wolves and lambs, leopards and goats, cows and lions, will be friends and be at peace with one another. Does that sound familiar? It should. It should remind you of the Garden of Eden, before the seeds of sin entered the world. This King will come to make all things new again, free of the power and presence of the serpent's lies that had scarred God's creation and His people. He truly is coming to defeat the greatest enemy of the world!

God's people continued to run away from God, worshiping the false gods of Baal and Asherah as the seeds of disobedience grew in their hearts. They continued to run towards their punishment, ignoring Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the other prophets of God. But God has not forgotten His promises and He will always do what He says He will do.

QUESTIONS:

1. What evidence do you see today of God's blessings on all the nations of the earth because Jesus the King was born? What evidence do you see in your life of God's blessings because Jesus the King was born?
2. Can arch enemies (like a lion and a lamb or two bullies at school) be truly friends and at peace apart from God's help in their lives? Why? Talk about a time when God helped you to be at peace with someone you once thought of as an enemy.

ACTIVITY:

The promise was that Jesus would make all things new, even creation itself. Draw a picture of a lion and a lamb together showing how Jesus will bring peace to the whole world and all of creation. Listen to the song "New Creation" from *Seeds of Faith* focusing on the words of 2 Corinthians 5:17. Try to memorize this verse together. Pray that your family will be made new day by day through your faith in Jesus and His power to change us all.



SEEDS OF CHRISTMAS

A Family Advent Guide

DECEMBER 19, 2017

Scripture: Read Micah 5:2-5a

DEVOTION:

Being a prophet in Israel was not a fun or easy job. A prophet's job was to tell people that what they were doing was wrong, what was going to happen to them if they kept doing wrong, and what God was going to do literally hundreds of years in the future. That doesn't tend to make you a very popular person. Most of the time they were ignored, but sometimes they were thrown in jail or worse!

Micah, one of God's prophets, spoke about the coming judgment of God in response to the seeds of rebellion currently flourishing in Israel. But he also spoke about God's forgiveness and the future, mentioning a familiar but forgotten town called Bethlehem where another ruler would come from. Could this coming ruler be the branch from the stump of Jesse? Like Isaiah, Micah tells of a King who will be a shepherd to the people of Israel and whose greatness would be to the ends of the earth. This wasn't a new promise, but an echo of the promises God made to Abraham, David, and even to the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Through Micah, God was planting the seed of hope once again. This King was the serpent-crusher who would be a blessing to every nation through Abraham's family and bring peace to the entire world. Could it be? A baby from Bethlehem would grow up to be great to the ends of the earth? Sounds impossible, but, as we know, nothing is impossible for God!

QUESTIONS:

1. The Israelites had no interest in listening to God or His prophets. What does it say about God that He would still give Micah this promise of hope? How does God remind you that He will always keep His promises?
2. Talk about times in your life when it is hard to share God's truth, like Micah did, because others don't want to hear it. Why can it be comforting to know that God and His truth will never change?

ACTIVITY:

"Bethlehem" literally means "house of bread". On your ornament today, draw a picture of a house to be reminded again how Jesus left His home in Heaven to make His home with us here on earth. Listen and sing along again to "To the Ends of the Earth" from *Seeds of Christmas* and maybe sing a verse of "O Little Town of Bethlehem" while you're at it. Pray that your home would be a place where Jesus would be honored and worshipped so that your friends and neighbors might know Him too!



SEEDS OF CHRISTMAS

A Family Advent Guide

DECEMBER 20, 2017

Scripture: Read Luke 1:5-25

DEVOTION:

Silence. Nothing but silence. The prophets who had heard from God stopped hearing from Him and for 400 years God remained silent. God's people had been defeated and taken captive by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and now the Romans, just like the prophets told them they would. The seeds of doubt originally planted by the enemy caused the people to question God. Where was He? Had He completely abandoned His people and broken His promises? Is He still good?

