

Advent and Christmas SOAP Guide

SOAP is a simple acronym that can help you structure a regular time to meet with God, engaging with Scripture and prayer. Use a journal or your notes app on a phone to write down a few notes. This practice can be done alone but also can be a way for a group to read through the Bible together.

Advent and Christmas are spiritual seasons where we remember (along with Christians around the world) the story of people longing for Jesus' arrival, the unexpected ways he shows up, and the generous and good gifts of God.

SCRIPTURE:

Read through the Scripture passage. Write down a verse or phrase that stands out to you.

OBSERVATION:

Write down observations about the scripture you just read. What do you think God is saying through the scripture (reading it in its context)?

APPLICATION:

Personalize what you just read by asking yourself how it might apply to your life right now.

	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5
WEEK 1 DEC 3	Isaiah 9:1-7	Isaiah 11:1-5	Isaiah 64:1-4	Isaiah 40:1-11	Isaiah 2:1-15
WEEK 2 DEC 10	John 1:1-5	John 1:5-16	Philippians 2:5-8	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:21-24
WEEK 3 DEC 17	Mark 1:1-8	Luke 1:5-25	Luke 1:57-80	John 1:6-9	John 1:19-23
WEEK 4 DEC 24	Luke 2:1-7	Luke 2:8-20	Psalms 126	John 1:1-14	Luke 2:25-35

PRAYER:

Write down a response from you to God based on what you read and observed. Ask Him to help you apply this truth in your life.

Week 1 – Waiting

God's people in the Old Testament, the Jews, endured a long season of waiting for God's promise to be fulfilled. In the days before Jesus was born, they were occupied by Rome and under severe taxation and oppression. They longed for the coming Messiah. They looked back at the prophecies we are reading this week for hope. We find ourselves in a similar season. God's people now wait for Christ's second coming. We wait for the day when there will be no more hurt, no more pain and the love of Jesus will be victorious. We also wait for Jesus to meet us in our everyday lives.

Challenges:

- Do you find yourself in a season of waiting? What are you waiting for? Write down some things you are currently waiting for. Be honest with God and share how you are feeling. Then journal some ways that God is at work in you in the waiting.
- Practice waiting. Most of us distract ourselves anytime we wait by using our phones (in a waiting room, at a restaurant, for a friend, etc.). Try not to touch your phone during these moments. Be present with God in these moments of waiting. Ask him what he wants to do in your heart.

Week 2 – Emmanuel God with Us

God is not far away. In a stunning move of humility and self-sacrifice, he became one of us – a human. He experienced a full range of emotions and temptations. He grieved the loss of a friend, celebrated at a wedding, was betrayed by a close friend, and ultimately died a horrible death on the cross. The Bible gives Jesus the name Emmanuel, which means “God with us.” Jesus modeled how we are to love this broken world in ways that show up and are with people as servant leaders. As we spend more time with Jesus in this season, we want to start to do things that Jesus did; we want to become like Jesus.

Challenges:

- Find a way to serve a friend in your community this week. Whether it's bringing a friend who is having a rough day a coffee or finding a need that they have and meeting it, how can you show up and serve someone this week?
- The second challenge is to serve a stranger. This could be as simple as paying for someone's meal or finding someone who is lonely or overlooked and hearing their story. How can you get outside of your comfort zone this week to be with someone?

Week 3 – Prepare the Way

John the Baptist is an interesting character in the Bible and an appropriate person to consider during Advent. He was Jesus' cousin, and his role was to prepare the way for Jesus. His job was to prepare everyone for Jesus' first coming, and he modeled how we are to prepare everyone for Jesus' second coming. John 1:8 says, “John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light.” That is our invitation, as well, to tell others of the light. A preacher once said it this way: “I am just a beggar, showing another beggar where I found some food.”

Challenges:

- Grab a Christmas at West Side invite box and start praying about who you could invite. Do as many of the invite challenges in the box as you can. How can you help to prepare the way for what Jesus wants to do this Christmas season?
- Is there a place or situation that seems dark and hopeless? Talk to God about it and ask him to show you how he might be at work. Is there a way he might want to use you to bring light and hope?

Week 4 – Hope is Here

Jesus arrives during a time of waiting and longing. Hope breaks through the darkness in the form of a baby. During this week, take time to celebrate! Celebrate that Jesus came down to earth. Celebrate all that he has blessed us with. Practice gratitude as we come out of a season of waiting that Jesus came to earth, and now our hope can be found in him. Spend some extra time leaning into the Christmas story. Try to put yourself into the story and experience it in a new way.

Challenges:

- Come to Christmas at West Side, and let's celebrate together as a church family!
- Celebrate! In the middle of all the flurry of events, find a way to lean into the JOY that is part of your life because of Jesus and his presence in your life. Savor the goodness and generosity of God.
- The end of the year can be a time for some extra reflection. Set aside time to pray the Examen and invite God to guide your reflection on the past year or season. The Examen is an ancient prayer practice used to become more aware of how God is involved in our everyday lives. Below is a simple list of steps for this type of prayer. The more you pray this prayer and become aware of God moving in your life, the more you will start to notice and see God moving in the ordinary moments of your life.
 1. **Become aware of God's presence.** Acknowledge that God is here with you at this moment.
 2. **Realize that God fully loves you.** Spend a few moments in God's presence, realizing that you are fully loved by him.
 3. **Review your day (or year) with gratitude.** What can you thank God for?
 4. **Look forward to tomorrow.** Ask God to give you guidance and strength for the next day/season. Give him anything you are anxious or dreading about the following day.