

## PARENTS,

Christmas is the most enchanting time of year. When you hear Christmas what comes to mind? Gifts? Twinkling lights on a tree? The smell of hot cocoa?

*While we enjoy our wonderful, festive traditions, they can easily overshadow the greatest reason we celebrate Christmas: the birth of Jesus!*

This year let's be intentional about celebrating the birth of Jesus by establishing holiday traditions centered around Him. Let this book be your inspiration to engage deeper in conversations with your kids about the true nature of Christmas. Watch as your relationships grow with your kids and with Christ through these fun weekly activities, scriptures, devotions and questions.

# WHAT IS ADVENT?

Advent is the season of the year leading up to Christmas and a reminder of Jesus' birth. The word *advent* is a Latin word meaning *coming* or *arrival*. When you know something is on its way, you can feel excitement, longing, expectation and joy. The purpose of Advent is to help believers remain focused on Jesus' birth and look forward to His magnificent return.



## *Our prayer for your family this holiday season.*

*Dear Lord,*

*Help us all focus on You, Your birth and Your love this Christmas season. Please direct our time with family and friends and fill it with joy. Help us celebrate You and the amazing gift You sent us, Your Son, Jesus. Amen.*

<p><i>Thanksgiving Day</i></p> <p>THURSDAY, NOVEMBER</p> <p><b>24</b></p>	<p><i>First Sunday of Advent</i></p> <p>SUNDAY, NOVEMBER</p> <p><b>27</b></p>	<p><i>Second Sunday of Advent</i></p> <p>SUNDAY, DECEMBER</p> <p><b>4</b></p>	<p><i>Third Sunday of Advent</i></p> <p>SUNDAY, DECEMBER</p> <p><b>11</b></p>	<p><i>Fourth Sunday of Advent</i></p> <p>SUNDAY, DECEMBER</p> <p><b>18</b></p>
<p><i>Christmas Eve</i></p> <p>SATURDAY, DECEMBER</p> <p><b>24</b></p>	<p><i>Christmas Day</i></p> <p>SUNDAY, DECEMBER</p> <p><b>25</b></p>	<p><i>New Year's Eve</i></p> <p>SATURDAY, DECEMBER</p> <p><b>31</b></p>	<p><i>New Year's Day</i></p> <p>SUNDAY, JANUARY</p> <p><b>1</b></p>	

# FOCUSING ON JESUS

Creating dedicated time to focus on Jesus is a great way to create a new family tradition. Consider choosing a time each week to light a candle and focus on each weekly theme.

Traditionally, Advent has four candles with unique meanings. We've added two more candles to the **Beyond ADVENTure** celebration.

One of the traditional four candles is lit each Sunday during Advent. The fifth candle is lit on Christmas Eve and the sixth on New Year's Eve.

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## *Candle 1 – Purple*

Represents the Jewish people's hope for the Messiah's arrival. We're reminded that there is hope because Jesus is coming back for us!

## *Candle 2 – Purple*

Represents peace. It reminds us to focus on God's promised peace with Jesus' birth and the ultimate peace that will come when Christ returns.

## *Candle 3 – Pink*

Represents joy. It reminds us to celebrate Jesus' arrival.

## *Candle 4 – Purple*

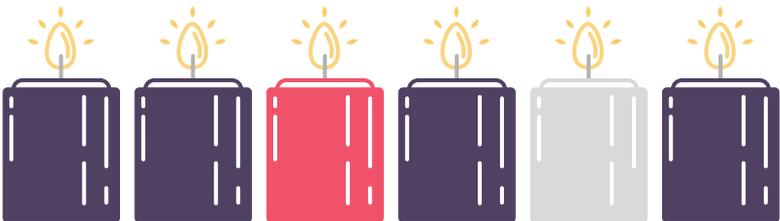
Represents love. It reminds us of God's greatest gift to us: His Son, Jesus, the Savior of the world.

## *Candle 5 – White*

Often referred to as the *Christ Candle*. It's commonly lit on Christmas Eve, representing purity and the life of Christ.

## *Candle 6 – Purple*

The last candle represents God's direction. We'll focus on asking God what He wants for us in the upcoming year.



*Lord, we have gratitude because  
You fulfill Your promises each day!*

Expressing gratitude is more than being polite. It's about showing your deepest appreciation. Gratitude is acknowledging the value of things and life experiences that we may not deserve. During Thanksgiving week, let's have a heart of gratitude for the many gifts we've received from God, especially Jesus.