People had stopped expecting to hear from God, so when Gabriel appeared to Zechariah it was surprising for a lot of reasons. For Zechariah personally, his surprise was the news that he and his wife Elizabeth were going to have a baby! They were old and had tried to have a baby for a long time, just like Abraham and Sarah, so they thought if they hadn't had a baby by now, they never would. How could it be that Elizabeth would become pregnant with a baby, much less a baby who would be like the prophet Elijah and prepare the way for a coming King? "Impossible!" thought Zechariah (familiar words to a God who is always doing the impossible). Because of his doubt, God chose to make Zechariah silent until his baby boy was born, a sign that God would do what He said He would do.

Nine months later, just as the angel Gabriel broke the silence of God, a little baby named John broke the silence of Zechariah. The seed of the prophets buried for 400 years in silence was beginning to sprout!

QUESTIONS:

1. Sometimes God is silent but that doesn't mean He doesn't hear you. Have you ever wondered if God really hears you? What makes you wonder that? What is true about God even if He is silent?
2. God surprised Zechariah and Elizabeth with a baby when they thought it was impossible. What in your life right now would you love for God to do but it seems impossible? Talk about some of the amazing things you know God has done.

ACTIVITY:

Today, draw a picture of an old man and woman on your ornament to represent Zechariah and Elizabeth and to be reminded that what is impossible for us is possible for God. Listen to the song "God is Faithful" from *The Character of God* album. Pray as a family, thanking God for all the ways He has been faithful to your family this past year and asking Him to help you trust Him in the year to come.



SEEDS OF CHRISTMAS

A Family Advent Guide

DECEMBER 21, 2017

Scripture: Read Matthew 3:1-6

DEVOTION:

The baby known as John grew up and became a strange looking man people knew as John the Baptist. Clothed in camel's hair with a leather belt and with breath that smelled like bugs and honey, John had a message for the people. He said he had a word from God, like the prophets of old. The people were so starved from the last 400 years of silence from God, they came from all over to hear what he had to say.

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." These were familiar words, similar to the ones Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Malachi, and the other prophets had spoken long ago, but now they sounded more urgent, more immediate, like something was about to happen. God used John to plant the seed of repentance into the hearts of people. Many who heard John did just what he said, repented of their sin, confessed to God and asked for the forgiveness they so desperately needed. God was getting His people ready for the arrival of their King. "Who is this King of Glory going to be?" they must have wondered. "We've waited 400 years. How much longer must we wait?"

QUESTIONS:

1. John the Baptist called all the people to repent. What is repentance and why is it so important? What does God promise to do when we repent?
2. Think of someone who doesn't know about the King who has come to save the world. How can you and your family share the same Good News with them this holiday season, just like John did?

ACTIVITY:

John the Baptist liked to hang out by the Jordan River, so draw a picture of a river on today's ornament. Let the river remind you that God's grace never runs out for those who believe and repent of their sins. Listen to "Grace (La-De-Da)" from the *Seeds of Faith* album and let Ephesians 2:8 remind you that Jesus came to save us as a gift of God to us. Pray, thanking God for the gift of forgiveness from our sins because of Jesus.



SEEDS OF CHRISTMAS

A Family Advent Guide

DECEMBER 22, 2017

Scripture: Read Luke 1:26-38

DEVOTION:

Shortly after Gabriel delivered his message to Zechariah, God gave him another message to deliver, one of the most important messages in all of history! One might think that this kind of news should have been told to some super important person, but this message was for an ordinary young lady living in the little area of Galilee in the simple town of Nazareth. Mary had found special favor with God and He wanted to give her a very special job. She was going to have a Son who would be the King to sit on the throne of David forever, the Son of Abraham through whom the whole world would be blessed. This was the One promised so long ago!

