

LONGING

ADVENT
DEVOTIONAL
FOR
TEENAGERS

25 PROMISES
FULLFILLED
IN JESUS



FOR



CHRISTMAS

EDITED BY
CHELSEA KINGSTON ERICKSON

ROOTED
MINISTRY

LONGING FOR CHRISTMAS

25 Promises Fulfilled in Jesus
Advent Devotional for Teenagers

Edited by Chelsea Kingston Erickson,
Rooted Ministry



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Introduction

Chelsea Kingston Erickson

Do you remember what it felt like to be a little kid at Christmastime?

I used to stay up late *weeks* before Christmas Eve, plotting my wish list by flashlight, long after lights out. Oh, I knew Christmas was about Jesus—but sadly that’s not what kept me awake. I’d make myself nearly sick with longing, imagining fun with my cousins and the gifts to come under the tree.

Maybe your childhood excitement about Christmas was for a special LEGO set, a PlayStation, or an American Girl Doll. Perhaps you eagerly awaited a special family tradition or a celebration at church.

There’s nothing quite like the anticipation of Christmas morning when we’re young.

And then we grow up a bit. As we leave childhood behind, our experience of Christmas changes, especially as we encounter more of the world’s suffering. Maybe you’ve lost a loved one to cancer, or your parents have divorced. Perhaps you feel lonely or anxious or angry. Maybe your friends have disappointed you or you’re drowning in others’ expectations for your performance in school or sports.

As a teenager, I often wished I could get back the thrill I used to feel at Christmastime. Instead, the holiday sometimes made me feel a little sad as I awoke to the real world with all its

problems. Christmas never quite lived up to the hype I recalled from childhood. I'm guessing you have felt this too.

LONGING FOR SOMETHING MORE

The loss we feel over our childhood wonder at Christmastime points to a deeper longing within all of us.

Author C. S. Lewis often wrote about the sense of bitter-sweet we all feel as we live in this world. He wrote that within each of us is an “inconsolable longing,” or the feeling of missing something we can't quite name. When we long for the innocence of childhood or even for Christmases past, what we're really missing, Lewis said, is the life we were made for: life together with God, forever.

This desire human beings have to be with God is well documented in the pages of Scripture. In fact, the whole Bible is the story of how God creates a good world and puts people in it so that he may dwell with them. It's the story of how God makes a plan to rescue them even when his people reject him and go their own way.

Throughout the Old Testament, God makes promises to the very people who were running from him that he would send a rescuer, a Messiah, to save them. For centuries, God's people longed for the fulfillment of these promises.

WAITING FOR GOD'S PROMISES

In the church calendar, we lean into longing during the season of Advent, which means *coming* or *arrival*. During Advent, we remember how God's people waited for a Savior, and how God promised to send his Son. During Advent, we remember how Jesus came long ago to a stable in Bethlehem, and how he will come again to fulfill every last promise God has ever made.

Over the next twenty-five days, we'll look at some of these promises and how they help us to prepare our hearts

for Christmas morning. Each day you'll read about a specific promise God made—and how he has fulfilled each one in Jesus Christ. It's important to note that we've ordered the promises chronologically through history, not in the order our Bibles record them. This is to help you get a sense of the time line of biblical history. As we journey through the Old Testament, I hope you'll see how its story causes us to eagerly wait for the Savior.

The authors of each chapter have been where you are. They know what it is like to feel lonely and left out, worn down and weary of this world. But each of them has found hope in the good news of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. It's a hope we want to share with you.

If you feel a little melancholy or downright disappointed this Christmas season, take heart. All of the longing we feel—for a better world, for renewed innocence, for things to be made right—will finally be met in Jesus. As we lean into longing together, I hope you'll experience something of the childlike anticipation for Christmas morning—not for gifts that await you under the tree, but for God's promised gift of his Son.

The best Christmas mornings of our childhoods are only a small taste of the good and beautiful world to come when Jesus returns to make all things right.

Day 1

Longing for What Has Been Lost

Chris Li

“I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15)

Have you ever had a blue Christmas?

My family’s Christmases growing up included cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents at our home for a loud and happy meal. But after my grandpa died, I remember going on a late-night walk with my mom and reminiscing about what Christmas used to be for our family. That first year especially, Christmas felt sad.

Unfortunately for many, Christmas can be a painful, stressful, and lonely time. From disappointment in our relationships with family and friends to reminders of sickness and death, the holidays can subtly highlight the brokenness of our world and the darkness in our lives. But God’s Word reminds us that we can take comfort and find hope in a Savior—a Savior God promised us from the very beginning.

All the pain we experience can be traced back to the Garden of Eden, where the first human beings rejected God’s rule. The Bible calls this sin, and we experience the traces of it everywhere. Friends leave us out or leave us behind, parents fight or get divorced, and we hurt others with our actions and words too.

Sin is choosing to live life on our own terms. Our sin separates us from who we are meant to be, from other people, and worst of all, from God. As we battle with sin, we need someone to help us be victorious because—in case you haven't noticed—we cannot save ourselves. This need we have for a rescuer is what Christmas is all about.

THE GOD WHO MAKES PROMISES

At the beginning of human history, God made a garden and placed the first two people, Adam and Eve, within it. What they had with God was special—a close relationship. They would go for walks with God, joyfully work to cultivate the land, and eat from the bounty God had given them. But God told them there was one tree from which they could not eat.

Adam and Eve listened to an impostor, a serpent who deceived them. They rebelled against God and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When they did, sin entered the world.

Immediately after darkness broke into the world, God made a promise to one day overcome it. God spoke to the serpent: “He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” This strange promise was the whisper of a Savior to come. God promised that one day, he would restore his close relationship with his people and bring them back to paradise.