.....SCRIPTURE READING .....

*Gather the family and read this together. Ask the kids to participate in the reading to help them become comfortable reading aloud and build good Bible reading habits.*

*Saying Thank You*

Read Together: **Luke 17:11-17 (NirV)**

This Bible story focuses on being grateful to God for all that He's done for us. In Luke 17, we read about ten men who had leprosy. This disease affected their skin. Many people avoided anyone who had leprosy. When the lepers saw Jesus, they knew that being healed by Him would save their lives. The good news is Jesus was not like other people. When He saw the lepers, He healed them. Jesus didn't have to heal them, but He did because He loved them.

One of the healed men returned and thanked Jesus, but the other nine forgot. We know that God is worthy of our praise, now at Thanksgiving and all year round. Let's allow this lesson to encourage us to show gratefulness to God for all that He's done for us this week and beyond.

*One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. **Luke 17:15 (NirV)***

.....QUESTIONS .....

Jesus healed the lepers. How many came back to tell Jesus, *Thank You*?

Why do you think Jesus healed the lepers?

Is it hard for you to say *thank you* to others?

What can you do to remember to always thank God?

## .....THIS WEEK'S PLAYLIST .....

*Listen to the BrookwoodKiDs Spotify playlist – Gratitude.*

**Forever** Chris Tomlin

**Blessed Be Your Name** Matt Redman

**Worthy Is the Lamb** Hillsong United

**Thank You** Hillsong Worship

**Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing** Celtic Worship

**Once Again** Matt Redman

**This Is Amazing Grace** Bethel Music and Jeremy Riddle

## .....HEART OF GRATITUDE .....

*Gratitude: the attribute of being thankful and showing that thankfulness through kindness to others.*

Kids are sponges and will copy what they see. One way to raise grateful kids is to practice being a grateful parent.

This week, decorate a hanging wooden heart and write *Thank You* in the middle of it. Explain that you'll hang the heart on the bedroom door of any child caught doing a good deed, as a reminder of our thankfulness for their decision or action. Then encourage them to make some paper gratitude hearts and give them to family members who also do a good deed. Before you begin the activity this week, pray a prayer of gratitude over your kids. Thank God for them and share special reasons why.

## .....QUESTIONS .....

How do you feel when someone thanks you for something you did?

Do you think God made us to be grateful?

Who can you thank right now?

What are you grateful for today?

Ask your kids to tell you when an adult thanks them.

Do you have a great attitude when you're asked to do something?

..... DEVOTIONAL .....

Gratitude and thankfulness are some of the most powerful feelings God gave us. Gratitude gives us joy and enriches our spiritual walk. Not only should we show our gratitude to God because He asks us to, but also out of thankfulness for His faithfulness.

Thankfulness is mentioned throughout the Bible. In **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NirV)**, it says, *Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Give thanks no matter what happens. God wants you to thank Him because you believe in Christ Jesus.* Notice this – *Give thanks no matter what. God is worthy of our gratitude. We should acknowledge Him for every good and perfect gift He gives.* **James 1:17 (NirV).**

Gratitude should flow from our hearts and out of our mouths. When we're thankful, our focus shifts from our desires and circumstances to what God wants. Articulating gratefulness helps us remember that God is in control, and we belong to Him.

The Bible encourages a spirit of gratitude. Paul wrote, *Always give thanks to God...* **Ephesians 5:20 (NirV).** Ongoing happiness doesn't come from saying thank you occasionally, but from having a continual spirit of gratefulness. Having a spirit of gratefulness also helps us avoid becoming entitled, jealous or angry, which separates us from God and each other.

..... QUESTIONS .....

How can gratitude improve our relationships with others?

Why does God deserve our gratefulness?

When we cultivate a grateful spirit what does it help us do?

When is the last time you thanked Jesus for something?

..... PRAYER .....

*Dear God,*

*I want to thank You for the gift of eternal life through Jesus. Thank You for my wonderful family and our friends, the food we eat, our health and our home. Thank You for giving us the gift of life and allowing us to live another day. We could not be here today without Your bravery and strength. Amen.*

## .....WEEKLY ACTIVITIES.....

### *Gratitude Jar*

Create a family Gratitude Jar. Ask your children to decorate a jar or basket, placing a notepad and pen next to it. Leave the jar out the week before Thanksgiving and ask family members and caregivers to write down reasons they're thankful. They can be big or small gestures. Ask family members to take their time and write heartfelt answers. During the Thanksgiving meal, ask the children to read them.

