



# PATIENCE

Wait with this word for awhile before you turn the page. Let *Patience* settle into your thoughts. Let this word soak into your life. Let it spread across your imagination as you look toward Christmas. Do not hurry. Wait. And when you have taken some time with this word, turn the page.

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT



## DAY ONE

Responding to the Word *Patience*

What is your first reaction to this word?

Describe your most recent experience of *patience*.  
Be as specific as possible.

What memories or stories from past Advent and Christmas seasons does this word, *patience*, call forth from your life?

What might God desire that you *hope* for in the gift of these days and weeks that lead us toward Christmas?

## INVOCATION

*Holy Patience,  
that deep, calm resistance  
against the riptide of the season's hurry,  
while swell upon swell of Christmas  
laps at every edge of our lives,  
you call us to an Advent way of living;  
deep calling to deep,  
love bearing love,  
Word becoming flesh.  
Slow, labored, beloved Patience,  
come, teach us to trust in Advent's buoyancy;  
suspend us, outstretched, for the coming of Christ.  
Amen.*

## SILENCE

### REFLECTION ON PATIENCE

Waiting for Christmas is like waiting for a star to fall. We know it will come, streaking across our lives with promised Light, but we can grow weary from the Advent strain of waiting.

In the early years of our marriage, my husband and I lived near the ocean. One favorite winter tradition was to pack a picnic dinner and head to the beach so that we could be there as day turned to night. Wrapped in our winter coats, hats, and gloves, we sat on an old sleeping bag and began to watch the sky as the stars made their light known. First one, then another, then a third would come into focus, and finally whole constellations competed for our attention. It was always a holy sight to behold.

Once the frozen background of the winter night's sky darkened just enough, we began our watch for falling stars. "There!" It seemed like Ray always saw the first one. I would look in the direction he pointed but often too late to see. My shoulders tightened,

my neck strained, and I tried to keep from blinking so that I wouldn't miss the next shooting point of light. Sometimes I realized I was holding my breath, as if that would help; as if suspension of my own breathing could in some way suspend the movement of the heavens and allow me to see more clearly. But as soon as I looked in one direction, Ray would cry out again, "Look, there's another one"; and no sooner would I turn his way than the stream of light was gone.

Still, with practice, I learned that if I just kept looking, patiently, I would almost always find a falling star. Over time I learned from friends who had lived by the ocean longer than I that the likelihood of finding a falling star was greater in certain seasons of the year or in particular quadrants of the sky. I learned that if I lay down with my head propped just right on Ray's knee, I could wait longer and watch better. I just had to let patience, desire, and practice teach me to be present to what was to come.

So it is with Advent and patience. As we begin to watch impatiently for the Light of Christmas, we have been given this stretch of time and space of Advent. Here we are invited to grow in patience and to position our lives so that we do not miss what God is doing in the wide expanse of the world.

May we slow down, spread out our whole lives before God, and practice patient watching for where the light of God is falling. May we catch a glimpse of this holy light, of the lives and places in the world that need our attention and are illumined by God's radiance so as to draw us near. May we all settle into Advent with a deep desire to see and attend to what matters to God.

## HYMN OF PATIENCE

Sing or read the words of this Advent hymn. Attend to the words carefully. How do they stir up a sense of patience for this season?

### *I WANT TO WALK AS A CHILD OF THE LIGHT*

*I want to walk as a child of the light.*

*I want to follow Jesus.*

*God set the stars to give light to the world.*

*The star of my life is Jesus.*

*[refrain]*

*In him there is no darkness at all.*

*The night and the day are both alike.*

*The Lamb is the light of the city of God.*

*Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.*

*I want to see the brightness of God.*

*I want to look at Jesus.*

*Clear Sun of Righteousness, shine on my path,*

*and show me the way to the Father. [refrain]*

*I'm looking for the coming of Christ.*

*I want to be with Jesus.*

*When we have run with patience the race,*

*we shall know the joy of Jesus. [refrain]*

—Kathleen Thomerson

## BENEDICTION

May the Holy Spirit fall upon you. Like a falling star, trailing across the dawns and dusks of your Advent living, may the Spirit mark you with light and point the way toward God-With-Us. Be patient, draw close, for the Lord is very near. Amen.



