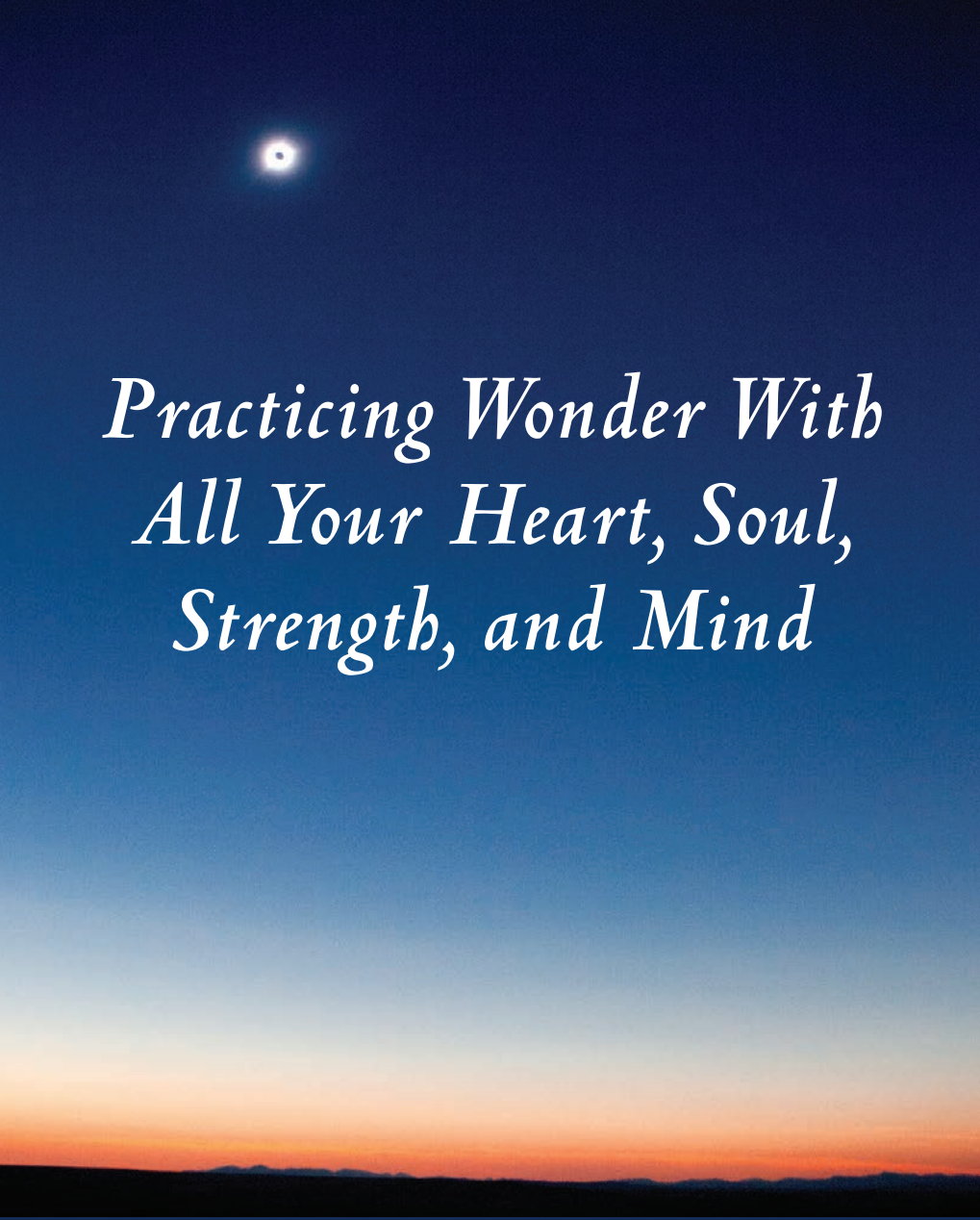

LEADER GUIDE

for Individuals, Small Groups, Advent Programs, and Retreats

LIVING WELL THROUGH ADVENT 2017



*Practicing Wonder With
All Your Heart, Soul,
Strength, and Mind*

A Living Compass Seasonal Resource



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The Living Compass ministry initiative was created with a generous gift from Ab and Nancy Nicholas. While Ab passed away in 2016, their generous support continues to inspire us and makes this resource possible.

Compiled, written, and edited by Robbin Whittington

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Introduction and Welcome

We at Living Compass are delighted to share this **Advent Leader Guide** with you. We are especially honored to include the voices and deep reflections of four guest writers. These voices represent diverse backgrounds, yet all come together to reflect upon the theme of this year's guide: **Practicing Wonder With All Your Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind.**

The guide and this resource can be used for individual reflection and study, small groups, a congregational Advent program, and/or a retreat. If you are using the Leader Guide with a group, we suggest you read through it first to familiarize yourself with the contents, concepts, and supplies you may need.