### *Create Thankful Turkeys*

Another idea is to create Thankful Turkeys. Draw an old-fashioned hand turkey or be more elaborate but ask the children to write something they're thankful for on each of the turkey feathers (their fingers). Use the turkeys as place cards or decorations during the Thanksgiving holiday and add more each year!

## .....PARENT FOCUS.....

**Adults, this is a time for reflection. Post this somewhere you'll see it often.**

### *David's Psalm for Giving Grateful Praise*

In the book of Psalms, David praises God no matter what his situation is. These verses show David's gratitude to the Lord regardless of his trials and uncertainty.

*Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before Him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name. For the LORD is good and His love endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations. Psalm 100:1-5 (NirV)*

Write down the verse and hang it in a place where you can easily read it. Set aside a few minutes to ponder what David wrote. Be grateful for everything and celebrate in God's name because He is our Almighty Father. Whether or not it's Thanksgiving, we should all learn to say a prayer of thanks every day.

## QUESTIONS

When you're practicing gratefulness, do you choose to focus on the positive or negative?

What behaviors would you see in a grateful person?

What habits can you create to help yourself be grateful?

## EXTRA ACTIVITIES

### *Signs of Thankfulness (6 - 18 months)*

At around 6 to 9 months old, some parents start teaching their kids ASL (American Sign Language) signs for common words like *milk*, *food*, *more* and *all done*. You can also teach them the signs for *please* and *thank you* to establish good manners before they start talking. See the ASL signs on page 37.

### *Whiteboard Thanks (5 years and older)*

To foster an environment of appreciation, mount whiteboards on each bedroom door. Anyone in the family can write on them, provided the messages are positive, like notes of thanks or a Bible verse. The boards create a way for everyone to show appreciation and encourage each other.

### *Check Your Blessings (5 years and older)*

One morning after eating a meal, push back from the table and say, *Here's your bill*. Present a bill to each child in the family. Then throughout the day, say, *Here's your bill!* as if cleaning, laundry and other tasks come with a bill for services rendered. At the end of the day, total up the kids' bills, and tell them you'll gladly pay their bills (or debt). The day will serve as a reminder of how blessed they are. Tie this lesson to how God, our Heavenly Father, sent Jesus to pay our sin debt. Use the bill template on page 38 with this activity.

### *Gratitude Sparks (3 years and older)*

Ask your children to select things that they encounter every day that can become *gratitude triggers* for your family. These can range from a stop sign to a restaurant or a song you listen to on the way to school. Anything can serve as a reminder to give thanks to God.

Here's an example: A family wanted to buy a new home, so they choose a billboard for a local home builder as a regular reminder to pray about the process and ask for God's guidance and help. After they bought a house and moved in, the billboard remained a *gratitude trigger*. When they see it, they thank God not only for their new home but for the many other blessings He's given them.

*Have hope because God is always with us.*

Let's reflect on hope. Four small letters. One amazing idea.

For the first week of traditional Advent, we focus on the hope and expectation of the Jewish people looking forward to the Savior's arrival. This week also reminds believers today to wait eagerly for Jesus' return.

## .....SCRIPTURE READING .....

*Immanuel - God is with us!*

Jesus is known by many special names. One of those names is Immanuel which means *God with us*. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, He was God in the flesh, and at that time people could touch and see Jesus. We can't touch God or see God with our eyes, but because Jesus was human (while also being God), He understands what it's like to be human--to be worn out and tempted.

*The Lord himself will give you a sign. The virgin is going to have a baby. She will give birth to a Son. And He will be called Immanuel.*

**Isaiah 7:14 (NIRV)**

*"The virgin is going to have a baby. She will give birth to a Son. And He will be called Immanuel. The name Immanuel means God with us."*

**Matthew 1:23 (NIRV)**

**The Announcement**

Read **Luke 1:26-38 (NIRV)**

## .....QUESTIONS .....

How does Gabriel describe Jesus?

How does Mary respond to the angel's information? (v.38)

## .....THIS WEEK'S PLAYLIST.....

*Listen on Spotify.*

**Prepare Ye Music for Advent** Katie Bogner

.....HOPE.....

