

 LIVING COMPASS

LEADER GUIDE

for Individuals, Small Groups, Advent Programs, and Retreats

LIVING WELL THROUGH ADVENT 2015



*Practicing Patience
With All Your Heart, Soul,
Strength, and Mind*

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with Steven Charleston, Nurya Love Parish,
Tom Purdy, and Porter Taylor

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Introduction and Welcome

We at Living Compass are delighted to share this *Advent Leader Guide* with you. We are especially honored to include the voices and deep reflections of four guest writers. These voices represent diverse backgrounds and experiences within the Episcopal Church, yet all come together to reflect upon the theme of this year's guide: *Living Well Through Advent 2015: Practicing Patience with All Our Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*.

The guide and this resource can be used for individual reflection and study, small groups, a congregational Advent program, and/or a retreat. If you are using the Leader Guide with a group, we suggest you read through it first to familiarize yourself with the contents, concepts, and supplies you may need.

Our Advent resources are designed to help develop a deeper connection between faith and our capacity to be patient. We will use the Sunday Gospel readings and the Reflections for each Sunday and Monday, found in *Living Well Through Advent 2015* as the foundation for suggested weekly gatherings.

However you choose to use these resources, we pray that this season of Advent be a time of spiritual renewal and recommitment to your relationship—with yourself, with each other, and with God. Our prayer is that both your faith and your capacity for patience be strengthened by your journey through this holy season of Advent.



A special thank you to the guest writers who contributed reflections for the Advent Guide.

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The Role of the Leader

You do not need to be an expert in any way to lead a group. Instead, you are much like a midwife who helps guide the process. You will be the one who prepares the space, makes sure everyone feels welcome, has needed materials, understands the process, and has enough time to speak.

We hope this Guide offers the tools and support you need to provide a safe space to listen to each other, and to create an environment

where authentic learning and conversations can occur about faith and patience during the season of Advent. If you have any questions, please ask: info@livingcompass.org.

* A note on page number references. When we refer to pages in the Leader Guide, it will simply be a page number reference (page 2, for example). When we are referring to pages in the Advent guide, we'll note that (page 2 in the Advent guide, for example).

Tips for Leading

- Create a safe, supportive, friendly, and confidential environment (what is talked about in the group stays in the group).
- Familiarize yourself with the Guidelines for Listening (on page 6).
- Remain friendly and open and maintain a sense of humor.
- Ask thoughtful, open-ended questions to increase the interaction and meaningful conversation in the group. We provide

questions for reflection in the Advent Guide for you to use. And, feel free to come up with additional questions in response to the needs and desires of your group.

- Ask group to commit to attend all meetings if at all possible, and to let the leader know when unable to attend.
- To create connection and community, consider sharing a simple potluck meal before the meeting.

Group Dynamics

All groups take on their own personality and energy. As a facilitator, it is important that you tune into your group and align with its energy, building rapport and trust. You can do this by:

- Warmly greeting each participant when they enter the room.
- Calling on participants by name.
- Remembering key issues and concerns they discuss and refer back to them

throughout the program. This lets them know you are listening deeply.

- Using feedback appropriately. For example, thank a person for sharing, compliment when opportunities arise, or ask a participant to repeat something important that he or she just shared for emphasis.
- Actively listening by focusing completely on what the participant is saying and then repeating back what was heard for clarity.

Suggestions for handling special situations

The overly chatty person

- Affirm that you “hear” them and are listening by reflecting back or summarizing what they are saying and then move on.
- Don’t look at this person when asking a question.
- Thank the person for their positive contribution, and then ask for others to share.
- If it continues, talk to the person privately outside of the session.

The quiet person

- Watch for signs that the person wants to participate, and engage them at that time.
- Respect their desire to not share much, but trust they may be benefiting from the session despite their silence.
- Connect with them before or after the meeting.

