



# ADVENT GUIDE

# 01

## **WEEK ONE** / PROMISES AND PATIENCE NOVEMBER 27 - DECEMBER 3

**E**xpectations are powerful. We long to trust possessions, people and ideas with our hope – hope of something greater than what we currently have. Relationships, careers and entertainment willingly receive our expectations. To the degree that we think each will deliver, anticipation grows inside of us. The voice of childhood may change tone through the years, but the same gut response comes with every disappointment: “But you promised...”

It might not be said so plainly, but our confidence shifts as the desired object escapes our fingertips. Impatience replaces anticipation. Unrest and discontentment rise up to our defenses, while our greatest need seems too simple – perspective.

God makes promises to His people throughout the Old Testament. A rainbow appears as a promise that the flood was a one-time deal. God promises deliverance and spares an entire generation of Israel during Passover and with it preserves the joy of each father in holding his firstborn son. David sleeps on cave floors, hunted by Saul, and God delivers him. The LORD is a promise-making and promise-keeping God.

There are also those who longed for the fulfillment of promises yet could only cling to the promises themselves. For days, weeks, months and years, these people waited. Genesis speaks of Abraham and Sarah who, with Abraham in his 80s, had no child. Their hopes and expectations belong to any would-be parent: a sign of the future, the joy of parenting, but the next generation absent. Along with Abraham and Sarah, the people of Israel knew a collective experience of waiting. God promised a Messiah, a Deliverer, an anointed King. Days turned into months and seasons into years. God’s people waited and trusted with patience and hope.

We often create our own expectations. What we want or think we deserve leaves us discontent, disillusioned, even resentful when it does not come. These feelings live in deep and powerful places within our souls and can begin to define us.

In Genesis 18, God speaks with Abraham, giving him the news that he will be a father, with descendants as countless as the stars. We can assume Sarah heard the news. Driven and impatient, though, she convinced Abraham to have a child through their servant, and Ishmael was born. There came no relief to her heart, no soothing balm to her wounds, only stinging disappointment because Ishmael was not their son.

Thirteen winters passed, and God again spoke to Abraham. Abraham could hardly believe what he heard and replied with nervous laughter. Him, 100, Sarah, 90 – could it be? A child between them? Sarah's words betrayed her lingering hope, "After I am old and worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?" One year later, tattered hopes and faded expectations were resurrected as they held Isaac in their arms.

Years after God's promise was fulfilled, we read of Abraham and Isaac heading toward Mount Moriah to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. The tightness in Abraham's throat was matched only by the knots with which he would bind decades of expectation that now look at him through trusting young eyes. "Where is the lamb?" Isaac asked.

"God will provide the Lamb," said Abraham.

Every promise, every dream and sleepless night rushed to the brink of Abraham's sight as he prepared to sacrifice his beloved only son.

None of us escape this pain, this fear that if we love something enough God will take it away from us, as if He is vengeful and plays games with His children. We trust the object of our expectations and set our expectations too low when they were meant to be occupied by Him, after all. What good thing would the Father withhold from us if He has given us His only Son? What more could capture our hearts than the Savior Himself and the knowledge that He died bound that we might live free?

Decades of wanting, years of promise, fitless starts and stops of patience – Abraham’s faith finds no greater description than where we read of father and son walking down the mountain together, leaving behind an altar that bears the name, “The Lord will provide.”

There is no more powerful expectation than patience in the promises of God, for He has provided the Lamb, and the Lamb is the coming King.

## QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Over the last week, what did you do to distract your mind from daily life? What was the outcome?

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2. Consider what you place expectations on and how that affects you when they are not met. Are you patient or irritable?

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3. If we place our hopes in finite things, which never fully meet our expectations, it seems that our expectations are meant for something greater. What things have you trusted in for the joy of your heart instead of Jesus, Who is fully able to meet your every need?

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4. God's faithfulness is proven as each of His promises comes true. Where are you tempted to forget or distrust His faithfulness to you in Jesus?

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# FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

NOVEMBER 27 – DECEMBER 3

As a family, spend time with God and in His Word. Together, talk about what you might already know about Abraham and the promises God made to Him. Have each person open Genesis 22:1-14 and ask one person to read it aloud.

Abraham waited many years to have Isaac, and the boy came as a direct result of a promise of God. Isaac was Abraham's pride and joy, his only son. When God called Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, He was calling Abraham to trust Him with the most important thing in his life. Abraham feared and loved God, and God knew it, but the call to sacrifice Isaac made it clear to Abraham, as well. God was to be Abraham's chief prize above all other blessings in his life. Isaac lived, and we read more of his story throughout the Old Testament. Abraham believed God at His word and knew that God's promises would come true, so he was patient and trusted God's wisdom.

There are times we want something so badly that we cannot think of anything else. Whatever it is, we must have it, or we will surely be miserable. Life would just be so much better then. We would be happy. Truthfully, it doesn't work that way. Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 3:11 that God has set eternity into man's heart so that he does not know what God has done from the beginning to the end. You and I are here for a short time when compared to the history of the world, and we are born in a line of men and women who have all longed to be made new. We have tried everything under the sun to make it happen.

Each day there is a choice of where to place hope, either in what we can do or buy or in the hands of the One Who is the answer to the longing in our hearts – the Lamb of God. Throughout the Old Testament, the Lord promised that He would make a people for Himself and deliver them from

their wicked hearts. Will you trust Him to deliver you from yourself and your perceived needs? Let us set our hope on Him.

1. Was there anything surprising or confusing in the passage?

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2. What does God's providing the lamb in place of Isaac show us about His nature and character? How is it a picture of Jesus?

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3. We saw that Abraham believed God so much that he was willing to obey Him at all costs. God was Abraham's greatest treasure. Is that true for you? What do you find yourself wanting more than Jesus?

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4. Why is it hard to be patient when waiting on God's promises? How can we fight impatience?

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As you spend time as a family, you might also want to introduce the word and idea of Advent if your children are not familiar with it. Explain that, over the next few weeks, you will be spending time together learning and thinking about why the birth and return of Jesus are so significant.

Close your time by praying as a family. Parents, ask your kids how you can be praying for them. Kids, ask your parents the same thing.

***See Appendix C for a list of ideas for Family Activities.***



*O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free  
Thine own from Satan's tyranny  
From depths of Hell Thy people save  
And give them victory o'er the grave  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