*A feeling of excitement for what's coming,  
a desire for something specific to happen,  
looking forward to something with confidence.*

*God is with Me!*

Ask your child to draw a picture of a time they felt scared or alone. Once they're done, ask them to share the details with you. When they've finished sharing, ask them to add Jesus to the picture beside them.

Now ask them to share what they see in the picture. Ask them to describe how they'd feel if they envisioned Jesus with them the next time they felt scared or alone.

Ask your child to write the word *hope* on the picture. Help them find a place to hang the picture as a reminder that God is with us.

.....QUESTIONS.....

**What do you see in the picture?**

**If you know Jesus is with you, how does this make you feel?**

**Adults, share an instance when you knew God was with you.**

.....DEVOTIONAL.....

Hope helps us endure gloomy, lonely and scary times. Hopelessness, however, invites fear, anxiety and indifference.

The Christmas season is a reminder that our hope must be placed securely in Jesus. This is not a promise that our prayers are always answered the way we want them to be or that our lives will be full of peace and ease. However, as followers of Jesus, we're promised that God is always with us, that He's working all things together for our good, for His plan and His praise.

The nation of Israel had been waiting for centuries for God's promised Messiah. God fulfilled His promise in Jesus our Savior. However, the Messiah was not what Israel pictured Him to be. They were looking for a king or conqueror, not a child born in a manger. Because they were looking for something different, they missed Him.

Jesus' birth is also a delivery of hope for us today. When Jesus returned to heaven, He promised to come back one day. He promised a life with Him in heaven forever. He promised to help us, comfort us, protect us, and never leave us. We can trust Him. He is faithful. Our hope is in His promises.

..... QUESTIONS .....

What promises do you have hope in today?

How can you have hope in His promises when times are difficult?

..... PRAYER .....

*Advent Prayer of Hope*

*Dear God,*

*Help us be ready when Jesus comes back. Thank you for sending Him to save us from our sin. We admit that we don't always keep our hope. Help our hearts to be full of hope for Jesus' return. Amen.*

..... WEEKLY ACTIVITY .....

*Christmas Cards*

Make homemade Christmas cards together! On the inside of the cards, write Psalm 130:5 (NIRV).

Gather everyone around the table and pass one of the cards around in a circle. Play Christmas music and when the music stops, whoever's holding the card opens it and reads the verse out loud. Resume the music and continue playing as long as interest and time allow. Challenge everyone to memorize the verse or even just the end of it (*I put my hope in His word*) without looking inside the card.

..... PARENT FOCUS .....

**Adults, this is a time for reflection. Post this somewhere you'll see it often.**

*With all my heart I wait for the LORD to help me.  
I put my hope in His word. Psalm 130:5 (NIRV)*

..... QUESTIONS .....

What's the relationship between hoping and waiting?

.....EXTRA ACTIVITIES.....

*Give (K2 and older)*

Ask your kids to pick a person or a charity that they'd like to help. Start with a simple idea. For example, if someone you know is sick, ask them what you can do for them. Maybe as a family, you can make a card to make them smile. Kids will see that they can make a difference when they give of themselves.

*God Will Guide You (K2-Grade 2)*

Create a road out of tape on the carpet. Ask the kids to follow the road with toy cars. Share with them how God guides us when we ask Him.

*God Has a Plan (K5-Grade 5)*

Use yarn to create a zigzag maze from wall to wall. Ask your child to direct another person through the maze. Tell the children that God has a plan for our lives, and we can ask Him for direction.

*Grow Something (K2 and older)*

Plant seeds together and watch them sprout and grow. Consider planting seeds that sprout fast so they come up quickly like cosmos, marigolds, zinnia and sunflowers. Take care of the plants. Seeing plants grow helps develop hope.

*God's peace is everlasting and secure.*

*Real peace can only be found by trusting God.*

The second week of traditional Advent focuses on preparation. Over many centuries, God prepared the hearts of the Jewish people for the coming Messiah, just as He's working in our hearts now to prepare us for Jesus' return.

## .....SCRIPTURE READING .....

### *The Visitation*

Read **Luke 1:39-56 (NirV)**

Mary travels to visit her cousin Elizabeth while they're both expecting babies. Elizabeth had desperately wanted a baby for years. Many people, including Elizabeth, thought she was too old to have a baby. But God blessed her with a child. Even with all that, Elizabeth recognized that Mary's miracle was bigger than her own.