This Advent resource has been designed to help develop a deeper connection between faith and our capacity to practice Wonder. We will use the Sunday Gospel readings and the Reflections for each Sunday and Monday, found in **Living Well Through Advent 2017** as the foundation for suggested weekly gatherings.

However you choose to use these resources, we pray that this season of Advent be a time of spiritual renewal and recommitment to your relationship—with yourself, with each other, and with God. Our prayer is that both your faith and your capacity for practicing wonder be strengthened by your journey through this holy season of Advent.



A special thank you to the writers who contributed reflections for the guide.

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Olympia

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founder of Living Compass,
a Faith and Wellness
Initiative, and co-creator of
The Teen Compass and the
Parent Wellness Compass

The Role of the Leader

You do not need to be an expert in any way to lead a group. Instead, you are much like a midwife who helps guide the process. You will be the one who prepares the space, makes sure everyone feels welcome, has needed materials, understands the process, and has enough time to speak.

We hope this guide offers the tools and support you need to provide a safe space to listen to each other, and to create an environment where authentic learning and conversations can occur about faith and simplicity during the season of Advent. If you have any questions, please ask: info@livingcompass.org.

Tips for Leading

- Create a safe, supportive, friendly, and confidential environment (what is talked about in the group stays in the group).
- Familiarize yourself with the Guidelines for Listening (p. 6).
- Remain friendly and open and maintain a sense of humor.
- Ask thoughtful, open-ended questions to increase the interaction and meaningful conversation in the group. We provide questions for reflection in the Advent Guide for you to use. And, feel free to come up with additional questions in response to the needs and desires of your group.
- Ask group to commit to attend all meetings if at all possible, and to let the leader know when unable to attend.
- To create connection and community, consider sharing a simple potluck meal before the meeting.

Group Dynamics

- All groups take on their own personality and energy. As a facilitator, it is important that you tune into your group and align with its energy, building rapport and trust. You can do this by:
 - Warmly greeting each participant when they enter the room.
 - Calling on participants by name.
 - Remembering key issues and concerns they discuss and refer back to them throughout the program. This lets them know you are listening deeply.
- Using feedback appropriately. For example, thank a person for sharing, compliment when opportunities arise, or ask a participant to repeat something important that he or she just shared for emphasis.
- Actively listening by focusing completely on what the participant is saying and then repeating back what was heard for clarity.

Suggestions for handling special situations

The overly chatty person

- Affirm that you “hear” them and are listening by reflecting back or summarizing what they are saying and then move on.
- Don’t look at this person when asking a question.
- Thank the person for their positive contribution, and then ask for others to share.
- If it continues, talk to the person privately outside of the session.

The quiet person

- Watch for signs that the person wants to participate, and engage them at that time.
- Respect their desire to not share much, but trust they may be benefiting from the session despite their silence.
- Connect with them before or after the meeting.

Guidelines for Listening

- (Print copies for everyone and read them at the beginning of each session, taking turns so they can be heard in different voices.)
- Take a moment to be fully present and to rest in God’s presence.
- Listen with your mind, heart, and intuition.
- Listen to others deeply in order to understand, rather than trying to “fix” anything, or to challenge what is being said.
- Speak only for yourself, expressing your own thoughts and feelings, your own experiences. Use “I” rather than “you” statements.
- Wait for others to finish speaking—allowing a pause in order to fully ingest what has been said, as well as what has not been said—before speaking.
- If you’ve talked, wait until everyone else in the group has spoken before speaking again.
- Listen with openness and curiosity, leaving judgement and criticism at the door.

Tips for Preparing

- Pray for God to guide you as the leader. You are not alone. And pray for each person in the group.
- Read the Sunday reflection and scripture at least twice before you meet.
- Keep the main ideas from the material to be covered firmly in mind. Make notes on this and refer to them as often as necessary to keep you grounded and focused. This will help you feel confident and relaxed and receptive to the needs and desires of the group.
- Prepare room ahead of time, arranging chairs in a circle, or around a table.
- You may want to bring flowers, and a candle to light (explain that it serves as a reminder that we are in the presence of the Holy).
- Make sure to have any needed supplies on hand.

Suggested supplies for each week

- Bibles or copies of the scripture for the week (listed at the beginning of each week’s session)
- *A Practicing Wonder With All Your Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind* booklet for each person
- Copies of the prayers (p. 24) and practices (pp. 7–9)
- Copies of Guidelines for Listening (p. 6)
- Music and/or music player
- Pens/Pencils
- Candle/matches
- Bell or soft timer alarm to signal shifts
- A contact form to be passed around to build a list to share among members of the group

Guidelines for Listening

Take a moment to be fully present and to rest in God's presence.