## DAY TWO

Read Isaiah 35:1-10.

THE PROPHET CALLS upon the deep imagination of God's people to watch patiently for signs of change. In the dark season of exile, life signs have seemed dormant, dried up, and closed off. But in a new season of light, like spring after winter, life signs will break through for all who have held fast patiently through the darkness. This is a text about what will be, about what shall be, for those who patiently watch for and trust God's restoring care for them, even after a bitter, hard season.

Reread this passage from Isaiah, but do so slowly, patiently. Take your time with the text and read it with expectation that it holds a word of life for you to see, like the first crocus bloom in early spring. Which particular verse catches your attention? Write it down and sit with that one verse or part of a verse. Be patient. What does it call forth from you? What does it touch in your life? Simply be in patient prayer.

*Your reflections—*



## DAY THREE

Read Luke 1:47-55.

OUT OF A YOUNG life tumble words of inordinate wisdom. Who could have predicted this kind of meaningful, dangerous language from a powerless girl of no means? On the face of her life, we would have expected a different kind of song—a child's song, a playful song, maybe the first notes of a lullaby; but not this kind of song, full of radical, upside-down prophecy meant to awaken rather than to lull to sleep. The world was already asleep to what God had in mind. That was the problem. The song needed to be a song of impatience about a world that even a child could see needed to be turned topsy-turvy.

Read the passage again, this time from the perspective of a child or youth of your community who is in need or lives on the margin in some way. How might Mary's song speak for this child or youth? In what ways might systems be turned upside down in order for this young person to be blessed by a different life? How might you grow in your impatience with systems that wound and neglect children? Is there a prophetic word or action that you could claim on their behalf?

*Your reflections—*



## DAY FOUR

Read James 5:7-10.

“BE PATIENT, THEREFORE, beloved, until the coming of the Lord.” In this letter the author urges the church to whom he writes to practice being patient with one another in their life together. How easy it is, especially in busy, difficult, and stressful times, to resort to criticism and gossip about people around us, even within the church. Yet as the church, we are called to set an example of holy patience with one another.

Take time to reflect on your own faith community. Are you aware of circumstances where friction, tension, or criticism exist? Do you feel any degree of judgmentalism toward persons, or have you recently grumbled about anyone? Pray for patience with these circumstances or individuals. Ask for God’s help in becoming more patient, merciful, and compassionate.

*Your reflections—*



## DAY FIVE

Read Matthew 11:2-11.

JOHN IS IN prison. He can no longer preach to the crowds or baptize the streams of people who believe that the reign of God is coming near. He is set apart and isolated, and now his followers and friends must prepare the way of the Lord or abandon the task and go on with their everyday lives. So John must wait, patiently, for a word from his friends about whether or not Jesus is the one for whom they have been searching. John can do nothing now but wait on his friends to bring a good word to him about Jesus.

Who in this season is waiting for a good word from you? Who comes to mind among your family, friends, coworkers, or others as set apart by fear, worry, stress, loneliness, anger, self-judgment, or other isolating life conditions? Sit quietly and patiently as you make a list of people you know who need you to bring them a good word, a piece of the good news of God's love for them. Take your time with this process. Write down a name, and then that individual's need (is it encouragement, presence, listening, forgiveness, other?). What good word can you bring each person? Can you go and tell these individuals that word sometime during the Advent season?

*Your reflections—*





**DAY SIX**  
The Waiting World

WHERE IN THE world are individuals and groups patiently waiting for help from God's people? Where in the world are orphaned children, widows and widowers, people imprisoned or displaced, starving or terrified, who can only wait patiently for someone to take notice of their struggle to stay alive?

Get a newspaper or magazine or go to the Internet and browse for a story from the world community where someone or some group is waiting for and in need of attention and action according to the good news of Jesus. Take action; do something; start somewhere to make their situation known and to bring them a piece of God's good word.