When Mary and Elizabeth greeted each other, Elizabeth's baby inside her jumped. This interaction shows that even though they were not born yet, baby John recognized the power of Jesus and that Jesus was God's Son.

## .....QUESTIONS .....

Elizabeth also recognized Jesus. How do you know this from what you read?

What's your favorite line from Mary's song/prayer?

Do you recognize the peace the young girl  
Mary had about having this baby?

## .....THIS WEEK'S PLAYLIST .....

*Listen to the BrookwoodKiDs Spotify playlist – Peace.*

**Peace Has Come** Hillsong Worship

**His Name is Wonderful** Chris Tomlin

**Peace Upon the Earth** Hillsong Worship

**I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day** Casting Crowns

..... PEACE .....

*A feeling of freedom from worry, anxiety or fear.  
The absence of any conflict.*

*Think Before You Act*

*Materials Needed: Small tube of toothpaste and small plate for each participant.*

**Ask the following questions:**

If the participants have a YES response, they squirt some toothpaste onto their plates. Use these questions and examples or come up with your own.

**Would the following make you angry or frustrated?**

1. Your favorite toy is broken.
2. You saved your favorite dessert and when you go to get it, it's gone.
3. Your car gets hit and the person leaves the accident.
4. Your bike is stolen.
5. You want to stay up later, but you're told, *No*.
6. Someone punches you in the back.
7. You fail a test.
8. No one wants to play what you want to play.
9. You lose the money you've saved.
10. You're tired and must clean up a mess that you didn't make.

Once most of the toothpaste has been squeezed out, ask each participant if they can then put the toothpaste back into the tube. Explain that once the toothpaste comes out of the tube, it is impossible to get it all back in.

*This is much like anger.*

*Once anger comes out, it cannot be taken back.*

**Proverbs 15:1 (NirV)** says, *A gentle answer turns anger away. But mean words stir up anger.* It can be hard to keep the peace in the heat of the moment. God can help us choose peace instead of anger.

**Matthew 5:9 (NirV)** tells us, *Blessed are those who make peace. They will be called children of God.*

Use this acrostic to help you the next time you're angry.

**T** Is it True?

**H** Is it Helpful?

**I** Is it Inspiring?

**N** Is it Necessary?

**K** Is it Kind?

Source: unknown

..... QUESTIONS .....

What is peace?

What does it look like not to have peace?

What is a peacemaker?

Is it better to have peace or the spirit of a peacemaker?

..... DEVOTIONAL .....

Peace. It's a concept that often refers to tranquility or a sense of calm.

The definition of peace is *free from disturbance*. However, in the Bible, Jesus talks about having peace no matter what problems we have in our lives. So, how do we have something *free from disturbance* when we have hard circumstances in our life?

Jesus told His disciples in **John 16:33**. *I have told you these things, so that you can have peace because of Me. In this world you will have trouble. But be encouraged! I have won the battle over the world.*

In this conversation, Jesus explained that He's returning to the Father in Heaven and sending the Holy Spirit. He tells them they'll be sad about what will happen to Him because many will rejoice with the assumed destruction of Jesus and His ministry. Jesus recognizes the pain that His followers will experience, and He still tells them to have peace in Him.

How can they have peace at this moment? The word *peace* that Jesus uses here is the Hebrew word *shalom*. *Shalom* means *completeness or wholeness*. There is no true peace outside of God. Jesus became the *complete and blameless* sacrifice for our sins.

Jesus promised to give His peace to us. Not peace like the world defines it, but peace or wholeness from God through Jesus' death on the cross. His birth was the start of the fulfillment of the promise of our reestablished relationship with God. The ability for God to reside within man through the Holy Spirit and bring peace to our hearts.

Peace during this life won't come through outside circumstances. It comes only as we find security, calmness and wholeness in relationship with God through Jesus. So, even if your life is like a library – quiet, in order, resourceful – OR like a rollercoaster – loud, unpredictable, fast - we can have God's peace by trusting in Him.

..... QUESTIONS .....

Christ's birth was the beginning of what?

How did Christ's death offer peace to the world?

How does it offer peace to you?

..... PRAYER .....

*Loving God,*

*Please remind us in the moments when peace seems far away that You're the ultimate peace. Grant us peace of mind and calm our hearts when we're struggling. Give us the strength to walk the path You've laid out for us. Thank You for sending the Holy Spirit to comfort us when life is hard. Amen.*

..... WEEKLY ACTIVITY .....

