

Finding Time this Christmas

STUDY QUESTIONS

December/Advent 2022 (27 Nov - 31 Dec)



There are few things as precious as quality time with those who love us. The Incarnation, Jesus coming to live amongst us and then dwelling in our hearts, is the ultimate in quality time! Jesus, the Word at the beginning of the universe, choosing to spend time with us, getting to know us, caring for us.

With this winter being a difficult one for many with the rising costs of living and energy we are all having to evaluate what is important. So we decided this Advent we should focus on quality time. The quality time Jesus finds for us and the quality time we find with one another. Forget the wrapping paper, the tinsel, the recipes, the to-do lists — what shines brightest is the opportunity to take time together. Time with Jesus and with one another matters more than any decoration or recipe or present.

Of the 33 odd years of Jesus's earthly life he only spent the last few years in active public ministry, he spent the decades before that spending time with us. Jesus could have materialised as a thirty-something firebrand, but he didn't. He was born a baby to live a real flesh and blood human life. He took his time with us. We should take our time with him.

So let's find time this Christmas. Time with Jesus, time with those we love, time with those who need us. Christmas can be an insular time where we focus on our nearest and dearest but our calling from Jesus invites us to look outwards too! What really matters, what is really important? Let's think about how we spend our time? What are we going to find time for this Christmas?

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SEEDS TO SOW: We are continuing to experiment with adding a Seeds to Sow phrase at the beginning of each section.

These are open-ended and optional prompts and are designed for people wanting to develop their own resources in response to the themes. Perhaps if you are using this material as a group you could use these prompts to inspire a time of prayer, or drawing, or creative writing? They are a short and sweet, simply a starting off place for you and your imagination. Tailor and develop as suits your group.

In this section we also have some optional group challenges that you could do each week and then share in your group how you got on, only if you wish.

These discussion questions adapt our monthly themes for small Connect Groups or personal Bible study (look up [Finding Time this Christmas resource pack PDF](#) for more information on this month's theme). The questions are divided into 5 parts to correspond with the 5 weeks of the Daily Worship theme. They are offered as a guideline and there is no need to go through all the given questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose, or adapt to what interests you or your group.

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Part 1: Finding time for peace this Christmas

SEEDS TO SOW: 'CRAFTING' PEACE

Optional weekly challenge: *There must be something practical about crafting peace. So each day this week intentionally craft out a peace moment. Breathe in peace and breathe out stress. Send a peace text to a friend or when you leave someone after a conversation just force yourself to say 'Have a peaceful day' this will remind you of your peace search this Advent.*

Read 2 Corinthians 4: 1-15

Finding time to feel this Christmas!

This passage is very dynamic and marked by lots of intense contrasts, such as: false/true, blinded/seeing, shining/darkness, treasure/clay, death/life. Christianity as a movement was very new when this letter was written — the people first hearing it were at the ground floor and making sense of their new faith in the context of religious, social, and political upheaval

How do you think they would have felt hearing the drama and sweep of this passage? Bearing in mind this was at a time when literacy rates were a lot lower than now and most people would have encountered this text through *hearing* it, not reading it. How would that have affected the experience? What would have reassured, confused or daunted a first century Christian hearing all this?

Read Romans 13: 11-14

Finding time for the armour of light!

Why do you think Paul chose the metaphor of putting on the 'armour of light' in verse 12? Why 'armour' as opposed to clothing? How do we square the work of being peacemakers with wearing armour?

Read Isaiah 2: 1-5

Finding time for peace this Christmas!

God's vision of peace is transformative, changing weapons of war into tools of peace. What can we do this Advent to make ploughshares and pruning hooks? How can we be a part of transforming conflict into peace in our everyday lives? By sharing little examples we can encourage one another to try new things and send ripples of peace around us this Christmas.

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Part 2: Finding time for stillness this Christmas

SEEDS TO SOW: **PUTTING JESUS INTO OUR SCHEDULES**

Optional weekly challenge: *Find a quiet spot at home or in a park and be still. Don't move a muscle for one minute. Peace is encountered in stillness and don't forget to speak a word of peace each day.*

Read Psalm 46

Finding time to be still and know God!

