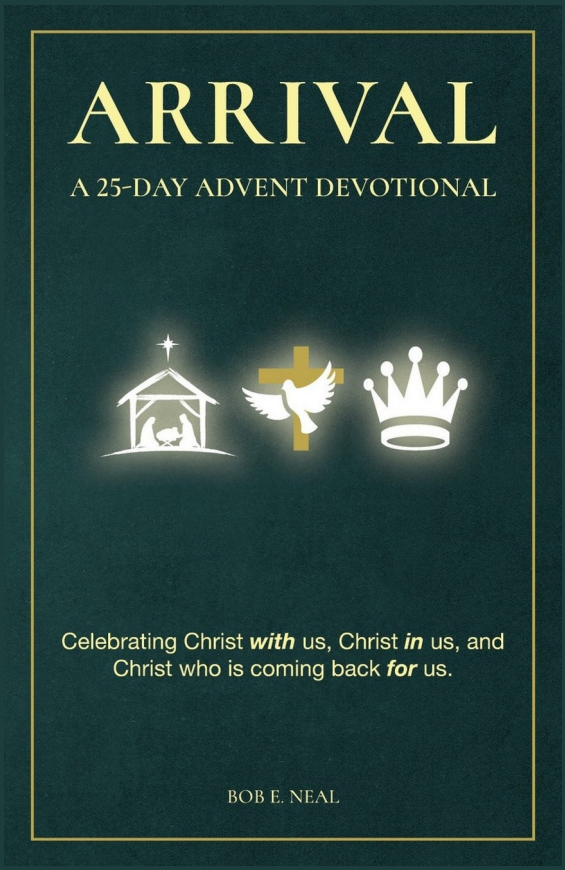
CHURCH ADVENT KIT

Group Discussion Guide

Four weekly sessions for small groups, built to go with ARRIVAL: A 25-Day Advent Devotional by Bob E. Neal



HOPE · PEACE · JOY · LOVE

Advent begins Sunday, November 29, 2026

Christ with us · Christ in us · Christ who is coming back for us

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A WORD BEFORE WE BEGIN

Welcome to ARRIVAL

[BOB: This letter is a placeholder draft written for you to rewrite in your own voice. Please replace or edit every line, and add any personal story you want to tell.]

Dear pastors, church leaders, and friends,

Thank you for gathering your people around God's Word this Advent. The word "Advent" means "arrival," and the heart of this season is that Christ has not arrived just once. He came to us at Bethlehem as Immanuel, God with us. He comes to live in us by His Holy Spirit. And He is coming back for us, just as He promised.

This guide is here so that small groups, classes, and families can walk through these four weeks together. Each week follows one of the Advent themes, Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love, and each one points back to the song heaven never stops singing:

> *"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"*
>
> REVELATION 4:8 (ESV)

My prayer is simple. I pray that each person in your group would open the Scriptures every day, meet with Jesus in them, and come to your gathering each week ready to share what God is teaching them. That is what it means to be a daily disciple. The group time is where we encourage one another; the daily reading is where the roots grow deep.

You do not need to be a Bible scholar to lead this. Read the passage, ask the questions, listen well, and pray. The Holy Spirit is the true Teacher in the room.

Merry Christmas, and may Christ arrive anew in your church and your home this season.

Grace and peace,

Bob E. Neal **[BOB: confirm sign-off, e.g. "Bob & Paige Neal" or "Dr. Bob E. Neal"]**

Along The Way Publishing

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

One Gathering a Week, One Reading a Day

Meet once a week for 45–60 minutes, and read ARRIVAL at home every day in between. The questions are built on the weekly themes and well-known Advent passages, so anyone who is behind on the reading can still join in.

These group sessions are companions to ARRIVAL, not the book's daily readings.

