



Advent

the gifts we all *really* want.

Series Companion
Highrock 2025

INTRODUCTION

In the Christmas season, the pressure is on to buy, wrap, and receive the perfect gifts. We chase after the latest gadgets, the trendiest clothes, or the biggest sales, often thinking *that* is what will finally make us happy. But how often do those gifts leave us feeling empty, unfulfilled, or back to wanting something else just a few weeks later? Were last year’s Christmas gifts all you hoped they would be? What about the year before...or the one before that?

We invite you to join us this Advent as we turn our attention to the truly satisfying gifts that last well beyond December 25th. Throughout the centuries, Christians have focused on the profound promise of Advent by anticipating the arrival of Jesus—the source of all the things we really want: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

RESOURCE OVERVIEW

Here we provide space to take notes on the sermon and Scripture text and answer reflection questions that you can discuss with others. When considering the reflection questions, remember that the goal is not to have all the “right” answers—instead, let these questions serve as a starting point for curiosity in your conversation with God and others. See the Appendix of this guide for more resources and opportunities to engage with this study.

Please note this discussion guide is created before the series begins. Discussion questions are prepared before the sermons are written and based on the theme and text for the week. Thank you for your understanding that the topic and focus of the sermon as the pastor writes it may differ from what is written in the discussion questions.

APPENDIX (page 13)

Offers a deeper dive into the topic as well as resources for Bible study, leading small groups, and links for further support.

- Additional Resources
- Online Bibles
- Prayer Tools
- “Icebreaker” Questions
- Tips for Guiding Conversations
- General Resources for Individual Support

SERMON SCHEDULE & SCRIPTURE READING

**Subject to change at the discretion of the pastors.*

Sermon	Topics
Week 1/2	Joy
Week 1/2	Hope
Week 3/4	Love

Week 3/4	Peace
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*For weeks 1 and 2 and weeks 3 and 4, use the topic/passage in the Sermon Discussion Guide covered in the sermon from your Highrock congregation on Sunday. The other topics/passage will be covered the following week.

WEEKLY FORMAT

SERMON DISCUSSION

(PRE-WORK) REFLECT: Listen to the sermon, read weekly selections/view video links (if provided), read scripture passages (used in the sermon), and answer reflection questions. (30-40 mins)

RELATE: Discuss reflection questions with your small group. (50 mins)

PRAY: Use the suggested prayer prompt to conclude your time (5-10 mins)

CONVERSATION COVENANT

We hope all small group discussions are lively and enriching, but sometimes tough topics will be discussed. The Conversation Covenant* is an agreement to hold respect and grace toward all participants within a small group, no matter the conversation. Please adhere to the Conversation Covenant or consider creating one that fits your context.

*Adapted from <https://conversational-leadership.net/conversation-covenant/>

I pledge:

To act in good faith, with curiosity. *I will assume the best about my conversation partners when entering into our groups. I will give the benefit of the doubt, recognizing that they may know something I don't.*

To show respect. *I will show respect. I will be polite and give due regard to the feelings and traditions of others. I understand that I do not have to agree with someone to show them respect.*

To speak the truth. *I won't use rhetorical tricks to try to win an argument. I will speak what I genuinely believe is the nuanced truth.*

To aim to discover the truth. *I will not enter into a conversation with the purpose of changing the mind of anyone to my way of thinking.*

To focus on what we can change. *I will focus on what we can do differently in the future since we cannot change what we did in the past.*

To take responsibility for the conversation. *I will take responsibility for the quality of the conversation and the abidance of the rules both in principle and in spirit.*

To follow the covenant even when others fail to do so. *I will abide by the rules regardless of whether another person breaks them.*

To respect the confidentiality of the group. *I will not share the stories of group members verbally or in written form (including on social media and online outlets).*

To lighten up and approach the conversation in good humor. *I recognize that humor is a hallmark of a constructive, generative conversation and take the conversation in good humor.*

PREPARE

The following questions are jumping-off points for personal reflection. Engage with them to awaken your awareness of themes in this sermon series. Pay attention to the questions that stand out to you and look back on them throughout the series to see how God might be speaking to you.

CONSIDER (questions drawn from Practicing the Way Workbook materials)

- Advent is a season for waiting and *active* expectation. What are you bringing into this sermon series? What are some of the concerns, questions, and joys in your life right now?
- Reflecting on these concerns, questions, and joys, how might you begin to bring them to God – in prayer, worship, and your devotional life and practices? Is there something you feel nudged to bring up in the group conversations for this series?
- In the spirit of active expectation, what's something you want to ask God to do in your life and in this world at the moment?