*Circle of Love (K4-Grade 5)*

Gather and read aloud **Romans 14:19**.

*So, let us do all we can to live in peace.  
And let us work hard to build up one another.*

**Romans 14:19 (NirV)**

Use construction paper or the template on page 39 to make a flower with a center and separate petals. Ask each person to write their first name in the middle of the flower. Then write the names of people they're at peace with on the petals – Jesus, parents, grandparents, or friends. Talk about the ways they're keeping peace with these people, and how can they make peace with people whose names are not on the petals. Discuss solving disagreements by talking and serving one another instead of using force. Form a circle and say a prayer thanking God for peace. Asking Him to help you be at peace with everyone.

..... QUESTIONS .....

What can we do to stay in a peacemaker mindset before dealing with others?

What can we do to be at peace with the people whose names are missing from our flowers?

What can we do to build up these people?

..... PARENT FOCUS .....

**Adults, this is a time for reflection. Post this somewhere you'll see it often.**

*LORD, You will give perfect peace to those who commit themselves to be faithful to You. That's because they trust in You.*

**Isaiah 26:3 (NirV)**

..... QUESTIONS .....

What stands out to you from this scripture?

What does *commit to be faithful* mean to each of you?

What are ways you can increase your faithfulness to God?

# .....EXTRA ACTIVITIES.....

## *Quiet Time Corner (K4 and older)*

Ask each person in the family to choose a quiet corner. Creating a quiet corner is key in a quiet time place. All it takes is a few pillows or a comfy chair, a window or natural light, maybe a book, a plant, a blanket, or maybe headphones with easy-listening music. The possibilities for a quiet corner are endless.

## *Quiet Time (K4 and older)*

### **Pick a time.**

A set time helps establish a habit.

### **Pick a place.**

Pick somewhere you'll avoid being disturbed like your quiet time corner.

### **Pick the way.**

Read your Bible, listen to music, or talk to God.

### **Start small.**

Try different things and don't give up.

## *Peaceful vs. Noisy Music Comparison (K3-Grade 3)*

Turn on a very peaceful song and listen to it together. When the song is over, invite your kids into the kitchen to grab a baking sheet, pan or other kitchen items as well as a spoon or a whisk to use as instruments. Tell them they can now play their own song!

After they've finished playing their song, gather the items and put them away. Sit down and talk about which song was more peaceful. What made it peaceful? Talk about how God gives us peace so we can be calm, just like in the first song.

## *Balloon Up (K5 and older)*

Using a parachute, blanket or tablecloth, work together to hold it up and keep a balloon in the middle as you move around as one.

*I'm filled with Joy when I spend quality time with God.*

The traditional third week of Advent is about the joyful celebration of the coming of the Messiah. Today's believers are fortunate to have the Old and New Testament to reflect on the joy of our salvation in Jesus Christ.

## .....SCRIPTURE READING .....

*The Preaching of John the Baptist*

Read **John 1:6-8, 19-30 (NirV)**

John the Baptist is baptizing people in the Jordan River. This means that he was preparing the people for the arrival of the Son of God. John the Baptist told the people that he was baptizing them with water, but that he was not good enough to untie the sandal of the One who will come after him.

John the Baptist was always looking forward to the coming of Jesus. He was very excited to meet the Savior who would come to save us from our sins. In this Christmas season, we should be like John the Baptist, very eager to meet our Savior at His second coming.

## .....QUESTIONS .....

How does John prepare the way for Jesus?

How can we prepare our hearts for Jesus to come?

What brings you joy?

## .....THIS WEEK'S PLAYLIST .....

*Listen to the BrookwoodKiDs Spotify playlist – Joy.*

**Joy** New Wine Worship

**What a Beautiful Name** Hillsong Worship

**Joy** Planetshakers

**Joy in the Morning** Tauren Wells

## JOY

*a feeling of happiness, excitement and peace  
that does not just depend on your circumstances,  
but on the presence of Jesus in your life.*

We can easily focus on the negatives in our lives, getting stuck and forgetting all the positives. When we feel overwhelmed by the negatives, we can also lose sight of what's important to us. Offset this by deliberately taking time to focus on the positives.

