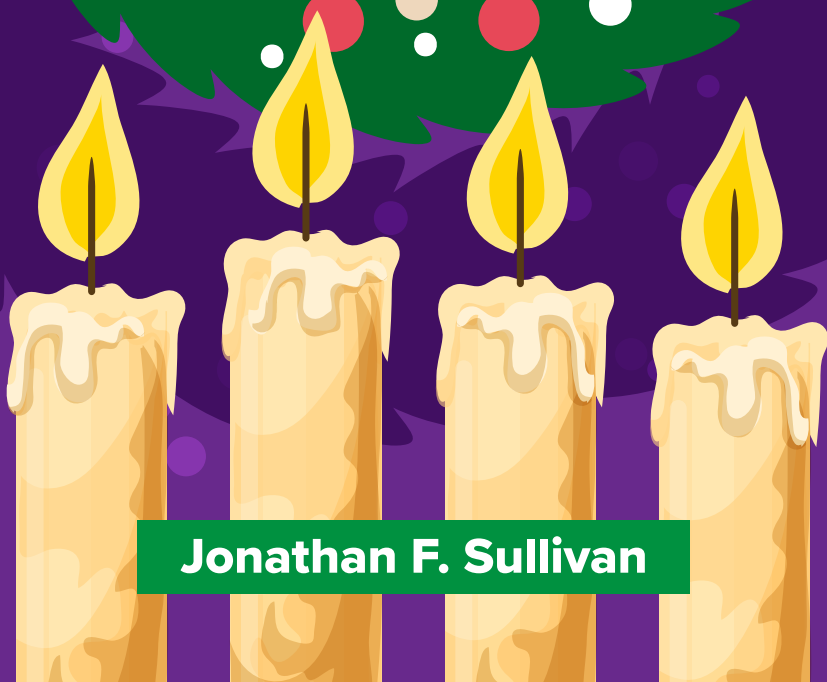




Rejoice in Hope

Daily Advent Devotions for Families



Jonathan F. Sullivan

Introduction



Rejoice in Hope

Faith, hope and love: Of these three gifts of God, hope may be the most misunderstood!

Many people think of hope as a kind of vague and passive optimism: “Everything will turn out OK, so what’s the use in worrying?”

In truth, hope is deeply active; it calls us to place our trust in God’s promises. We hope for eternal life and the happiness God has promised for all the faithful, not by resting on our laurels but by cultivating our hope through prayer, acts of kindness and loving service to others, and careful study of God’s Word.

Advent is a season designed to help us focus on the blessing of hope. In Advent, we remember the promises God made to send us a Savior who would not only restore what was lost to sin but give us more by sharing our human nature and making us adopted sons and daughters of our heavenly Father.

I pray that, throughout this Advent season, your family may experience the hopeful anticipation of the season and share it with others!

May we, together, rejoice in hope!

Jonathan F. Sullivan

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Ready... Set...

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel... **JEREMIAH 33:14**

Reflect

The start of Advent is always an exciting time. There are so many plans to make, foods to prepare, gifts to wrap. But in all this excitement, we must remember that we're awaiting something even greater.

Long ago, God made a promise to his people that he would send a Savior to free them from their enemies. The people had to wait a long time, and sometimes they forgot about the promise and looked for other saviors, but God never wavered. He always remained faithful.

The day is surely coming. Will you be ready when the promise is fulfilled?

Pray

O God who keeps his promises,
bless your people who hope in you,
and may our Advent observances and prayers
prepare us to celebrate the coming of our Savior.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Act

Make a plan—as a family—for how you will observe Advent this year. Maybe you'll pray with an Advent wreath every evening or read one to three chapters of the Bible each day. Whatever your plan, don't think of it as an obligation but as an opportunity.



FIRST MONDAY OF ADVENT

Forgiveness: An Act of Hope

...forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors. **MATTHEW 6:12**

Reflect

Being the father of 10 children has been a learning experience—especially since I grew up with only one sister! As you can imagine, that many children means there are plenty of opportunities for squabbles and fights. It also means plenty of opportunities to practice reconciliation. In our house, that means saying you're sorry for what you've done, a verbal acceptance of the apology and a hug to "seal the deal." Even the 23-year-old participates!