Tips for Preparing

- Pray for God to guide you as the leader. You are not alone. And pray for each person in the group.
- Read the Sunday reflection and scripture at least twice before you meet.
- Keep the main ideas from the material to be covered firmly in mind. Make notes on this and refer to them as often as necessary to keep you grounded and focused. This will help you feel confident and relaxed and receptive to the needs and desires of the group.
- Prepare room ahead of time, arranging chairs in a circle, or around a table.
- You may want to bring flowers, and a candle to light (explain that it serves as a reminder that we are in the presence of the Holy).
- Make sure to have any needed supplies on hand.

Suggested supplies for each week

- Bibles or copies of the scripture for the week (included at the beginning of each week’s session)
- A *Living Well Through Advent 2015* guide for each person
- Copies of the Practices (on page 7)
- Guidelines for Listening (on page 6)
- Music and/or music player
- Pens/Pencils
- Candle/matches
- Bell or soft timer alarm to signal shifts
- A contact form to be passed around to build a list to share among members of the group

Guidelines for Listening

Take a moment to be fully present and to rest in God's presence.

Listen with your mind, heart, and intuition.

Listen to others deeply in order to understand, rather than trying to "fix" anything, or to challenge what is being said.

Speak only for yourself, expressing your own thoughts and feelings, your own experiences. Use "I" rather than "you" statements.

Wait for others to finish speaking—allowing a pause in order to fully ingest what has been said, as well as what has not been said—before speaking.

If you've talked, wait until everyone else in the group has spoken before speaking again.

Listen with openness and curiosity, leaving judgement and criticism at the door.

Practices

Invite the participants to journey through Advent by using one of the following practices or another mindful practice that speaks to them. You can do these either during your session or invite them to take these practices home. (Print as many copies as needed for your group.)

Theme for the week. Reread the practice for the week, found in the Advent guide each Monday. What speaks to you about this practice? Take time to think about how this particular practice can help you draw closer to God and the people around you.

Gratitude Practice. Each day, think about three things for which you are grateful and write them down in a journal. It might be helpful to consider one or more of the eight areas of wellness seen through the lens of *practicing patience*. Read them each day during the season of Advent as a powerful reminder of the goodness and grace that surrounds you.

Journal. Take time this week to further reflect on the reading and practicing patience. Journaling is a great way to keep track of your thoughts and feelings. Writing down your thoughts, or drawing images, will help you to order and process them. You can use the reading, reflection, or discussion questions as a prompt.

Daily Prayer. Consider praying each day between now and the next time the group meets. Think about how prayer applies to your journey through Advent, patience, and who God is calling you to be. Prayer is one way to ground yourself each day. If you are using this Guide as part of a group, you may want to have a prayer partner for whom you commit to pray each day.

Prayer partners. Offer an opportunity for each group member to pray for a prayer partner each day, praying for them by name and asking God to bless their desires. Encourage the group to contact their prayer partner at least

once a week. A phone call or meeting for coffee, a meal, etc., is a warmer way of making contact. If time is an issue, emails work, too. The goal is to stay in touch between gatherings. This will build trust and rapport more quickly and help those who may feel shy gain confidence and more ease in a new group setting.

Living Compass Wellness Assessment and FAITH Step. Using this *Living Compass* tool (on next page), take some time to reflect on the ways in which practicing patience is showing up in the eight areas of wellness. Reflect on how each area of wellness is impacted by the theme for the week. For example, how well am I practicing patience with myself (week two's theme) as it relates to what I'm choosing to eat (Care for the Body) during the holidays?

There is no "right" way to do this. Just allow yourself to see your life as a garden. Identify the areas of wellness you've tended and watered, and celebrate them. Then, identify any areas you may have neglected that you want to focus on. You'll shade in each area on the Assessment Tool as a value (0-100) based on how you feel you are doing, right here, right now. Then, choose one area to focus on for the week. A FAITH step is a place to write down the one thing you commit to do during the coming week. If you have a prayer partner, you could share that with him/her. If you have any questions, please ask: info@livingcompass.org