Listen with your mind, heart, and intuition.

Listen to others deeply in order to understand, rather than trying to “fix” anything, or to challenge what is being said.

Speak only for yourself, expressing your own thoughts and feelings, your own experiences. Use “I” rather than “you” statements.

Wait for others to finish speaking—allowing a pause in order to fully ingest what has been said, as well as what has not been said—before speaking.

If you've talked, wait until everyone else in the group has spoken before speaking again.

Listen with openness and curiosity, leaving judgment and criticism at the door.

Suggested Practices

Invite the participants to journey through Advent by using one of the following practices or another mindful practice that speaks to them. You can do these either during your session or invite them to take these practices home. (Print as many copies as needed for your group.)

1. The Daily Examen. The Daily Examen is an ancient and powerful way of reflecting on the day so that we can more clearly identify how and where God has shown up in our lives and where God may be guiding us. You could reread the Daily Spiritual Practice for the week, found in the Advent Guide each Monday. Then, apply the practice of the examen around the week's practice. Following is a brief description of the practice.

At the end of the day, sit quietly for a few minutes, seeking God's presence. Then, keeping the theme for the week in mind and heart (*Making Room for Wonder by Removing Distractions; Finding God in the Ordinary, Messy Miracles of Life and Love; Giving the Gift of Wonder; Receiving the Gift of Wonder*):

- Remember times in the day when you felt most alive, and thank God for those moments.
- Remember instances when you felt the least grateful, and offer those with thanks to God.
- Notice times in the day when you experienced being aligned with God's purpose for you, and give thanks for those times.
- Notice any moments when you felt far from living out God's purpose for your life, and offer those to God.
- Ask God to help you live ever more closely to God's plan and purpose for you tomorrow, and then turn everything over to God to hold while you rest.

For more resources, a good place to start is the Ignatian Spirituality's website: <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen>

2. Theme and Daily Spiritual Practice for each week. The suggested daily spiritual practices, found in the Advent guide each Monday, were inspired by the Sunday reflection for that week. Re-read Monday's reflection and consider what speaks to you about this practice. Take time to think about how this particular practice can help you draw closer to God and the people around you.

3. Gratitude Practice. Each day, think about three things for which you are grateful and write them down in a journal. It might be helpful to consider one or more of the eight areas of wellness seen through the lens of *Practicing Wonder*. Read them each day during the season of Advent as a powerful reminder of the goodness and grace and wonder that surrounds you.

4. Journal. Take time this week to further reflect on the readings and practicing wonder. Journaling is a great way to keep track of your thoughts and feelings. Writing down your thoughts, or drawing images, will help you to order and process them. You can use the reading, reflection, or discussion questions as prompts.

5. Daily Prayer. Consider praying each day between now and the next time the group meets. Think about how prayer applies to your journey through Advent, wonder, and who God is calling you to be. Prayer is one way to ground yourself each day. If you are using this guide as part of a group, you may want to have a prayer partner for whom you commit to pray each day.



LivingCompass.org

6. Prayer partners. Offer an opportunity for group members to pray for a prayer partner each day, praying for them by name and asking God to bless their desires. Encourage the group to contact their prayer partner at least once a week. A phone call, meeting for coffee or a meal, etc., is a warmer way of making contact. If time is an issue, emails work, too. The goal is to stay in touch between gatherings. This will build trust and rapport more quickly and help those who may feel shy gain confidence and more ease in a new group setting.

7. Living Compass Wellness Assessment and FAITH Step. Using this tool, take some time to reflect on the ways in which practicing wonder is showing up in the eight areas of wellness. Reflect on how each area of wellness is impacted by the spiritual practice for the week.

There is no “right” way to do this. Just allow yourself to see your life as a garden. Identify the areas of wellness you’ve tended and watered, and celebrate them. Then, identify any areas you may have neglected that you may want to focus on. You’ll shade in each area on the Assessment Tool on p. 9 as a value (0–100) based on how you feel you are doing, right here, right now. Then, choose one area to focus on for the week. A FAITH step is a place to write down the one thing you commit to do during the coming week. If you have a prayer partner, you could share that with him/her. If you have any questions, please ask: info@livingcompass.org

Note: If there is a lot of interest in this practice, you can invite the group to identify a FAITH step for each week, choosing the same or a different area of wellness to focus on. They should also feel free to continue to focus on the same FAITH step for more than one week.



Sample completed Wellness Assessment

This Advent season, however you use this guide, our hope and prayer is that you feel supported in your desire to more fully practice your faith in a way that is deeply renewing. Thank you for taking on the role of being a leader on this Advent journey. We hope this companion guide will help you as you walk with others during this season of Advent.

Wellness Assessment and FAITH Step

Shade in each of the eight areas on the compass with the value that reflects your current state of wellness and balance.