Offering forgiveness to those who have wronged us is a radical act. Our natural inclination is to hold on to our wounds and indignation. But Jesus shows us the better way: "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." True reconciliation offers a foretaste of the peace we will experience in the Kingdom of God. Holding on to grudges and hatred only serves to separate us from that Kingdom.

To forgive is to be Christlike. To forgive is to hope in a more peaceful future.

Pray

Heavenly Father,
help me to extend forgiveness
when I have been wronged
and to work for peace in my community.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Act

Write a note to someone you've wronged or lost touch with. It doesn't have to be long or elaborate; just let them know you're thinking of them. Younger children might draw a picture or do an act of service for someone.

FIRST TUESDAY OF ADVENT

Hope for the Poor

...with righteousness he shall judge for the poor... **ISAIAH 11:4**

Reflect

The Bible tells us that the poor have a special place in God's heart. This doesn't just mean the materially poor but also the spiritually poor—those that are forgotten, bullied and cast out. In short, those that have no hope. God loves and cares for the poor and wants us to reach out to care for them.

In families, we have many opportunities to practice bringing hope to others. We can give an encouraging word to someone struggling to learn a new skill, offer a comforting hug when someone is hurt and include younger siblings in games and activities.

When we do these little acts of love, we bring hope to others and reflect the love Jesus has for us. Bringing hope to the poor is one way we can live the Advent season all year long!

Pray

God who loves the poor,
give us eyes to see
those in need of your love
and the courage to share it
without asking for anything in return.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Act

Go through your clothes, toys, books and other belongings, and see what you can donate for the benefit of the poor. Be honest about what you really need!



FIRST WEDNESDAY OF ADVENT

Learning Trust

Blessed are those who trust in the LORD... **JEREMIAH 17:7**

Reflect

Trust is the foundation of any relationship. Babies learn to trust when their parents lavish attention on them and tend to their needs. As children grow older, parents continue to build trust when they admit their mistakes and ask for forgiveness, when they teach children how to live well with and care for others and when they shield their children from things that will harm them.

It's the same with Jesus. When we rely on him, spending time with him and sharing our needs with him, we learn to trust in our God who loves us with a greater love than we can fathom. He is always ready to stand with us, forgive us when we fail and heal our wounds.

How blessed are we when we trust in the Lord!

Pray

O Father who loves his children,
help us to rely on your unfailing care
and place all our hopes and trust in your faithfulness
throughout Advent and our lives.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Act

Spent 10 minutes in prayer sharing your hopes and needs with God. Ask him to be with you and to share his magnificent love with you!

FIRST THURSDAY OF ADVENT

Old Testament Promises

He has raised up a mighty savior for us...
as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old...

LUKE 1:69-70

Reflect

Throughout the Old Testament, God tries to form a people to be his own. But the people keep turning their backs on God and refuse to listen to him! As a result, to save the people he loves, God promises to send a Savior—his own Son—so that they won't be lost.

The Old Testament is filled with this promise, and so during Advent, many families set up a Jesse Tree. This is a small tree or branch on which they hang ornaments marked with symbols from the story of our faith from Creation to Christmas. It serves as a kind of family tree for Jesus and as a way to remind us of the ways God prepared the world to welcome Jesus when he came.

Pray

God of our ancestors,
you fulfilled the promise you made
to raise up a mighty savior.
Deepen our hope in your promises
as we prepare to celebrate his birth.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Act

Plan to create a Jesse Tree this Advent by crafting ornaments based on the Old Testament roots of Jesus. You can find a list of such images by searching for “Jesse tree ornaments” online.





Rejoice in Hope

A dedicated husband and father of 10, author Jonathan F. Sullivan brings a father's perspective with a strong dose of hope to the season of Advent. This Scripture-focused, page-a-day Advent devotional for families is immensely doable with its four weeks of poignant reflections, graceful prayers and approachable intergenerational activities and conversation-starters for parents and children.

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