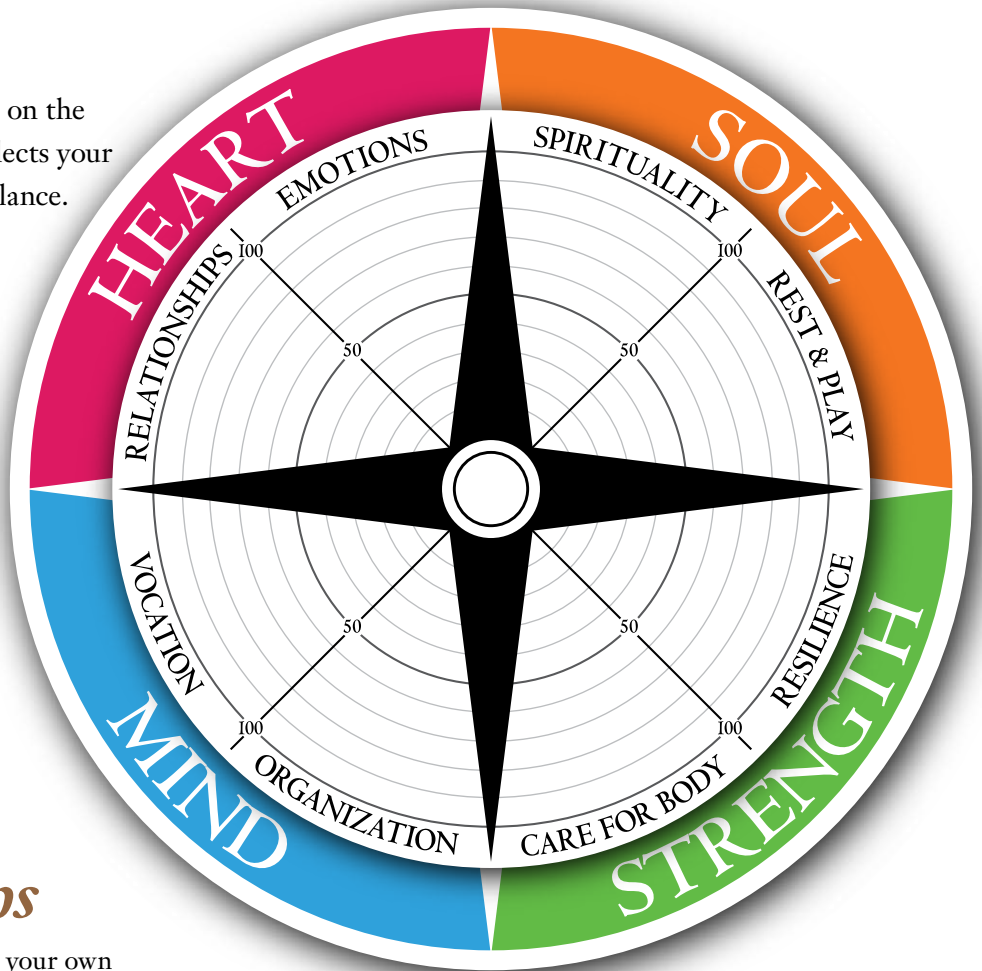
Note: If there is a lot of interest in this practice, you can invite the group to identify a FAITH step for each week, choosing the same or a different area of wellness to focus on. They should also feel free to continue to focus on the same FAITH step for more than one week.



Shade in each of the eight areas on the compass with the value that reflects your current state of wellness and balance.

0 = Uh-Oh! / 100 = Awesome!

Using this tool, reflect on how the theme of the week is showing up in one or more of the eight areas of wellness and choose one area to focus on for the week. Notice what happens when you focus on this area through the lens of practicing patience.



FAITH Steps

Now that you've put yourself on your own map of wellness, pick one area you feel called to focus on. Remember that whatever we pay attention to is what will grow.

Area I feel called to focus on:

List one FAITH step you are ready and willing to take in the next 24 hours.

Is there someone you would like to share this FAITH Step with?

Support + accountability = much greater chance for success.

- F Focused.**
Specific and narrow in scope.
- A Action-Oriented.**
An action that is observable and measurable.
- I Inspired.**
I feel that God wants me to take this step.
- T Time-specific.**
I will do at this time, or within a finite time frame.
- H Heartfelt and Honest.**
Commit to a step we are ready to take, true to wherever we are in the stages of change.