0 = Uh-Oh! / 100 = Awesome!

Using this tool, reflect on how the theme for the week is showing up in one or more of the eight areas of wellness and choose one area to focus on for the week. Notice what happens when you focus on this area through the lens of practicing wonder.



FAITH Step

Now that you've put yourself on your own map of wellness, pick one area you feel called to focus on. Remember that whatever we pay attention to is what will grow.

Area I feel called to focus on:

List one FAITH step you are ready and willing to take in the next 24 hours.

Is there someone you would like to share this FAITH Step with?

Support + accountability = much greater chance for success.

- F Focused.**
Specific and narrow in scope.
- A Action-Oriented.**
An action that is observable and measurable.
- I Inspired.**
I feel that God wants me to take this step.
- T Time-specific.**
I will do at this time, or within a finite time frame.
- H Heartfelt and Honest.**
Commit to a step we are ready to take, true to wherever we are in the stages of change.

Using for an Advent Retreat

This program can be used as an Advent Retreat in a variety of ways. Below are two sample schedules. Please feel free to adapt and use however will be helpful for your retreat. It is important to leave space for silence, prayer, reflection, and creative

responses, so don't force the entire contents of the Advent Guide into a single retreat. If you want to offer your own reflections on "Practicing Wonder" by expanding on any of the material in the booklet, feel free to do so.

Full-day Retreat

9:00 AM Welcome and outline for the day
9:15 AM Week One Reflection and Spiritual Practice
(*Making Room for Wonder by Removing Distractions*)
Small-group discussion and reflection time
10:15 AM Break
10:30 AM Week Two Reflection and Spiritual Practice
(*Finding God in the Ordinary, Messy Miracles of Life and Love*)
Small-group discussion and reflection time
11:45 AM Break
Noon Lunch

1:00 PM Week Three Reflection and Spiritual Practice
(*Giving the Gift of Wonder*)
Small-group discussion and reflection time
2:00 PM Break
2:15 PM Week Four Reflection (Christmas Eve this year) and Christmas Day Theme
(*Receiving the Gift of Wonder*)
Small-group discussion and reflection time
3:15 PM Break
3:30 PM Whole-group synthesis, shared reflections (share FAITH steps if desired), and celebration of time together
4:30 PM Close with prayer

Half-day Retreat

9:00 AM Welcome and outline for the day
9:15 AM Weeks One and Two (read Sunday's reflection for both)
Small-group discussion and reflection time (on one of the reflections; group to choose)
10:30 AM Break
10:45 AM Weeks Three and Four (read Sunday's reflection for both)

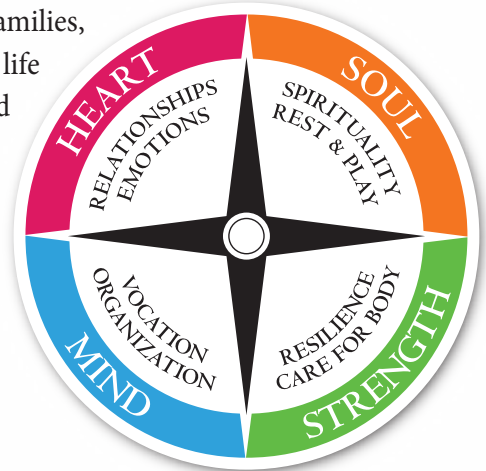
Small-group discussion and reflection time (on one of the reflections; group to choose; could write down a FAITH step and share with at least one other person)
Noon Lunch
1:00 PM Whole-group synthesis, shared reflections (share FAITH steps if desired), and celebration of time together
2:00 PM Close with prayer

The Living Compass: A Brief Overview

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.

—Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 6:5

Living Compass provides tools and trainings to assist individuals, families, congregations, and communities as they seek to live the abundant life God intends for them in all areas of life. The compass points us toward the four dimensions of our being: heart, soul, strength, and mind. These dimensions are interconnected, and each one affects the other. Whatever impinges on one dimension of our lives (positively or negatively) has an impact upon the other dimensions. Our call is to live an undivided life, where heart, soul, strength, and mind are integrated into both our *being* and our *doing*. We use these four as our compass points to help guide and equip us in eight areas of wellness.



Areas of Wellness

Heart

- **Relationships.** The ability to create and maintain healthy, life-giving connections with others.
- **Emotions.** The ability to process, express, and receive emotions in a healthy way.

Soul

- **Spirituality.** The ability to develop and practice a strong personal value system, and to discover a meaningful purpose in life.
- **Rest and Play.** The ability to balance work and play and to renew oneself.

Strength

- **Resilience.** The ability to deal positively with the adversities of life.
- **Care for the Body.** The ability to build healthy habits and practices regarding our physical well-being, as well as the ability to end unhealthy ones.