Why do you think stillness and knowledge are linked in verse 10?

Read Philippians 4: 8-9

Finding time for good things this Christmas!

Which word in the list is leaping out at you today? What draws you in? (Depending on the translation the exact wording will be different but in the NRSVA the following six are in verse 8.)

- true
- honourable
- just
- pure
- pleasing
- commendable

How can we get better at noticing these things in our day to day life? If you are in a group, can you share with others tips you have for spotting and celebrating good news?

Read Matthew 6: 25-34

Finding time for today!

The commercial, festive, and culinary pressures around Christmas can make it hard to live in the moment. It can be easy to end up with something to buy, or organise, or prepare every way we turn.

Tomorrow, what can we simplify? To be able to simply spend some time *being* with Jesus in some quiet? As well as discussing examples from your own life you could think about what could be simplified in wider society to make more room for people to simply 'be'.

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Part 3: Finding time to share the love this Christmas

SEEDS TO SOW: **SURPRISED BY THE BEAUTIFUL**

Optional weekly challenge: *Find something beautiful to give away, from a smile to a material gift. Don't forget to be still for a minute and to speak a word of peace to someone.*

Read Isaiah 35: 1-10

Finding time to blossom!

Our God is a God of rejuvenation, transformation and new life!

In verse 1 the wilderness *itself* is personified as being glad and the desert as rejoicing. What do these poetic expressions add to the reading? What differences does it make to think of the landscape itself having feeling and reacting?

Read James 5: 7-10

Finding time to wait this Christmas!

There's a link made in this reading between being patient with God and patient with one another. Does waiting on God make us more patient with other people? And, alternatively, does waiting on other people make us more patient with God? If so, how? If not, why not?

Read Luke 1: 46-55

Finding time to fill the hungry with good things!

We often think about how to fill *ourselves* with good things at Christmas, but Mary's words inspire us to feed the hungry! How can we find time to be inspired by these words to feed the hungry this Christmas? What actions could we take?

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Part 4: Finding time to make room this Christmas

SEEDS TO SOW: CONSIDER DOING A REFLECTIVE *LECTIO DIVINA* READING

Optional weekly challenge: *Do all three from the previous weeks and add a Lectio Divina - reading. Check out Laura's Lectio Divina reading on Genesis 32 to get the idea: sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/video/watch/lectio-devina-genesis-32 Read Matthew 1: 18-25 in this style.*

Read Matthew 1: 18-25

Finding time for grace!

Why did God find time to reassure Joseph in this way?

Read Isaiah 52: 7-10

Finding time to pass it on!

The sequence here builds from a single messenger, to an initial response (from the sentinels), to a wider response in verse 9, to the very ends of the earth.

Why do you think the message of peace and good news builds like this gradually rather than instantly going to verse 10?

Read Luke 2: 1-7

Finding time to make room this Christmas!

Room was made amongst humanity for God. Room was made in a busy Bethlehem. Room was made in the straw. Room was made in Mary's heart.

Where are we making room this Christmas? Whom are we making room for? If we're in a group looking at this material it may be that we inspire one another to make room in new ways! If you're looking at the material on your own it may be that this is something to write and journal about. In either case we can pray to God to inspire us to make more room in our lives this Christmas.

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Part 5: Finding time for hallelujahs this Christmas

SEEDS TO SOW: HOW MANY TYPES OF 'HALLELUJAH' CAN YOU THINK OF?

Optional weekly challenge: *Why not take time to Listen to Handel's Hallelujah Chorus?*

Read Luke 2: 8-20

Finding time for shepherds.

Who did the angels make time for at the first Christmas? Not rulers, important dignitaries, church leaders, leading artists, local heroes, or winners of a talent competition.

No. They made time for shepherds.

Why?

Read Romans 8: 12-17

Finding time for a Hogmanay Hallelujah!

That phrase in verse 15 'a spirit of adoption' is very evocative.

What do you think are the key differences between a spirit of slavery and a spirit of adoption?

Read Isaiah 43: 18-19

Finding time for change!

As one year draws to a close and we anticipate another, are we attentive to the new things God is doing?

What new thing do you think God will do this year?