Change is inevitable. Growth is optional. —John C. Maxwell

Using this material for an Advent Retreat

This program can be used as an Advent Retreat in a variety of ways. Below are two sample schedules. Please feel free to adapt and use however will be helpful for your retreat.

It is important to leave space for silence, prayer, reflection, and creative responses, so don't force the entire contents of the Advent Guide into a single retreat.

Full-day Retreat

9:00 AM Welcome and outline for the day
9:15 AM Week One Reflection and Theme
(Practicing Awareness of our Impatience)
Small-group discussion and reflection time
10:15 AM Break
10:30 AM Week Two Reflection and Theme
(Practicing Patience with Ourselves)
Small-group discussion and reflection time
11:45 AM Break
Noon Lunch
1:00 PM Week Three Reflection and Theme
(Practicing Patience with Others)

Small-group discussion and reflection time
2:00 PM Break
2:15 PM Week Four Reflection and Theme
(Practicing Patience with God)
Small-group discussion and reflection time
3:15 PM Break
3:30 PM Whole-group synthesis, shared reflections (share FAITH steps if desired), and celebration of time together
4:30 PM Close with prayer

Half-day Retreat

9:00 AM Welcome and outline for the day
9:15 AM Weeks One and Two (read Sunday's reflection for both)
Small-group discussion and reflection time
(on one of the reflections; group to choose)
10:30 AM Break
10:45 AM Weeks Three and Four (read Sunday's reflection for both)

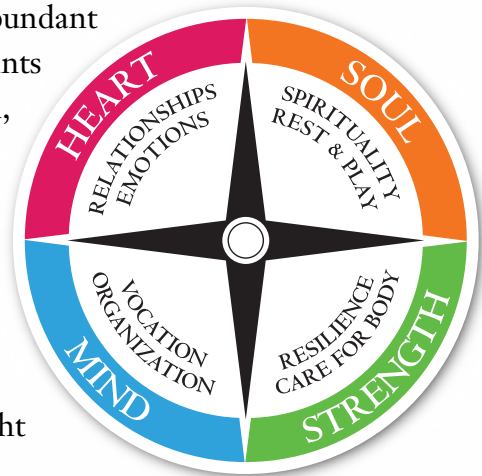
Small-group discussion and reflection time
(on one of the reflections; group to choose; could write down a FAITH step and share with at least one other person)
Noon Lunch
1:00 PM Whole-group synthesis, shared reflections (share FAITH steps if desired), and celebration of time together
2:00 PM Close with prayer

The Living Compass: A Brief Overview

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.

—Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 6:5

Living Compass provides tools and trainings to assist individuals, families, congregations, and organizations as they seek to live the abundant life God intends for them in all areas of life. The compass points us toward the four dimensions of our being: heart, soul, strength, and mind. These dimensions are interconnected, and each one affects the other. Whatever impinges on one dimension of our lives (positively or negatively) has an impact upon the other dimensions. Our call is to live an undivided life, where heart, soul, strength, and mind are integrated into both our *being* and our *doing*. We use these four as our compass points to help guide and equip us in eight areas of wellness.



Areas of Wellness

Heart

- **Relationships:** The ability to create and maintain healthy, life-giving connections with others.
- **Emotions:** The ability to process, express, and receive emotions in a healthy way.

Soul

- **Spirituality:** The ability to develop and practice a strong personal value system, and to discover a meaningful purpose in life.
- **Rest and Play:** The ability to balance work and play and to renew oneself.

Strength

- **Resilience:** The ability to deal positively with the adversities of life.
- **Care for the Body:** The ability to build healthy habits and practices regarding our physical well-being, as well as the ability to end unhealthy ones.

Mind

- **Vocation:** The ability to align our life's purpose with the gifts and talents given by God. This includes work, volunteer service, and any educational/enrichment activities.
- **Organization:** The ability to keep track of and make good use of possessions, money, and time.