THE FOUR WEEKS

WEEK 1	**Hope**	Begins Sunday, November 29	*Isaiah 9:2*
WEEK 2	**Peace**	Begins Sunday, December 6	*Isaiah 9:6*
WEEK 3	**Joy**	Begins Sunday, December 13	*Luke 2:10–11*
WEEK 4	**Love**	Begins Sunday, December 20	*1 John 4:9*
BONUS	**Christmas**	Thursday, Dec. 24 or Friday, Dec. 25	*John 1:14*

Groups can meet on any day during each week. **[BOB: confirm when the ARRIVAL daily readings begin (planning notes say the dated pages run Dec. 1–25) and add a one-line note on when to light the first candle.]**

EACH SESSION FLOWS LIKE THIS

Welcome & check-in	5–10 MIN	Greet people; share one highlight from this week's reading.
Opening Scripture	5 MIN	Read the week's verse aloud. Leaders read the leader's note ahead.
Discussion	25–30 MIN	Six questions move from Observe to Reflect to Apply. Use what time allows.
Candle moment	5 MIN	Light the week's Advent wreath candle with a Scripture reading.
Closing prayer	5–10 MIN	Pray with the prompt, then point people to the week at home.

THE THREE ARRIVALS

Each session traces the three "Arrivals" at the heart of ARRIVAL:

Christ with us
His birth, when He was given the name Immanuel.

Christ in us
The indwelling Holy Spirit.

Christ who is coming back for us
His return.

[BOB: confirm the third-Arrival phrasing. The back cover says "God FOR Us"; the subtitle says "Christ Who is Coming Back for Us." This guide uses the subtitle.]

TIPS FOR LEADERS

- You do not have to use every question; two honest answers beat six rushed ones.
- Let silence work: count to ten before you rephrase a question.
- Candle safety: keep flames away from paper and greenery and never unattended. Battery candles work too.
- Candle names and colors vary by tradition; use whatever your church uses. **[BOB: confirm the traditional candle names used in each session.]**

SMALL-GROUP SESSION 1 · HOPE

Hope: A State of Anticipation

Week of Sunday, November 29, 2026 · First Sunday of Advent

Opening Scripture

> *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone."*
>
> ISAIAH 9:2 (ESV)

This week's three Arrivals

Christ with us	Christ in us	Christ coming back for us
Matthew 1:23	Romans 15:13	Titus 2:13
"They shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).	*"...by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."*	*"...waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."*

Leader's Note [BOB: review]

Advent begins in the dark. Isaiah spoke to people who knew what it was to wait, and God answered with a promise of light. Biblical hope is not wishful thinking; it is confident expectation that rests on what God has said and already done. Christ has come, the Holy Spirit fills us with hope now, and we wait for "our blessed hope," His appearing. Some in your group may arrive carrying grief or disappointment. Make room for honest answers, and let the Scripture do the comforting.

Discussion

1. OBSERVE Read Isaiah 9:2–7 aloud. What words describe the people's condition before the light comes? What changes after it shines?
2. OBSERVE Read Matthew 1:21–23. The child is given two names, Jesus and Immanuel. What does each name tell us about why He came?
3. REFLECT How is biblical hope different from the way we use the word in everyday life ("I hope it doesn't rain")? According to Romans 15:13, where does hope come from, and whose power supplies it?
4. REFLECT Titus 2:13 calls Christ's appearing "our blessed hope." How does knowing that Jesus is coming back change the way we wait through hard seasons?
5. APPLY Where in your life right now does it feel like "a land of deep darkness"? What would it look like to invite Christ's light into that place this week?
6. APPLY Who do you know who needs hope this Advent? Name one simple way you could share it this week: a call, a note, a meal, or an invitation to read Scripture with you.

✦ CANDLE MOMENT

Light the first candle. Many churches call it the Hope candle; some call it the Prophecy candle. Have one person read Isaiah 9:2 aloud as it is lit, then sit in quiet for thirty seconds and simply look at the light. If your group sings, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" fits this week well.

✦ CLOSING PRAYER PROMPT

Thank God that He keeps His promises. Pray by name for anyone in the group who is waiting on God for something. Close by asking the Holy Spirit to do what Romans 15:13 describes: fill you with joy and peace in believing, so that you abound in hope.

THIS WEEK AT HOME

Begin reading ARRIVAL each day this week. Read the day's Scripture and devotional, answer one reflection question, and bring one insight to share next time. Use the book's weekly candle-lighting with your household.