Now Mary was not yet married, but she was engaged to Joseph, a carpenter who was one of King David's great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandsons. How, she wondered, could she have a son when she wasn't even married? Gabriel told her that a seed would be planted in her womb by the Holy Spirit of God Himself. That meant that this baby King wasn't just the Son of David or the Son of Abraham. He was the Son of the Most High God Himself! Once again, God was doing the impossible!

Mary may have been scared, but she knew that God was good and that He could be trusted. Humbly, Mary accepted God's Word as true and courageously she chose to be His servant. But one question remained — what would Joseph say?

QUESTIONS:

1. God allowed Mary to be part of something bigger than she could imagine. What do you think it would take for you become more faithful and available for God to use in a big way for His glory?
2. Do you ever feel like God could never use someone like you? Why? How can you, as a family, help remind each other that God can use people just like you to do His work?

ACTIVITY:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His One and only Son..." Today draw a picture of a heart representing God's amazing love that He sent down to earth in the baby that Mary carried in her womb. Listen to "Mary's Song of Praise" from *Seeds of Christmas*. These are the words Mary spoke thanking God for all He had done. Let each person pray using the words in their heart to tell God how they feel about Him and what He has done for them in Jesus.



SEEDS OF CHRISTMAS

A Family Advent Guide

DECEMBER 23, 2017

Scripture: Read Matthew 1:18-25

DEVOTION:

Joseph was in shock! Mary had told him that she was going to have a baby, and he knew the baby was not his. She had also told him that an angel told her that the baby was God's own Son. "Impossible!" he thought (like so many in his family before him). No one had heard from God for hundreds of years and now He decides to talk? To Mary? Even though he may have been angry and disappointed in Mary, Joseph was a good man who loved God. He chose to forgive Mary, but he also decided not to make her his wife.

But God (all the great stories in the Bible start with "But God") gave Joseph a dream and sent another angel to tell him that this was God's plan and that the baby in Mary's womb really was the Son of God. And did you hear what the angel said this baby was going to do? He told Joseph that this baby was going to save God's people from their sins! The greatest enemy of God's people was never the pharaohs or Philistines or kings from powerful foreign countries. Their greatest enemy was always the seeds of sin that the serpent had given to Adam and Eve, and that every person has planted in their heart. This baby King, this Son of God, the God who is with us, Immanuel, was going to save the people from their sins and crush the head of the serpent, just like God promised!

When Joseph woke up from his dream he knew what he had to do. It's the same thing that all great men with the seed of faith growing in their hearts do. He heard the Word of God and did exactly what God told him.

QUESTIONS:

1. Mary's baby had been promised and spoken of many times over hundreds of years. Why was this such a special baby? Who was His father? What did He come to do?
2. What did God tell Joseph to do? Why was Joseph so willing to do what God said? What are some things God has asked us to do and how can we be obedient?

ACTIVITY:

Draw a picture of tools on today's ornament to represent Joseph, the carpenter, and let the tools remind you of Joseph's obedience to do exactly what the Lord commanded him. Listen to "God With Us" from *Seeds of Christmas*. Think today about people who have been obedient, like Joseph, to teach you about Jesus (parents, teachers, friends, etc.) and spend time today praying for them by name and thanking God for their obedience and faithfulness.



SEEDS OF CHRISTMAS

A Family Advent Guide

DECEMBER 24, 2017

Scripture: Read Luke 2:1-5

DEVOTION:

Mary's belly kept growing as the baby inside her grew and the time was getting close for the baby to be born. But do you remember the promise that God had given to Micah to tell the people? He said this baby King was to come from the town of Bethlehem. Joseph and Mary lived nearly 100 miles away in Nazareth, and they had no reason to leave, especially with Mary being so pregnant.

Then the news came: Caesar, the king of Rome, had decided that every person in the Roman empire needed to be counted, and the best way to count them was to send them back to their hometowns. Guess what Joseph's hometown was? That's right! Bethlehem, the city of a shepherd boy turned king, David.