Creating resources grounded in the integration of faith and wellness makes Living Compass different from other wellness programs. Living Compass believes we all have many compasses that compete to guide our lives, often outside of our awareness. When we choose to make faith the compass that guides decisions in all areas of our lives, we are better able to experience wellness and wholeness. It is worth noting that the words “health,” “wholeness,” and “holy” all come from the same root.



Practicing Awareness of Our Impatience



Readings for the First Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16

Psalm: Psalm 25:1-10

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Gospel: Luke 21:25-36

Session One Outline

- Opening music, either recorded or sung (optional)
- Welcome
- Minute of silence to still our hearts and minds and to prepare for our time together
- Prayer
- Introduce yourself
- Go around the group with introductions. You can ask them to tell their name, where they are from, and what they hope to get out of the experience.
- Hand out a copy of and read out loud *Guidelines for Listening* on page 6.
- Read the Gospel for the first Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Read the Reflection from the first Sunday of Advent (on pages 11–12 in the Advent guide) out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Announce theme for week: *Practicing Awareness of Our Impatience*. Read Monday's Reflection (on page 13 in the Advent guide) out loud as a way to more deeply engage with the theme as a group. Invite brief responses.
- Reflect and Learn
 - Suggested questions for reflection, journaling, and discussion
 - Reflection and journaling time (5 min)
 - Small-group breakout for discussion (3–4 in each group, depending on size of group; 10 min)
 - Whole-group reflection and a brief time to share small-group discoveries
- Organize prayer partners (optional).
- Introduce Practices and invite group to choose one to use during the week.
- Wrap-up. Give any reminders for upcoming meeting.
- Close with prayer.
- End on time.

Rhythm of Weekly Gathering

Each session is timed to be 50–60 minutes long and can easily be adapted as needed.

Feel free to use the suggested opening and closing prayers, as well as incorporating anything you choose that would work well with the theme of *practicing patience*.



Opening Invitation

As we embark on this Advent Journey together, I invite you to think about what this season means for you.

Invite participants to share their thoughts and reflections.

The Gospel for the First Sunday of Advent

Luke 21:25-36

“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Suggestions for reading the Scripture

As you read the scripture out loud, we invite you to think about creative and engaging ways in which this can be done.

Different translations. Depending on the length of the passage, you may want to read it two or three times, using a different Bible translation.

Different voices. If you are reading in parts or using different translations, be sure to use a variety of voices (male and female, young and old, etc.).

Opening Prayer

It is Advent and there are glimmers
Of returning
And new beginning
I am being given credit
For faith
When really there are glimmers
Of returning
They are hard to miss
I see them
Faith is hope in things unseen
But I see them
I'm glad for faith credits but really
I see *the things*
Glimmering, glittering signs of return
One by one by one
We can only return ourselves
One by one by one
I see them: one over here
One over there
Watch
Do you see the glimmers
Of return even in the words
Of leaving?
I will collect the glimmers in a basket
They will shine through the weave
Week by week by week
Until Jesus comes
We are separate
No
We are together
We are more together than you
We are more together *with* you
We are We and it is all of us
There are glimmers of returning
I will collect them in a basket
For all to see

—Catharine Phillips

December 5, 2008

<http://allwillbewellperiod.blogspot.com/>



Read the Living Compass Reflection for the First Sunday of Advent

Found on pages 11–12 in the Advent guide.

Then, read Monday’s Reflection out loud as a way to more deeply engage with the theme as a group: *Practicing Awareness of our Impatience*. Found on page 13 in the Advent guide.

Invite brief responses.

Reflection and journaling time

Reflection Questions/Small Groups

Use any of the following questions, or any you choose from the weekday reflections, on pages 14–18 in the Advent guide. Reflect on the questions as a whole group, or break into smaller groups of 4 or 5. You can also use this time to invite responses by journaling.

The theme for the week is: *Practicing Awareness of our Impatience*. How has that shown up for you recently? When do you find yourself being impatient with others? How does that show up? When are you impatient with yourself? With God? What about impatience when it comes to eating, drinking, spending money, living and working with others, or simply waiting for things in general?