NOTES

SMALL-GROUP SESSION 2 · PEACE

Peace

Week of Sunday, December 6, 2026 · Second Sunday of Advent

Opening Scripture

> *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*
>
> ISAIAH 9:6 (ESV)

This week's three Arrivals

Christ with us	Christ in us	Christ coming back for us
Luke 2:14	John 14:26–27	Isaiah 9:7
"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"	*The Father sends the Helper, the Holy Spirit. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."*	*"Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end."*

Leader's Note [BOB: review]

The peace Scripture promises begins with peace with God (Romans 5:1), not merely calm circumstances. The angels announced peace over a manger. In the Upper Room, Jesus promised His own peace in the same breath as He promised the Holy Spirit. And Isaiah looks ahead to a kingdom whose peace will have no end. December is often the least peaceful month of the year. Let this session be a place where people can breathe.

Discussion

1. OBSERVE Read Isaiah 9:6–7. List the four names given to the child. Which one speaks to you most right now, and why?
2. OBSERVE Read Luke 2:8–14. To whom did the angels first announce peace? What does that tell us about the people God welcomes?
3. REFLECT Read Romans 5:1. What is the difference between having peace with God and feeling peaceful? Why does the first matter for the second?
4. REFLECT In John 14:25–27, Jesus connects His peace with the coming of the Holy Spirit. How does "Christ in us" make a peace possible that is "not as the world gives"?
5. APPLY What tends to steal your peace in December? What is one practical step you could take this week toward "Let not your hearts be troubled"?
6. APPLY Is there a relationship in which you could be a peacemaker this Christmas? What might a first step look like?

✦ CANDLE MOMENT

Relight the first candle, then light the second, often called the Peace candle (in some traditions, the Bethlehem candle). Read Isaiah 9:6 aloud together, slowly. Invite each person to name, silently or aloud, one worry they are placing in the Prince of Peace's hands. Song suggestion: "Silent Night" or "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear."

✦ CLOSING PRAYER PROMPT

Bring to God the specific worries named tonight, with Philippians 4:6–7 in mind. Pray for peace in homes and in strained relationships, and thank Jesus that through Him we have peace with God.

THIS WEEK AT HOME

Keep reading ARRIVAL each day. Light two candles at home this week using the book's weekly candle-lighting, and notice one moment each day when you choose to receive Christ's peace instead of rushing past it.

NOTES

SMALL-GROUP SESSION 3 · JOY

Joy

Week of Sunday, December 13, 2026 · Third Sunday of Advent

Opening Scripture

> *And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*
>
> LUKE 2:10–11 (ESV)

This week's three Arrivals

Christ with us	Christ in us	Christ coming back for us
LUKE 2:10–11	GALATIANS 5:22	JUDE 24
"Good news of great joy that will be for all the people."	*"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace…"*	*He is able "to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy."*

Leader's note [BOB: review]

In many churches the third Advent candle is rose-colored, a pause of rejoicing in the middle of the season. The angel's news was "great joy" for "all the people." In Scripture, joy is not the denial of sorrow: Mary sang with a hard road ahead of her, and Peter wrote to believers who were grieving. Joy is fruit the Holy Spirit grows in us, and it will be made complete when we stand in Christ's presence. Be gentle this week. For some, the holidays bring loss to the surface.

Discussion

1. OBSERVE Read Luke 2:8–20. What did the shepherds do after they heard the news? Notice the verbs in verses 15–20.
2. OBSERVE Read Luke 1:46–55, Mary's song. What reasons does Mary give for rejoicing? Which are about what God has already done?
3. REFLECT Galatians 5:22 lists joy as fruit of the Spirit. How is fruit different from something we manufacture? What does that tell us about where lasting joy comes from?
4. REFLECT Read 1 Peter 1:6–9. How can believers "rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory" even while grieving various trials?
5. APPLY What "good news" do you need to hear again this Advent? Where have you seen God's goodness in the past week?
6. APPLY The shepherds told others what they had seen and heard. Who could you tell this week about what God is doing in you?

✦ CANDLE MOMENT

Relight the first two candles, then light the third, the Joy candle, which is rose or pink in many traditions (some call it the Shepherds' candle). Read Luke 2:10–11 aloud. Go around the circle and let each person finish the sentence, "I rejoice because God…" Song suggestion: "Joy to the World."