Mind

- **Vocation.** The ability to align our life's purpose with the gifts and talents given by God. This includes work, volunteer service, and any educational/enrichment activities.
- **Organization.** The ability to keep track of and make good use of possessions, money, and time.

Creating resources grounded in the integration of faith and wellness makes Living Compass different from other wellness programs. Living Compass believes we all have many compasses that compete to guide our lives, often outside of our awareness. When we choose to make faith the compass that guides decisions in all areas of our lives, we are better able to experience wellness and wholeness. It is worth noting that “health,” “healing,” “wholeness,” and “holy” all come from the same root word “hal” or “haelen.”



Making Room for Wonder by Removing Distractions



Readings: First Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Isaiah 64:1-9

Psalm: Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Gospel: Mark 13:24-37

Making Room for Wonder by Removing Distractions

- ▢ Opening music, either recorded or sung (optional)
- ▢ Welcome
- ▢ Minute of silence to still our hearts and minds and to prepare for our time together
- ▢ Prayer
- ▢ Introduce yourself
- ▢ Go around the group with introductions. You can ask them to tell their name, where they are from, and what they hope to get out of this time together.
- ▢ Hand out a copy of and read out loud *Guidelines for Listening*, (p. 6).
- ▢ Read the Gospel for the first Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- ▢ Read the Reflection from the first Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- ▢ Announce the theme and suggested daily spiritual practice for the week: *Making Room for Wonder by Removing Distractions*. Read Monday's reflection out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the suggested daily spiritual practice. Invite brief responses.
- ▢ Reflect and Learn
 - ▢ Suggested questions for reflection, journaling, and discussion
 - ▢ Reflection and journaling time (5 min)
 - ▢ Small-group breakout for discussion (3–4 in each group, depending on size of group; 10 min)
 - ▢ Whole-group reflection and a brief time to share small-group discoveries
- ▢ Organize prayer partners (optional).
- ▢ Introduce Practices and invite group to choose one to use during the week.
- ▢ Wrap-up. Give any reminders for upcoming meeting.
- ▢ Close with prayer.
- ▢ End on time.

Rhythm of Weekly Gathering

Each session is timed to be 50–60 minutes long and can easily be adapted as needed.

Feel free to use the suggested opening and closing prayers, as well as incorporating anything you choose that would work well with the theme of *Practicing Wonder*.



Opening Invitation

As we embark on this Advent Journey together, I invite you to think about what this season means for you.

Invite participants to share their thoughts and reflections.

The Gospel for the First Sunday of Advent

Mark 13:24-37

The Coming of the Son of Man

“But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

“Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Suggestions for reading the Scripture

As you read the scripture out loud, we invite you to think about creative and engaging ways in which these readings can be done.

Different translations. Depending on the length of the passage, you may want to read it two or three times, using a different Bible translation.

Different voices. If you are reading in parts or using different translations, be sure to use a variety of voices (male and female, young and old, etc.).

Opening Prayer

It is Advent and there are glimmers
Of returning
And new beginning
I am being given credit
For faith
When really there are glimmers
Of returning
They are hard to miss
I see them
Faith is hope in things unseen
But I see them
I'm glad for faith credits but really
I see *the things*
Glimmering, glittering signs of return
One by one by one
We can only return ourselves
One by one by one
I see them: one over here
One over there
Watch
Do you see the glimmers
Of return even in the words
Of leaving?
I will collect the glimmers in a basket
They will shine through the weave
Week by week by week
Until Jesus comes
We are separate
No
We are together
We are more together than you
We are more together *with* you
We are We and it is all of us
There are glimmers of returning
I will collect them in a basket
For all to see

Catharine Phillips

December 5, 2008

<http://allwillbewellperiod.blogspot.com/>



Read the Living Compass Reflection for the First Sunday of Advent

Found on pp. 11–12 in the Advent guide.

Then, read Monday's reflection out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the suggested daily spiritual practice for the week: *Making Room for Wonder by Removing Distractions* (found on p. 13 in the Advent guide).

Invite brief responses.

Reflection and journal time

Reflection Questions/Small Groups

Reflect on questions you select from the weekday reflections in the guide (pp 13–18) as a whole group, or break into smaller groups of 4 or 5. You can also use this time to invite responses by journaling.

The theme and suggested daily spiritual practice is: *Making Room for Wonder by Removing Distractions*. What distractions have shown up for you recently? When and where do you find it difficult to name and then put aside distractions? How do you think putting aside distractions could help you make room for wonder?

Group Discussion

If you broke into small groups for the reflection questions, invite each group to share their responses to one or more of the questions. As you listen, take note of any themes or where responses tie together. If you discussed as a group, reiterate themes and tie-ins.

Briefly review Practices on pp. 7–9 and invite group to engage with at least one during the week.