Group Discussion

If you broke into small groups, invite each group to share their responses to one or more of the questions. As you listen, note of any themes or where responses tie together. If you discussed as a group, reiterate themes and tie-ins.

Briefly review Practices on page 7 and invite group to engage with at least one during the week.

Closing Prayer

We seek the mighty God
in the most unlikely places
as a child in a stable,
and in an empty tomb.
May God hear these prayers,
which come from the unlikely corners
of our lives. **Amen.**

—*Revised Common Lectionary
Prayers, Augsburg Fortress*



Practicing Patience with Ourselves



Readings for Second Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Baruch 5:1-9 or Malachi 3:1-4

Psalm: Luke 1:68-79

Second Reading: Philippians 1:3-11

Gospel: Luke 3:1-6

Session Two Outline

- Opening music, either recorded or sung (optional)
- Welcome
- Minute of silence to still our hearts and minds and to prepare for our time together
- Prayer
- Read Guidelines for Listening (on page 6) to encourage active and respectful listening.
- Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of their impatience showed up during the past week.
- Read the Gospel for the second Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Read the Reflection from the second Sunday of Advent (on pages 21–22 of the Advent guide) out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Announce theme for week: *Practicing Patience with Ourselves*. Read Monday's Reflection (on page 23 in the Advent guide) out loud as a way to more deeply engage with the theme as a group. Invite brief responses.
- Reflect and Learn
 - Suggested questions for reflection, journaling, and discussion
 - Reflection and journaling time (5 min)
 - Small-group breakout for discussion (3–4 in each group, depending on size of group; 10 min)
 - Whole-group reflection and a brief time to share small-group discoveries
- (optional) Explore how the theme for the week shows up in the different areas of wellness. Encourage them to choose an area to focus on during the coming week.
- Wrap-up. Give any reminders for upcoming meeting.
- Close with prayer.
- End on time.

Rhythm of Weekly Gathering

Each session is timed to be 50–60 minutes long and can easily be adapted as needed.

Feel free to use the suggested opening and closing prayers, as well as incorporating anything you choose that would work well with the theme of *practicing patience*.



Open Invitation

Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of their impatience showed up during the past week.

Gospel for the second week of Advent

Luke 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Suggestions for reading the Scripture

As you read the scripture out loud, we invite you to think about creative and engaging ways in which this can be done.

Different translations. Depending on the length of the passage, you may want to read it two or three times, using a different Bible translation.

Different voices. If you are reading in parts or using different translations, be sure to use a variety of voices (male and female, young and old, etc.).

Opening Prayer

God of timeless grace,
you fill us with joyful expectation.
Make us ready for the message that
prepares the way,
that with uprightness of heart and
holy joy
we may eagerly await the kingdom of
your Son, Jesus Christ,
who reigns with you and the Holy
Spirit, now and for ever. **Amen.**

—*Revised Common Lectionary
Prayers, Augsburg Fortress*



Read the Living Compass Reflection for the Second Sunday of Advent

Found on pages 21–22 in the Advent guide.

Then, read Monday’s Reflection out loud as a way to more deeply engage with the theme as a group: *Practicing Patience with Ourselves*. Found on page 23 in the Advent guide.

Invite brief responses.

Reflection and journaling time

Reflection Questions/Small Groups

Use any of the following questions, or any you choose from the weekday reflections, on pages 24–28 in the Advent guide. Reflect on the questions as a whole group, or break into smaller groups of 4 or 5. You can also use this time to invite responses by journaling.

The theme for the week is: *Practicing Patience with Ourselves*. How has that shown up for you recently? When do you find yourself being patient with yourself? How does that show up? When are you impatient with yourself? With God? What about patience with yourself when it comes to eating, drinking, spending money, living and working with others, or simply waiting for things in general?

Group Discussion

If you broke into small groups for the reflection questions, invite each group to share their responses to one or more of the questions. As you listen, note of any themes or where responses tie together. If you discussed as a group, reiterate themes and tie-ins.

Briefly review Practices on page 7 and invite group to engage with at least one during the week.