✦ CLOSING PRAYER PROMPT

Spend most of this prayer time in praise: thank God for specific things He has done. Then pray for those for whom this season is heavy, asking the Spirit to give a joy that does not depend on circumstances.

THIS WEEK AT HOME

Keep reading ARRIVAL each day and light three candles at home. Each evening, write down one reason for joy you saw that day, and share one with your group next week.

NOTES

SMALL-GROUP SESSION 4 · LOVE

Love

Week of Sunday, December 20, 2026 · Fourth Sunday of Advent

Opening Scripture

> *"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him."*
>
> 1 JOHN 4:9 (ESV)

This week's three Arrivals

Christ with us	Christ in us	Christ coming back for us
John 3:16	Romans 5:5	1 John 3:2
"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son…"	*"God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."*	*"When he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."*

Leader's note [BOB: review]

Love is the root of all three Arrivals. God sent His Son because He loved the world. He pours His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. And because we are His children, we will see Christ as He is when He appears. First John defines love by God's initiative, not ours: "not that we have loved God but that he loved us" (1 John 4:10). This is the last session before Christmas, so leave time to talk about practical ways the group can show that love.

Discussion

1. OBSERVE Read 1 John 4:7–12. How many times does John use the word "love"? Who acts first?
2. OBSERVE Read John 3:16–17. What did God give, and why? According to verse 17, what did He not send His Son to do?
3. REFLECT Romans 5:5 says God's love "has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit." What difference does it make that God's love is poured into us, not just explained to us?
4. REFLECT Read 1 John 3:1–3. How does the promise that "we shall be like him" when He appears shape the way we live now (verse 3)?
5. APPLY Who is hard for you to love right now? How might "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19) change your next conversation with that person?
6. APPLY As a group, is there a practical way to show Christ's love to someone this Christmas, such as a neighbor, a family in need, or someone who will be alone?

✦ CANDLE MOMENT

Relight the first three candles, then light the fourth, the Love candle (in some traditions, the Angels' candle). Read 1 John 4:9 aloud. Leave the candles burning during prayer as a reminder that the light grows as Christmas draws near. Song suggestion: "O Come, All Ye Faithful."

✦ CLOSING PRAYER PROMPT

Thank God for His love shown in sending His Son. Pray for the people named in the last two questions, and ask the Holy Spirit to make your group a channel of that love this week.

THIS WEEK AT HOME

Finish ARRIVAL through Christmas Day, and light four candles at home. Use the Christmas Eve and Christmas Day page in this guide with your family or your group.

NOTES

SMALL-GROUP BONUS SESSION · CHRISTMAS

Christmas Eve & Christmas Day

Optional gathering for Christmas Eve (Thursday, December 24) or Christmas Day (Friday, December 25). Use it with your family, your group, or both. About 20–30 minutes.

Opening Scripture

> *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."*
>
> JOHN 1:14 (ESV)

[BOB: review this bonus session as a whole.]

Read the story

Read Luke 2:1–20 aloud. If children are present, let them read a verse or act out the shepherds.

Light the Christ candle

Relight the four Advent candles, then light the center candle, often white, called the Christ candle. Say together: "The Light has come."

Talk together

1. What part of the Christmas story struck you differently this year?
2. Read Revelation 4:8: "who was and is and is to come!" Where have you seen each of the three Arrivals this Advent: Christ with us, Christ in us, and Christ who is coming back for us?
3. What is one habit from these weeks, such as daily Scripture, prayer, or the candle, that you want to carry into the new year?

Pray and sing

Thank God for sending His Son. Close with one of the last prayers in the Bible: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20). Song suggestion: "Silent Night" or "O Come, All Ye Faithful."

AFTER ADVENT The daily habit does not have to end on December 25. ARRIVAL includes four 30-Day Reading Plans based on Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love, to help readers stay in the Scriptures as the new year begins. Encourage your group to choose one and keep going together.

[BOB: optional line to add: The Gospel of Mark: The Way of Christ, a 30-Day Scripture Journey, releases December 1 for groups who want to read Mark together starting January 1.]

Grab a copy and send one to family and friends, so they can walk through Advent with you.

www.alongtheway121.com

Is your church using this kit? We would love to pray for you. Email info@alongtheway121.com to let us know your church is joining.