Closing Prayer

We seek the mighty God
in the most unlikely places
as a child in a stable,
and in an empty tomb.
May God hear these prayers,
which come from the unlikely corners
of our lives. *Amen.*



Finding God in the Ordinary, Messy Miracles of Life and Love



Readings: Second Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Isaiah 40:1-11

Psalm: Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

Second Reading: 2 Peter 3:8-15a

Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

Session Two Outline

- ▢ Opening music, either recorded or sung (optional)
- ▢ Welcome
- ▢ Minute of silence to still our hearts and minds and to prepare for our time together
- ▢ Prayer
- ▢ Read *Guidelines for Listening* to encourage active and respectful listening (p. 6)
- ▢ Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of the theme/suggested daily spiritual practice showed up during the past week.
- ▢ Read the Gospel for the second Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- ▢ Read the Reflection from the second Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- ▢ Announce the suggested daily spiritual practice for the week: *Finding God in the Ordinary, Messy Miracles of Life and Love*. Read Monday's reflection out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the suggested daily spiritual practice. Invite brief responses.
- ▢ Reflect and Learn
 - ▢ Suggested questions for reflection, journaling, and discussion
 - ▢ Reflection and journaling time (5 min)
 - ▢ Small-group breakout for discussion (3–4 in each group, depending on size of group; 10 min)
 - ▢ Whole-group reflection and a brief time to share small-group discoveries
- ▢ Explore how the theme for the week shows up in the areas of wellness from one of the four Living Compass quadrants that are introduced Tuesday-Friday of each week. Encourage them to choose an area to focus on during the coming week.
- ▢ Wrap-up. Give any reminders for upcoming meeting.
- ▢ Close with prayer.
- ▢ End on time.

Rhythm of Weekly Gathering

Each session is timed to be 50–60 minutes long and can easily be adapted as needed.

Feel free to use the suggested opening and closing prayers, as well as incorporating anything you choose that would work well with the theme of *Practicing Wonder*.



Open Invitation

Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of the theme/suggested daily spiritual practice showed up during the past week.

Gospel for the second week of Advent

Mark 1:1-8

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’”

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Opening Prayer

God of timeless grace,
you fill us with joyful expectation.
Make us ready for the message that
prepares the way,
that with uprightness of heart and
holy joy
we may eagerly await the kingdom of
your Son, Jesus Christ,
who reigns with you and the Holy
Spirit, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Suggestions for reading the Scripture

As you read the scripture out loud, we invite you to think about creative and engaging ways in which these readings can be done.

Different translations. Depending on the length of the passage, you may want to read it two or three times, using a different Bible translation.

Different voices. If you are reading in parts or using different translations, be sure to use a variety of voices (male and female, young and old, etc.).



Read the Living Compass Reflection for the Second Sunday of Advent

Found on pp. 19–20 in the Advent guide.

Then, read Monday's reflection out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the suggested daily spiritual practice: *Finding God in the Ordinary, Messy Miracles of Life and Love* (found on p. 21 in the Advent guide).

Invite brief responses.

Reflection and journal time

Reflection Questions/Small Groups

Reflect on questions you select from the weekday reflections in the guide (pp. 21–26) as a whole group, or break into smaller groups of 4 or 5. You can also use this time to invite responses by journaling.

The theme and the suggested daily spiritual practice is: *Finding God in the Ordinary, Messy Miracles of Life and Love*. One question from the guide you can discuss: What is one simple way in the last twenty-four hours you have experienced God being present in the “ordinary” of your life?

Group Discussion

If you broke into small groups for the reflection questions, invite each group to share their responses to one or more of the questions. As you listen, take note of any themes or where responses tie together. If you discussed as a group, reiterate themes and tie-ins.

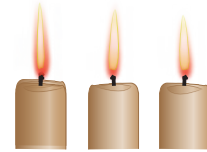
Briefly review Practices on pp. 7–9 and invite group to engage with at least one during the week.

Closing Prayer

Out of the embrace of mercy and
righteousness,
you have brought forth joy and dignity
for your people,
O Holy One of Israel.
Remember now your ancient promise:
make straight the paths that lead to
you,
and smooth the rough ways,
that in our day
we might bring forth your compassion
for all humanity. *Amen.*



Giving the Gift of Wonder



Readings: Third Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

Psalm: Psalm 126 or Luke 1:46b-55

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Gospel: John 1:6-8, 19-28

Session Three Outline

- Opening music, either recorded or sung (optional)
- Welcome
- Minute of silence to still our hearts and minds and to prepare for our time together.
- Prayer
- Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of the theme and suggested daily spiritual practice showed up during the past week.
- Read the Gospel for the third Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Read the Reflection from the third Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Announce the theme/suggested daily spiritual practice for the week: *Giving the Gift of Wonder*. Read Monday's reflection out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the suggested daily spiritual practice. Invite brief responses.
- Reflect and Learn
 - Suggested questions for reflection, journaling, and discussion.
 - Reflection and journaling time (5 min)
 - Small-group breakout for discussion (3-4 in each group, depending on size of group; 10 min)
 - Whole-group reflection and a brief time to share small-group discoveries
- Explore how the theme for the week shows up in the areas of wellness from one of the four Living Compass quadrants that are introduced Tuesday-Friday of each week. Encourage participants to choose an area to focus on during the coming week.
- Wrap-up. Give any reminders for upcoming meeting.
- Close with prayer.
- End on time.