Closing Prayer

Out of the embrace of mercy and
righteousness,
you have brought forth joy and
dignity for your people,
O Holy One of Israel.
Remember now your ancient promise:
make straight the paths that lead to you,
and smooth the rough ways,
that in our day
we might bring forth your compassion
for all humanity. **Amen.**

—*Revised Common Lectionary
Prayers, Augsburg Fortress*



Practicing Patience with Others



Readings for Third Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-20

Psalm: Isaiah 12:2-6

Second Reading: Philippians 4:4-7

Gospel: Luke 3:7-18

Session Three Outline

- ▣ Opening music, either recorded or sung (optional)
- ▣ Welcome
- ▣ Minute of silence to still our hearts and minds and to prepare for our time together.
- ▣ Prayer
- ▣ Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of how they practiced patience with themselves showed up during the past week. Invite them to share the area of wellness they chose to focus on.
- ▣ Read the Gospel for the third Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- ▣ Read the Reflection from the third Sunday of Advent (on pages 31–32 in the Advent guide) out loud, taking turns as readers.
- ▣ Announce theme for week: *Practicing Patience with Others*. Read Monday's Reflection (on page 33 in the Advent guide) out loud as a way to more deeply engage with the theme as a group. Invite brief responses.
- ▣ Reflect and Learn
 - ▣ Suggested questions for reflection, journaling, and discussion
 - ▣ Reflection and journaling time (5 min)
 - ▣ Small-group breakout for discussion (3-4 in each group, depending on size of group; 10 min)
 - ▣ Whole-group reflection and a brief time to share small-group discoveries
- ▣ (optional) Introduce Wellness Assessment Tool and invite group to explore how the theme for the week shows up in the different areas of wellness. Encourage them to choose an area to focus on during the coming week.
- ▣ Wrap-up. Give any reminders for upcoming meeting.
- ▣ Close with prayer.
- ▣ End on time.

Rhythm of Weekly Gathering

Each session is timed to be 50–60 minutes long and can easily be adapted as needed.

Feel free to use the suggested opening and closing prayers, as well as incorporating anything you choose that would work well with the theme of *practicing patience*.



Open Invitation

Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of practicing patience with themselves showed up during the past week.

Gospel Reading for the third Sunday of Advent

Luke 3:7-18

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

Opening Prayer

O God of the exiles and the lost,
you promise restoration and
wholeness
through the power of Jesus Christ.
Give us faith to live joyfully,
sustained by your promises
as we eagerly await the day when
they will be fulfilled
for all the world to see,
through the coming of your Son, Jesus
Christ. **Amen.**

—*Revised Common Lectionary
Prayers*, Augsburg Fortress.

Suggestions for reading the Scripture

As you read the scripture out loud, we invite you to think about creative and engaging ways in which this can be done.

Different translations. Depending on the length of the passage, you may want to read it two or three times, using a different Bible translation.

Different voices. If you are reading in parts or using different translations, be sure to use a variety of voices (male and female, young and old, etc.).



Read the Living Compass Reflection for the Second Sunday of Advent

Found on pages 31–32 in the Advent guide.

Then, read Monday's Reflection out loud as a way to more deeply engage with the theme as a group: *Practicing Patience with Others*. Found on page 33 in the Advent guide.

Invite brief responses.

Reflection and journaling time

Reflection Questions/Small Groups

Use any of the following questions, or any you choose from the weekday reflections, on pages 34–38 in the Advent guide. Reflect on the questions as a whole group, or break into smaller groups of 4 or 5. You can also use this time to invite responses by journaling.

The theme for the week is: *Practicing Patience with Others*. How has that shown up for you recently? When do you find yourself being patient with others? How does that show up? When are you impatient with others? With God? What about patience with others when it comes to eating, drinking, spending money, living and working with others, or simply waiting for things in general?

Group Discussion

If you broke into small groups for the reflection questions, invite each group to share their responses to one or more of the questions. As you listen, note of any themes or where responses tie together. If you discussed as a group, reiterate themes and tie-ins.

Briefly review Practices on page 7 and invite group to engage with at least one during the week.

