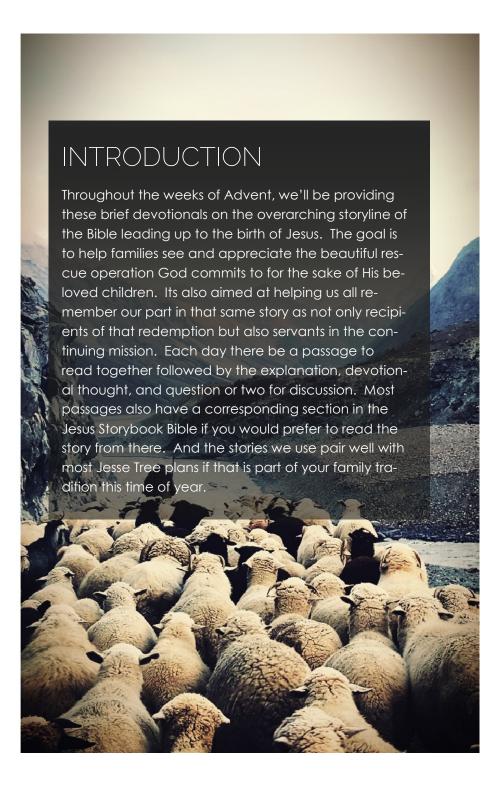




ADVENT FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

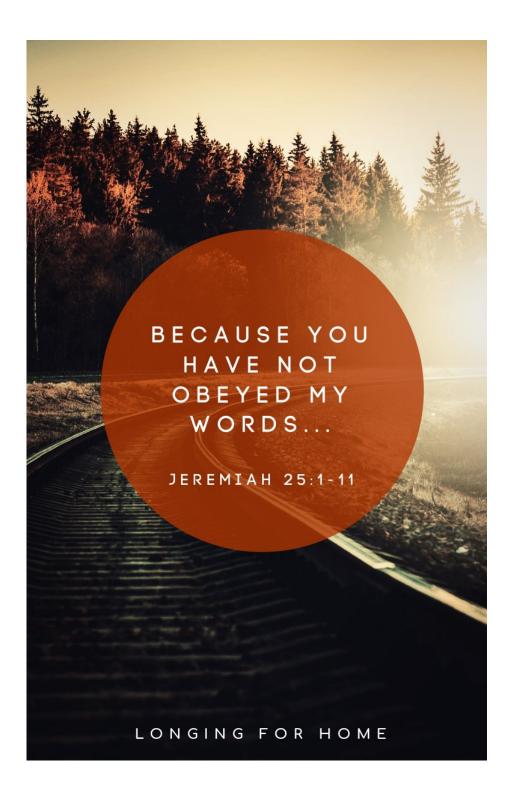


- 1 Samuel 16:1-13 (Jesus Storybook Bible—The Teenie, Weenie True King)

If ever we are having to take two cars someplace as a family, my wife is not too fond of having to follow behind in one car while I lead in the other. Apparently I don't pay as much attention as I should to those who are following—making sure they are keeping up or making it through that yellow light or aren't getting stuck behind a line of cars, etc. And sometimes (though I never let on) I might not actually know where I'm going and thus have to pull the occasional U-turn or skip across lanes to make a quick exit...all hard things to do on the spot if you're following behind.

As we continue our story with the Israelites in the promised land, one thing becomes quickly apparent, they need someone to lead them in righteousness. They need to follow a king who will shepherd them in being faithful and obedient to God's desires and plans for them as a people. Left to themselves, they make horrible decisions, go astray chasing after other gods, and make a mess of the life God gives them. Today is the story of God anointing such a king for them. He's not a big and strong guy who's really into himself. He's not necessarily a lover of power and glamorous kingdoms. That would be a disastrous king to follow. Someone like that would lead God's people down all the wrong roads. This king (David), has a pure heart, knows how to look after those in his care, and is a wise shepherd. This is the king they need to lead them in paths of righteousness.

Even David was not perfect though. He had some painful flaws. We, however, are fortunate to have a king who was perfectly obedient to the will of the Father, whose heart is perfectly loving and faithful. who has already struck a deathblow to all of our enemies, and who promises to lead us safely to God's glorious future. How are you doing following King Jesus whom God has sent for your salvation and anointed to lead you in the fullness of life?



- Jeremiah 25

One of the nice things about Christmas is that it's a time to be home, celebrating with those you love. We get extra time off from the office. Schools are shut down. College kids get a break from classes and board the car pools or airplanes for the cheapest route home. Perry Como and others sing in the background, there's no place like home for the holidays.

Have you noticed how in our story so far there is a lot of homelessness or longing for home going on? Adam and Eve are sent away from their perfect home in the Garden. Abraham is summoned onto a long journey to a land that will one day be called home. Jacob has to run away from home lest his brother kill him. Joseph is sold to slave-traders by jealous brothers and sent far away from home. The Israelites wander in the wilderness on route to their new home. And today we read the sad, unfortunate story of Israel losing their precious home on account of their constant idolatry and pursuit of injustice. The kings have failed. The land overflows with wickedness. So in judgment, God purges His land, and allows His people to be carried of into exile.

You could argue that the Bible is one long story of God's people finding their way back home...to the perfect home that was lost in the very beginning as sin, evil, and death entered the picture. Which is partly our story as well. We too wait on a king who will make this world our perfect home once again, who will rid it of sin's curse, restore the broken relationships, remove the tears and threats, and repair our fickle and sin-infested hearts. In the meantime, we wait as scattered exiles (1 Peter 1:1), serving, following, and holding fast in faith to the One who leads us home.