Rhythm of Weekly Gathering

Each session is timed to be 50-60 minutes long and can easily be adapted as needed. Feel free to use the suggested opening and closing prayers, as well as incorporating anything you choose that would work well with the theme of *Practicing Wonder*.



Open Invitation

Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of the theme or the suggested daily spiritual practice showed up during the past week.

Gospel Reading for the third Sunday of Advent

John 1:6-8, 19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

The Testimony of John the Baptist

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” He said,

“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’
as the prophet Isaiah said.

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Opening Prayer

O God of the exiles and the lost,
you promise restoration and
wholeness
through the power of Jesus Christ.
Give us faith to live joyfully,
sustained by your promises
as we eagerly await the day when
they will be fulfilled
for all the world to see,
through the coming of your Son, Jesus
Christ. *Amen.*

Suggestions for reading the Scripture

As you read the scripture out loud, we invite you to think about creative and engaging ways in which these readings can be done.

Different translations. Depending on the length of the passage, you may want to read it two or three times, using a different Bible translation.

Different voices. If you are reading in parts or using different translations, be sure to use a variety of voices (male and female, young and old, etc.)



Read the Living Compass Reflection for the Third Sunday of Advent

Found on pp. 27–28 in the Advent guide.

Then, read Monday's reflection out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the theme and suggested daily spiritual practice: *Giving the Gift of Wonder* (found on p. 29 in the Advent guide).

Invite brief responses.

Reflection and journal time

Reflection Questions/Small Groups

Reflect on questions you select from the weekday reflections in the guide (pp. 29–34) as a whole group, or break into smaller groups of 4 or 5. You can also use this time to invite responses by journaling.

The theme and suggested daily spiritual practice is: *Giving the Gift of Wonder*. One question from the guide you could offer to get conversation started is: What is one unexpected gift you will give, or have already given, to someone today?

Group Discussion

If you broke into small groups for the reflection questions, invite each group to share their responses to one or more of the questions. As you listen, take note of any themes or where responses tie together. If you discussed as a group, reiterate themes and tie-ins.

Briefly review Practices on pp. 7–9 and invite group to engage with at least one during the week.

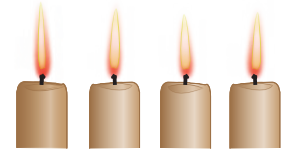
Closing Prayer:

God of hope,
you call us home from the exile of
selfish oppression
to the freedom of justice,
the balm of healing,
and the joy of sharing.
Make us strong to join you in your holy
work,
as friends of strangers and victims,
companions of those whom others shun,
and as the happiness of those whose
hearts are broken.
We make our prayer through Jesus
Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Giving the Gift of Wonder



Receiving the Gift of Wonder



Readings: Fourth Sunday of Advent

First Reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Psalm: Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26

Second Reading: Romans 16:25-27

Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

Session Four Outline

- Opening music, either recorded or sung (optional)
- Welcome
- Minute of silence to still our hearts and minds and to prepare for our time together.
- Prayer
- Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of how the theme and suggested daily spiritual practice showed up during the past week.
- Read the Gospel for the fourth Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Read the Reflection from the fourth Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Announce the suggested daily spiritual practice for the week*: *Receiving the Gift of Wonder*. Read the reflection for Christmas Day as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the suggested daily spiritual practice. Invite brief responses. *This year, Advent 4 is only one day, so we want to encourage you to invite your group to consider practicing this theme throughout the twelve days of Christmas.
- Reflect and Learn
 - Suggested questions for reflection, journaling, and discussion
 - Reflection and journaling time (5 min)
 - Small-group breakout for discussion (3–4 in each group, depending on size of group; 10 min)
 - Whole-group reflection and a brief time to share small-group discoveries
- Allow time for group members to express their feelings about the material, the season of Advent in general, and their appreciation for each other.
- Thank group for their commitment: to themselves and to the group.
- Offer ways to stay in touch if group members indicate a desire to stay connected.
- Close with prayer.

Rhythm of Weekly Gathering

Each session is timed to be 50–60 minutes long and can easily be adapted as needed.