WEEK 1/2: Joy

Psalm 16

*The sermon topics for this series will alternate locations (Arlington/MetroWest) for weeks 1 and 2. Check to see which theme/passage was covered in the sermon from your Highrock congregation on Sunday. The other theme/passage will be covered in the following week.

(PRE-WORK) REFLECT | Before your small group gathering, complete the following and reflect on the discussion questions. These will be the basis for your small group time.

- ☐ Listen to the Sermon on Highrock's [YouTube channel](#) and note any reactions you had – curiosities, concerns, or delights
- ☐ Read Psalm 16

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation or personal reflection.

1. What from the sermon or reading has brought up new questions or interesting points you would like to discuss?
2. How does this sermon help you distinguish between happiness and joy? Is that distinction helpful for you? Why (or why not)?
3. P. Taylor highlighted the connection between joy and gratitude. Have you experienced joy through gratitude before? What might that look like for you now?
4. What feelings or emotions do you experience when you sit with an image of God smiling upon you or when you hear (and really take in) the words, “God delights in you”?
5. What do you think joy might look like in challenging situations or circumstances? What might help you see (or experience) a connection between joy and hope?
6. P. Taylor said, “Joy is a gift and practice.” Is there an invitation you sense God making through your conversation or reflections this week? Is there a next step you could take in how you engage, act, or relate to others?

PRAY | God, help me discover, more and more during this season of advent, that you give the gift of joy. May joy keep us strong and may it keep us going to do what you ask of us. In joyful service to you for all you have given us, we say together, “Amen.”

Psalm 16

- 1 Keep me safe, my God,
for in you I take refuge.
- 2 I say to the LORD, “You are my Lord;
apart from you I have no good thing.”
- 3 I say of the holy people who are in the land,
“They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight.”
- 4 Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more.
I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods
or take up their names on my lips.
- 5 LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup;
you make my lot secure.
- 6 The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance.

7 I will praise the LORD, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.

8 I keep my eyes always on the LORD.

With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

9 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure,

10 because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,
nor will you let your faithful one see decay.

11 You make known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

WEEK 1/2: Hope

Luke 1:39-56

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(PRE-WORK) REFLECT | Before your small group gathering, complete the following and reflect on the discussion questions. These will be the basis for your small group time.

- ☐ Listen to the Sermon on Highrock's [YouTube channel](#) and note any reactions you had – curiosities, concerns, or delights
- ☐ Read Luke 1:39-1:56

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation or personal reflection.

1. What from the sermon has brought up new questions or interesting points about prayer you would like to discuss?
2. What's your relationship with hope right now? At a general level, would you say you are experiencing more or less hope right now? Elaborate.
3. What do you think it would look like to help others find hope right now? While respecting privacy and personal details, share about these situations and what it sharing hope might mean.
4. Drawing from the sermon and/or Scripture passage, how does faith give you hope? How does this sense of hope connect to a tangible part of your life?
5. Exercise: Pray as a group in three ways, for individual hope, for hope to become more real for people in your nearby communities, and for a world event.

PRAY | God, amidst all the things that distract or lead us away from you, make us new, redirect us to your overflowing goodness and grace. In you, in the words of Jesus, in the Spirit's presence in our lives, help us find hope. Help us be people who share hope with others.

Luke 1:39-1:56

39 At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

46 And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.

Questions? smallgroups@highrock.org

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From now on all generations will call me blessed,

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.

50 His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.

51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful

55 to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors."

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

WEEK 3: Love

Reference Scripture used in the sermon

*The sermon topics for this series will alternate locations (Arlington/MetroWest) for weeks 3 and 4 . Check to see which theme/passage was covered in the sermon from your Highrock congregation on Sunday. The other theme/passage will be covered in the following week.

(PRE-WORK) REFLECT | Before your small group gathering, complete the following and reflect on the discussion questions. These will be the basis for your small group time.

- ☐ Listen to the Sermon on Highrock's [YouTube channel](#) and note any reactions you had – curiosities, concerns, or delights
- ☐ Read the Scripture used in the sermon

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation or personal reflection.

1. What from the sermon or reading has brought up new questions or interesting points you would like to discuss?
2. How would you fill out this sentence, “Love is . . .”?
3. How does the birth of Christ, the Advent story, deepen or change the meaning of love for you?
4. What could it look like to commit your self to the love of God during this season of Advent (and beyond)? What’s one practical expression of this for you?
5. Likewise, what would it mean for you to receive the love of God during this season of Advent (and beyond)?