Closing Prayer

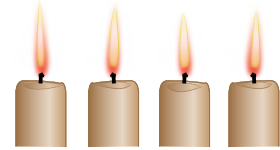
God of hope,
you call us home from the exile of
selfish oppression
to the freedom of justice,
the balm of healing,
and the joy of sharing.
Make us strong to join you in your
holy work,
as friends of strangers and victims,
companions of those whom others
shun,
and as the happiness of those whose
hearts are broken.
We make our prayer through Jesus
Christ our Lord.

Amen.

—*Revised Common Lectionary
Prayers*, Augsburg Fortress.



Practicing Patience with God



Readings for Fourth Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Micah 5:2-5a

Psalm: Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 80:1-7

Second Reading: Hebrews 10:5-10

Gospel: Luke 1:39-45 (46-55)

Session Four Outline

- Opening music, either recorded or sung (optional)
- Welcome
- Minute of silence to still our hearts and minds and to prepare for our time together.
- Prayer
- Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of how they practiced patience with others showed up during the past week.
- Read the Gospel for the fourth Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Read the Reflection from the fourth Sunday of Advent (on pages 41–42 in the Advent guide) out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Announce theme for week: *Practicing Patience with God*. Read Monday's Reflection (on page 43 in the Advent guide) out loud as a way to more deeply engage with the theme as a group. Invite brief responses.
- Reflect and Learn
 - Suggested questions for reflection, journaling, and discussion
 - Reflection and journaling time (5 min)
 - Small-group breakout for discussion (3–4 in each group, depending on size of group; 10 min)
 - Whole-group reflection and a brief time to share small-group discoveries
- Allow time for group members to express their feelings about the material, the season of Advent in general, and their appreciation for each other.
- Thank group for their commitment: to themselves and to the group.
- Offer ways to stay in touch if group members indicate a desire to stay connected.
- Close with prayer.

Rhythm of Weekly Gathering

Each session is timed to be 50–60 minutes long and can easily be adapted as needed.

Feel free to use the suggested opening and closing prayers, as well as incorporating anything you choose that would work well with the theme of *practicing patience*.



Open Invitation

Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of practicing patience with others showed up during the past week.

The Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:46b-55

And Mary said,
“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Opening Prayer

God of promise,
you have given us a sign of your love
through the gift of Jesus Christ, our
Savior,
who was promised from ages past.
We believe as Joseph did
the message of your presence
whispered by an angel,
and offer our prayers for your
world, confident of your care and
mercy for all creation. **Amen.**

—*Revised Common Lectionary
Prayers, Augsburg Fortress*



Read the Reflection for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

Found on pages 41–42 in the Advent guide.

Then, read Monday's reflection out loud as a way to more deeply engage with the theme as a group: *Practicing Patience with God*. Found on page 43 in the Advent guide.

Invite brief responses.

Reflection and journaling time

Reflection Questions/Small Groups

Use any of the following questions, or any you choose from the weekday reflections, on pages 44–46 in the Advent guide. Reflect on the questions as a whole group, or break into smaller groups of 4 or 5. You can also use this time to invite responses by journaling.

The theme for the week is: *Practicing Patience with God*. How has that shown up for you recently? When do you find yourself being patient with God? How does that show up? When are you impatient with God? What about patience with God when it comes to eating, drinking, spending money, living and working with others, or simply waiting for things in general?

Group Discussion

- Allow time for group members to express their feelings about the material, the season of Advent in general, and their appreciation for each other.
- Thank group for their commitment: to themselves and to the group.
- Offer ways to stay in touch if group indicates a desire to stay connected.

Closing Prayer

And could it be
That You have called us so completely
Embodied
that we have no hope
Of knowing You without our feet
touching grass
Our lips smacking blueberries
From the morning cereal
No hope of knowing
Without the miracle of the letter arriving
From the past saying
Remember?
Remember?
Remember?
No hope without the sheer gathering
Of women holding hands
Of men looking on and wondering
What on earth is happening here
So completely embodied
That here
Here is our hope
Of knowing You
Here

—Catharine Phillips
<http://allwillbewellperiod.blogspot.com/>