# DISCUSS

- Have you ever considered how powerful the strange business of forgiveness is in God's mission of redemption? Is God inviting you to extend forgiveness to someone today? How can you find

# THE ROADS TO ZION MOURN

LAMENTATIONS 1:4

WEEPING WHILE WE WAIT

- Lamentations 1:

Okay, why are we reading these sad and weepy groans of a lonely city whose children lie desolate because the enemy has prevailed against her? Why read it now...during the Christmas Season?! Isn't now supposed to be a time of joy and love, of happy stories and songs of celebration?

Well, that's actually part of the reason this is called an ADVENT family devotional. Advent is more about looking forward to the day when Christ will restore perfect joy and love, fill His people's hearts with unending celebration like you've never seen! But we're not there yet. And part of waiting faithfully in hope involves recognizing the world is not right yet. It's recognizing that sin and evil have messed up the place. It's being mindful that there is real hurt and sadness filling our neighborhoods. Or worse, people are drowning in sin but have no idea, singing songs of good cheer while their feet sink deeper and deeper.

It was Jesus who left the glory of Heaven and ran into the deep darkness, to the "sad and lowly plains," to serve and rescue those He loved. And part being His people is following His lead while we wait on His return. We too are called, not to run from the darkness...or just cover it up with chipper songs and happy feelings. Rather ,we run to it with the love of Christ, eager to see the world find the hope and true joy that Jesus offers. And part of what inspires us to faithful acts of love is seeing, hearing, and actually feeling the desperation that cries out in the city. Which is why the Bible has quite a few deep songs of lament and is full of cries of "How long, O Lord," from the lips of His servants. So even though it's doesn't bring the warm fuzzies, even though we're not all that good at it, Advent, in part, is a time for bringing to the Lord the laments of our heart and the laments of a broken world.

### **DISCUSS**

- What do you see worth lamenting in the world around you?



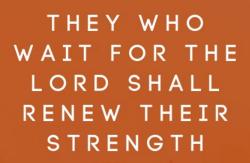
- Jeremiah 19:4-14

So here's the scene: a bunch of nut-job "prophets" are running around telling everyone that this really isn't all that bad. In fact, they say, God is breaking the necks of the Babylonian rulers as we speak. In two years, this whole exile thing should be wrapped with a nice, big welcome home party. So just lay low and hang tight (i.e. Jeremiah 28). Who doesn't like an encouraging word of prophecy? Only problem is, its not true. Jeremiah jumps in and declares, no, we're in this for a while. God has appointed 70 years for this time of exile. Don't listen to those peace-prophets.

He takes it further and encourages the people to build houses, plant gardens, get married...there in Babylon. And then he goes even further and says the unthinkable, "seek the welfare of the city where you have been sent and pray to the Lord on its behalf." This is Babylon we're talking about! These are the wicked people who care next to nothing about God, not to mention destroyed the land of Israel, carried the people into exile, and ruined their families and their lives. You want me to do what?! Seek the welfare of this place, pray for this place?

We might naturally think that a time of disaster is time for hunkering down, laying low, and just waiting on God's salvation. But God has a different idea. He whole redemption plan involved sending the son to be born in exile that He might redeem those far from home. So its no surprise that God has a plan to use the Israelites, even in their exile. Or it should be no surprise to hear Peter write to the Church in exile that we are yet called to "declare the excellences of Him who called us out of darkness in His marvelous light" through our responses and our acts of love and service. The king is coming...there is work to be done!

TAKE IT FURTHER- Watch the Bible Project video—the way of the exile—https://bibleproject.com/explore/way-of-the-exile/



ISAIAH 40:31

THE POWER OF HOPE

# WEEK 3 / DAY 5

#### **SCRIPTURE READING**

- Isaiah 40 (*Jesus Storybook Bible—Operation No More Tears*)

If being a Philadelphia sports fan has taught me anything in life (and that's certainly questionable), it's that hope is a pretty powerful thing...and the absence of it can be devastating for my enthusiasm. I can endure a fair amount of poor performances, bad management, and lousy play calling if there's but a glimmer of hope on the horizon. Take it away, and I lose interest pretty fast.

This week has centered on the theme of exile, longing for our forever home, free from fear, free from sin, free from separation from our Creator and those we love. Or more specifically, the theme has been, waiting in exile. While we wait, we are called to wade into the darkness and actually lament alongside a hurting world. Instead of just biding our time or making the most of an imperfect situation. We're called to actively follow our King, seeking the welfare of those around us, and interceding on their behalf. We're called to shine like lights in the darkness...while we wait. Which all can be more than a bit difficult at times. Enduring exile, dealing with the sin and brokenness in our hearts, homes, and families can be hard enough. Add to that the job of sacrificially serving and loving out in the darkness, and it can easily become overwhelming. Which is where hope comes into play. Hope is a powerful means of binding up strength, keeping our hearts pure from idols or controlling fears, building endurance, and even finding real joy in living with full abandon for the kingdom of Christ.

This is Isaiah's charge. Our God is coming. The glory of the Lord is soon to be revealed. His reward is with Him, And He, Himself will lovingly shepherd us into the firm gates of our long awaited home. Wait for Him in hope, and He will give you strength.

#### DISCUSS

- What is the hardest part about waiting?
- What is one way you might serve your neighborhood with the love of Christ during this Advent season?