Feel free to use the suggested opening and closing prayers, as well as incorporating anything you choose that would work well with the theme of *Practicing Wonder*.



Open Invitation

Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of the theme and suggested daily spiritual practice showed up during the past week.

The Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:26-38

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Opening Prayer

God of promise,
you have given us a sign of your love
through the gift of Jesus Christ, our
Savior,
who was promised from ages past.
We believe as Joseph did
the message of your presence
whispered by an angel,
and offer our prayers for your world,
confident of your care and mercy for
all creation. *Amen.*

Suggestions for reading the Scripture

As you read the scripture out loud, we invite you to think about creative and engaging ways in which these readings can be done.

Different translations. Depending on the length of the passage, you may want to read it two or three times, using a different Bible translation.

Different voices. If you are reading in parts or using different translations, be sure to use a variety of voices (male and female, young and old, etc.)



Read the Reflection for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

Found on pp. 35–36 in the Advent guide.

Then, read Monday's reflection, Christmas Day, out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the theme and suggested daily spiritual practice: *Receiving the Gift of Wonder* (found on p. 37–38 in the Advent guide).

Invite brief responses.

Reflection and journal time

Reflection Questions/Small Groups

Reflect on any questions the group or you select from any of the weekday reflections in the guide as a whole group, or break into smaller groups of 4 or 5. You can also use this time to invite responses by journaling.

The theme and suggested daily spiritual practice for today and the coming Christmas season is: *Receiving the Gift of Wonder*. One question you could ask to get the conversation started is: How can this daily spiritual practice open your awareness to the gifts of wonder all around you?

Group Discussion

- Allow time for group members to express their feelings about the material, the season of Advent in general, and their appreciation for each other.
- Thank group for their commitment: to themselves and to the group.
- Offer ways to stay in touch if group indicates a desire to stay connected.

Closing Prayer

And could it be
That You have called us so completely
Embodied
that we have no hope
Of knowing You without our feet
touching grass
Our lips smacking blueberries
From the morning cereal
No hope of knowing
Without the miracle of the letter
arriving
From the past saying
Remember?
Remember?
Remember?
No hope without the sheer gathering
Of women holding hands
Of men looking on and wondering
What on earth is happening here
So completely embodied
That here
Here is our hope
Of knowing You
Here

Catharine Phillips

<http://allwillbewellperiod.blogspot.com/>



We seek the mighty God
in the most unlikely places
as a child in a stable,
and in an empty tomb.
May God hear these prayers,
which come from the unlikely corners of
our lives.

God our strength and our hope,
grant us the courage of John the Baptist,
constantly to speak the truth,
boldly to rebuke vice
and patiently to suffer for the truth's sake;

in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord
who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit
one God now and for ever. *Amen.*

—New Zealand Prayer Book, p. 652

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Be with us in our dark times of not knowing.
Come, like an angel.
Shake us to know your presence.
Give us grace to receive you.
Midwife our rebirth.
And like the wise men,
direct our way, always, toward you. *Amen.*
Brothers and sisters,
as we joyfully await the glorious coming of
the Christ,
let us pray for the needs of the church, our
community, and the world.
God of justice and peace,
from the heavens you rain down mercy and
kindness,
that all on earth may stand in awe and
wonder
before your marvelous deeds.
Raise our heads in expectation,
that we may yearn for the coming day of the
Lord
and stand without blame before your Son,
Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

Blessing to Summon Rejoicing

When your weeping
has watered
the earth.
When the storm
has been long
and the night
and the season
of your sorrowing.
When you have seemed
an exile
from your life
lost in the far country
a long way from where
your comfort lies.
When the sound
of splintering
and fracture
haunts you.
When despair
attends you.
When lack.
When trouble.
When fear.
When pain.
When empty.
When lonely.
When too much
of what depletes you
and not enough
of what restores
and rests you.
Then let there be
rejoicing.
Then let there be
dreaming.
Let there be
laughter in your mouth
and on your tongue
shouts of joy.
Let the seeds
soaked by tears
turn to grain,
to bread,
to feasting.
Let there be
coming home.
Amen.

—Jan Richardson,
AdventDoor.com



Sent People

This is a season
Of people being *sent*,
Out Into the wilderness (yes),
But also to my office door,
Next to the children
Who sing *Jingle Bells*,
Part of the Advent repertoire.
This is a season of
Sent people:
Bearers of Word and wisdom,
Carriers of overwhelming hope and light,
People of und erstanding, new promise.
I am struck dumb, dizzied, blinded
By those who come
Mute and deaf and blind,
Sent people and me
We stand on the banks
Of the Jordan
Our toes in the water,
Listen to another chorus
Of *Jingle Bells*.
We wait.
We wonder who will join us
Next.

—Catharine Phillips, December 3, 2012
<http://allwillbewellperiod.blogspot.com/>