*Your reflections—*



## DAY SEVEN

Praying Patiently

I waited patiently for the LORD;  
he inclined to me and heard my cry.  
—Psalm 40:1

### THE JESUS PRAYER

*The Jesus Prayer*, often called a “prayer of the heart,” is ancient. It best unfolds through patient repetition. It is a short prayer, which, like many small things of God, can be taken for granted until given a chance: like the yes from a teenage girl or the first breath of a tiny, newborn baby. It is, therefore, a splendid prayer for Advent.

The Jesus Prayer has a rich history. You can find many books and articles about this little prayer if you want to know how it came to be and to be practiced through the centuries. Typically in these readings various versions of the prayer that have been prayed through the life of the church will be presented (see Resources at the back of this book). For example, in the most basic English form, the Jesus Prayer has become known as “Lord, have mercy” and in its longest form as “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” In other versions the name of Jesus and the petition for mercy are prayed in various combinations, such as, “Jesus Christ, have mercy on me” or “Lord Jesus, have mercy” or even a simple “Lord, mercy.” But the heart of the prayer is not revealed in its history or in any particular combination of words prayed; the heart of the prayer is revealed through its patient praying.

The Jesus Prayer gets to the heart of our need before God. It hides behind nothing and represents everything that we are before God. Short and to-the-point, it comes to life in us not through wordy, complicated construction but through patient, repeated simplicity. For centuries spiritual guides have instructed seekers to say this little prayer over and over again throughout their day, beginning with small sets of repetition while doing tasks like

tending a garden, sweeping a floor, or, more currently, sitting in traffic, and then expanding its use over time so that it might become a means by which we “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Although at first such a repetitive practice can feel awkward and odd, people who stay with this prayer find that over time it becomes a source of deep comfort and rhythm that arises from the heart, connecting them with the Source of life always present to us.

Perhaps this Advent will be a time when the simple rhythm of an unhurried prayer can be a gift for you. The directions that follow are intended to introduce or reintroduce you to the Jesus Prayer. May this little prayer of the heart guide you into Advent patience and gentleness with yourself and with others.

#### A GUIDE TO THE PRACTICE OF THE JESUS PRAYER

As with a daily examen, the Jesus Prayer is typically an individual prayer. But as noted before, a prayer like this can also be practiced by a group that might covenant together to learn and practice it for a time and then to share their experiences with it. As with any form of prayer, some people will find this prayer helpful, while others will not. Only through practical experience can you know whether it offers a prayerful space for you.

Unlike many other prayer forms, the Jesus Prayer is not a prayer for sitting or lying still. This is a prayer you can take into activity—standing, walking, driving, digging, cleaning, and more. This prayer may be best suited to the action-soaked and activity-weighted ways of our culture, especially of our pre-Christmas way of life. Therefore, in order to try out this little prayer, you will not need to carve out or leave behind any tasks in your schedule but rather plan to carry the Jesus Prayer into your busy routine.

First, choose the wording that attracts you. Resist overanalyzing your choice. You can change it at any time. You might begin with “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me”; “Jesus Christ, have mercy”; or a longer wording that touches your heart, such as, “Jesus

Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Practicing a short version may be easiest in the beginning.

Once you have chosen the wording, simply say it right away in five slowly-paced repetitions. Get a feel for the prayer’s rhythm.

Now choose an activity or daily practice already in your schedule at least twice a day. This can be something like brushing your teeth, checking your e-mail, sitting at a red light, walking the dog, filling the dishwasher, leaving your office to attend a meeting—any daily experience that you repeat at least once. Then write out a reminder to take with you or stick on a mirror, computer, door frame, or dashboard to remind you to say the Jesus Prayer five times when the designated activity begins. Each time you attend to this daily activity, say the Jesus Prayer five times again. Do this for a few days.

Next, expand your repetitions to ten. Live with the Jesus Prayer. Experiment with other daily activities where you could add the practice.

Live in the Advent light of Christ’s unceasing mercy.