PRAY | God, you are love. Where love is lacking in our lives, in our relationship with others, in the environments around us, in the world at large, draw near. For where you are, there is love. And may it be greater and stronger and fuller. We pray this, and we trust it may be so, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Reference Scripture used in the sermon

WEEK 4: Peace

Reference Scripture used in the sermon

*The sermon topics for this series will alternate locations (Arlington/MetroWest) for weeks 3 and 4 . Check to see which theme/passage was covered in the sermon from your Highrock congregation on Sunday. The other theme/passage will be covered in the following week.

(PRE-WORK) REFLECT | Before your small group gathering, complete the following and reflect on the discussion questions. These will be the basis for your small group time.

- ☐ Listen to the Sermon on Highrock's [YouTube channel](#) and note any reactions you had – curiosities, concerns, or delights
- ☐ Read the Scripture referenced in the sermon

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation or personal reflection.

1. What from the sermon or reading has brought up new questions or interesting points you would like to discuss?
2. Where are you experiencing peace in your life right now? What feels unsettled or an area where there isn't peace?
3. Drawing from the sermon, what does the biblical (advent) idea of peace mean? How do you think this is different from common, popular ideas of peace?
4. How does the advent story call us to be makers of peace in our lives and the world around us? What could this look like for you?
5. If you were to ask God for peace in on area of your life, and in something going on outside of you and your immediate context, what would it be? Bring this into your group's prayer time.

PRAY | We are nearing Christmas day, where we celebrate that truth that you draw closer to our human situation than ever before. And yet we are still restless; we feel uncertain about the future and know that things are not as they should be. Oh God of peace, come to us and this world as you have before. May your Spirit awaken new things in us, new life, justice and a renewed desire to experience mercy. May the mighty power of your peace continue to overturn all things until we can say, in perfect peace, that "all is well; in all matters of things, all will be well."

Reference the Scripture used in the sermon

APPENDIX

Below are resources to look into if you are interested in diving deeper into some of the topics covered in this series. If you need resources that more specifically address your own experience, demographic, or faith journey, please reach out to a Highrock pastor or to smallgroups@highrock.org and we will be happy to help!

ONLINE BIBLES

- [Blue Letter Bible](#)
- [Bible Gateway](#)

PRAYER TOOLS

- [The Prayer of Examen: Tracking Our Moods](#)
- [Breath Prayer/Prayer of the Heart](#)
- [Divine/Fixed Hour Prayer](#)
- [SoulCare guide to Imaginative Prayer Spiritual Practice](#)
- [Imaginative Prayer/Ignatian Contemplation](#)
- [SoulCare guide to Recall & Paraphrase Spiritual Practice](#)
- [Lament](#)
- [Laughter and Prayer](#)
- [Palms Up, Palms Down](#)
- [Pray a Psalm in a Nature Setting](#)
- [Praying with your Body](#)
- [Welcoming Prayer](#)

“ICEBREAKER” QUESTIONS

- What was a small win from your week?
- Share a High/Low from your day or week.
- On a scale of 1-10, how are you doing coming into this meeting?
- If you were to describe yourself as a weather forecast today, what would you be? Example: sunny, partly cloudy, rainy with a chance of snow, etc.
- What song would be the theme track for the day you had?

GENERAL RESOURCES FOR INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT

- [Spiritual Practices](#)
- [Mental Health Resources](#)
- [Parenting & Kids—Understanding each other through Milestones](#)

TIPS FOR GUIDING CONVERSATION

- Allow everyone space to share. It's ok to ask what people are thinking even if they don't volunteer to share right away. But always give people the option to decline to share. Example: "Hey, Fred, you've been a little quiet and I'm curious to know what you think. Would you like to share anything?"
- Remember there aren't necessarily "right" answers. Encourage participants to simply be curious about what came up for them or others without the pressure of feeling like they "should" have thought or felt anything in particular. Example: Instead of asking "What is this story supposed to be communicating?" ask "What did you notice?"

- Embrace the differences. Affirm that different people can come to different conclusions regarding the same thing. Example: "Interestingly, the text reminded Susie of ABC, while it reminded José of XYZ. Both can be present and true."
- Adapt to suit your group's needs. Sometimes conversation is free-flowing and sometimes it's easier to move through discussion questions one at a time. Do what feels suitable for your group, but don't feel pressured to answer/discuss every single question.
- Encourage curiosity by modeling curiosity. Asking someone "Tell me more about XYZ" can be a really simple but effective tool to go deeper in conversation.
- Don't be afraid of silence. It's natural to want to fill silences or pauses in a conversation. But don't be afraid to sit in silence with your group members. Sometimes thoughts just need time to percolate, so don't feel like you have to rush to another question if no one shares immediately.
- Refer back to the Conversation Covenant. This is the posture that we as Highrock hold as we gather in groups. When the conversation gets tough, you can always refer back to the Conversation Covenant to remind the group that everyone has agreed to abide by this covenant in small group meetings.