Joseph loaded up his very pregnant wife and walked the 100 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. God wasn't about to let even one seed of promise go to waste. Everything was happening just like God had said it would hundreds of years earlier. Joseph and Mary strolled into Bethlehem just in time. All of creation held its breath as the greatest promise of God was about to be kept.

QUESTIONS:

1. God used Caesar, the king of Rome, to make sure His promises came true. What other ways have you seen God use people keep His promises?
2. Joseph and Mary trusted God and knew that His plan was good even when it seemed impossible. How did they know they could trust God in everything? What are some things in your life you need to trust God with right now?

ACTIVITY:

When Joseph and Mary got to Bethlehem, there was no room or bed for them, only a stable with a manger for a bed. Draw a picture of the manger Jesus was laid in on today's ornament. Listen once again to "To Us a Child Is Born" from *Seeds of Christmas* and sing loud as a family! It's Christmas Eve! Pray, thanking God for keeping all of His promises, for loving us so much that He sent Jesus and for the chance to tell everyone that Jesus loves them too!



SEEDS OF CHRISTMAS

A Family Advent Guide

DECEMBER 25, 2017

Scripture: Read Luke 2:6-21

DEVOTION:

Bethlehem. A stable. A manger for a bed. A tired young woman. A fearful new husband. A newborn baby wrapped in scraps of cloth. This is what it looks like when a branch comes shooting out of a dead tree stump.

God, through Isaiah, had promised that He wasn't finished with Jesse's tree, the one that had seen the great King David shepherd God's people with a heart like the Lord's. The once strong and majestic tree had withered and died after years of selfish, weak, and cowardly sinfulness by the kings of Israel and the people they led. For 400 years God's people felt like orphans without a King and foreigners without a home.

The seeds of sin had spread like a weed from that first temptation by the serpent in the Garden. But in that same Garden, God had planted a seed of promise that someday One would come from Adam to crush the head of the serpent and make all things in creation new again. While the seeds of sin kept sprouting up and producing fruit, God planted another seed of promise, telling Abraham that all the world would be blessed through him. Another seed of promise came to David of a kingdom and throne that would never end.

With the world covered in the weeds of sin, at just the right time, the baby named Jesus was born, the Holy, Perfect One from God. The seed of promise was no longer just a promise. The promise was kept, and His name was Jesus. The angels couldn't hold in their joy. They rushed to a group of shepherds outside Bethlehem to tell them that the Savior of the world, the snake-crusher, had been born! Thousands of angels burst into song saying, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!"

Today, we join the angels' song once again, not only because He was born, but because that baby grew to be a man who died on the cross to save us from our sins. Buried in the ground like a seed, Jesus sprang to life again three days later, giving peace to all those who would believe, all who would trust in His name. And now, 2,000 years later, that seed of hope continues to spread and come to life! Sing today like the angels did all those many years ago! Sing Glory to God in the highest! Merry Christmas!

QUESTIONS:

1. On this Christmas Day, think back over this last year. Tell one another of specific ways you have seen God keep His promises to your family this year (for ideas of some of God's promises, see Psalm 1:1-3; Psalm 121; Matthew 11:28-30; John 10:10; Romans 1:16-17; 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; Philippians 1:6; 4:19).
2. Read John 14:2-3. This is the promise of a day greater than that first Christmas. How does this promise give you reason to sing today? Who can your family pray for and share with this next year like the shepherds did, so that they might sing "Glory to God in the highest" by this time next year?

ACTIVITY:

Merry Christmas! For the final ornament, draw a star like the one that the wise men may have seen in the sky when Jesus was born. Listen and sing along to "Joy" from *Seeds of Christmas*, the song the angels sang to the shepherds on that first Christmas. Spend time praying together as a family. Parents, pray over the seeds of truth that have been planted in the hearts of your kids this Christmas season. Pray God would water them, nurture them and bring about a harvest of righteousness in the lives of your kids this year by the power of Jesus our Lord.