THE GOD WHO KEEPS PROMISES

When Jesus came into the world, he fulfilled God's long-awaited promise. As we trace the offspring of Adam and Eve throughout the Bible, we see that their family tree leads to Jesus, the Messiah.

From the offspring of Adam and Eve, Jesus came to crush sin and Satan. But how? Jesus was bruised on the cross for our sin. As Jesus laid down his life, Satan was also bruised as his scheme to end God's plan of salvation failed. When Jesus

nailed our sin to the cross and rose from the dead, he delivered the fatal blow (Colossians 2:13–15).

Christmas can be a difficult time, especially if you are dealing with the heartache of sin and darkness, both in others and in yourself. When you spend time with friends and family, it can feel like things will never get better. When you reflect on the year, you may feel lost, like a failure, burned out, or drifting away from God.

Christmas is not about God telling us to toughen up, try harder, or be better. Instead, Christmas calls us to remember that God himself came down to earth to do what we could not do for ourselves. God saw our sin and the sin of the world. He sent Jesus to fulfill his promise from so long ago. One day, Jesus will come again to restore the paradise he created in the garden.

God is faithful to his Word, and he wants a relationship with you! No matter what you are going through this Christmas, look to him as the one who is able to rescue and save.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. What areas of brokenness are highlighted for you this holiday season?
2. What parts of your life seem beyond rescue?
3. There is nothing so dark that Jesus cannot (and has not) already overcome. In what ways does this truth offer you a sense of rest? How does the fact that Jesus overcomes all help you rejoice?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, we thank you for Jesus—that from the beginning you knew we needed a Savior to rescue us from our sin. Even though there is darkness and despair

around us, you are present and faithful, giving us hope. In both our pain and our sin, our victory is in Christ who has crushed our Enemy, Satan. Spirit, help us to remember Jesus during this season and to rejoice in what he has done for us.

Day 2

Longing for Peace

Chelsea Kingston Erickson

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

(Genesis 12:1–3)

Have you ever thought about how much hostility exists between groups of people and nations in our world? As we look to history and even to our present day, it’s so apparent that human beings are prone to dividing against one another: *Slavery. The Holocaust. Apartheid. Genocide in Rwanda. Racism. The war on Ukraine. Conflict in the Middle East.*

We regularly see groups of people pushed to the sidelines because they look or act or live somewhere different. Nearly every day we hear stories of these divisions in the news. Maybe you have even experienced the painful reality of prejudice yourself as you live in our sin-torn world.

The sin we read about in Genesis 3 extends not only to individual relationships, but to groups of people and whole nations. If you’ve ever felt sadness, frustration, or even rage over these broken human relationships, the story of the Bible comes as really good news. From the beginning God has been

working out a plan to rescue people from every corner of the world, to bless them and include them in his family.

THE GOD WHO MAKES PROMISES

In Genesis 12:1–3, we read about God’s promises to a man called Abram (later renamed Abraham). There was nothing special about Abram; in fact, he and his father were idol-worshippers (Joshua 24:2) who had no knowledge of the one true God. And yet *God* initiated a relationship with Abram, including Abram in his plan to rescue the world.

Later in Genesis, God explains his blessing will come through Abraham’s offspring, picking up on the promise to Eve in the Garden from yesterday’s reading (Genesis 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). At the time Abraham and his wife Sarai are old and childless, so it seems impossible that God could actually fulfill his word to them.

God does all he promised for Abraham, giving him a son, Isaac, whose descendants become the nation of Israel. And throughout the Old Testament, God often includes other nations—even Israel’s enemies—in the blessings he has promised.¹ Still, the nations war against one another and human sin continues.

THE GOD WHO KEEPS PROMISES

All of God’s blessings to Abraham find their ultimate fulfillment when Jesus arrives on the scene. He is the offspring from Abraham’s line who “comes to make God’s blessings flow,” as we sing at Christmas.

Jesus regularly engaged with people across ethnicities and backgrounds, inviting them to trust him in faith. He lived, died, and rose again in their place and ours. When we come

1. Here are some other Scriptures in which we see God including the nations: Exodus 3:16–22; 9:20–21; 12:38; 18; Joshua 2; Ruth 1:1–5; 4:13–17; Jonah 3:6–10.

into a relationship with Jesus, he welcomes us into this diverse family God promised so long ago.

The New Testament shows how the early Church embraced God's mission to include the nations of the world. What started as a Jewish movement quickly expanded to include the Gentiles (or non-Jews), including men, women, and children from all walks of life. Today, Christianity is the most socially and ethnically diverse movement in the world.

In Revelation, the final book of the Bible, we read that when Jesus returns, "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language" will gather at God's throne to worship him (Revelation 7:9 ΝΙΥ). This beautifully multiethnic gathering results not from human effort, but from God's saving work in Jesus.

From the beginning, God has been pursuing people who might otherwise be at odds with one another, inviting us into relationship. Like Abraham, we do nothing to deserve God's blessing; we receive it through grace alone. Also like Abraham, God blesses us so that we might bless others in his name, bringing the good news about Jesus to people from all cultures and backgrounds.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What conflict in our world today causes you to feel sadness or anger? Bring these feelings to God in prayer, knowing he cares for the nations of the world.
2. What are some of the messages we hear about the solution to broken human relationships? How do these compare to the gospel, which says we can't save ourselves but need Jesus to rescue us?
3. How could it help you to remember the way God has included you in Christ? When do you most need to remember his good plans for our world?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, I experience the effects of sin in my relationships, and I see it in the way people everywhere struggle to get along. Thank you for sending Jesus to rescue me. Help me to remember the good news that you are pursuing people from every nation and tribe. Please make me brave to point others to you. Amen.