Sharing the positives, or the things that bring us joy with others, has many benefits. We create strong connections, and we remind ourselves what's truly important. We're creating new habits and changing our brains to scan for the positives rather than gravitating toward the negatives.

Give each participant a blank piece of paper. Ask them to take 5 minutes to write down as many specific things as they can think of that bring them joy.

For example, instead of writing vacation, write what you specifically like about your vacation, such as being out of school and off work, visiting a new place or a familiar one, swimming in the lake, etc.

Don't forget to list small things as well: waffles in the morning, listening to the rain on the back porch, and the friend who always greets you with a smile in the morning.

Encourage everyone to take note of the small things throughout their day that brings them joy. Ultimately, we can have joy in all circumstances if Jesus is our Savior.

## QUESTIONS

What new habits can you begin this week to help you focus on the joy that God has given His children?

When you're struggling to find joy, what can you do to change your outlook?

In what ways do you think you need to ask God to help you focus on joy?

How is God using you to help spread joy?

## ..... DEVOTIONAL .....

There are two types of joy – superficial joy and deep, abiding joy.

Superficial joy comes from our circumstances. We get an A on the test, buy a new car, receive an answer to prayer, then we're overjoyed. Pleasure and happiness fill our thoughts and our hearts. We celebrate, smile and triumph without effort.

The deep and abiding joy often confuses people. This is cheerfulness in the middle of the darkest days and hardest trials. It's not a response to life's circumstances but comes from personal intimacy with and knowledge of God.

Think of Paul who rejoiced despite suffering, and David who praised God while being chased by enemies. Even within the Christmas story, there's rejoicing. Mary was delighted that God chose her to carry the Messiah. But why would Mary rejoice? She was unmarried and young. Her reputation would be marred. The angels rejoiced when Jesus was born. Why would the angels rejoice when Christ left heaven, was bound by time and space and came to earth to suffer and die? These were not very happy circumstances.

Even then, each of them looked past their outward situations, to something greater. Paul grew closer to Christ. David trusted God had a plan for him and would keep His promises. Mary saw the fulfillment of God's promise of a Savior for her people. The angels saw the decisive defeat over Satan. And so, they each endured, just as Jesus would one day endure. They endured the trials for future joy.

Look past the pain to the joy that God has promised you. Jesus' birth is a reminder that God keeps His promises. Your pain will not be forever. One day it will be wiped away, never to return!

*For now, in the time of waiting,  
the joy of the Lord will carry you through.*

## ..... QUESTIONS .....

What trials are you facing today?

Is there joy when you ask your kids for help?

How are you looking past your trials to the promised joy?

Does God keep His promises?

.....PRAYER.....

*Father,*

*You've promised that You won't give us more than we can handle. Help us remember that we do not bear hardships alone. You're with us and will help us endure all that we face. Thank You for loving us, Lord. In Your name, we pray. Amen.*

.....WEEKLY ACTIVITIES.....

*Filled with Joy (K5 and older)*

Gather your supplies: Balloons, Sharpie, Baking Soda, Vinegar, Plastic Water Bottle, Tablespoon, Funnel (optional, but very helpful), Safety Glasses

Ask each person to use the Sharpie to write their name on a balloon. (The balloon represents them.)

Fill the empty water bottle about 1/3 full of vinegar (The vinegar represents the Holy Spirit at work in their heart).

Insert the funnel into the opening of the balloon and scoop a spoonful of baking soda into the funnel to fill the inside of the balloon (The baking soda represents spending time getting to know God. Talk about ways to do this – reading His Word, pray, worship, etc.)

Attach the balloon to the plastic water bottle filled with vinegar. (Be careful not to get the baking soda into the bottle yet.)

Slowly lift the balloon and watch what happens next! The Holy Spirit fills us with joy when we spend time getting to know God. Joy comes from being with God which means you can be joyful even in unhappy moments.

*Dark Hide and Seek (K4 and older)*

Play hide and seek in the dark, inside or outside if it's not too cold. Even in the dark times, God can see us and He's there with us. He'll walk alongside us in the times when we need help.

## *Bananagrams® (Grade 2 and older)*

Bananagrams® is like a fast-moving, free-form game of Scrabble®, where you have a set number of letter tiles, and you make as many words with them as quickly as you can. The twist in Bananagrams® is that when you run out of letters, you draw a mystery letter from the bunch – but every time you draw a letter, everyone else needs to as well!

The language of this game is joyful. You yell *Split* to start the game, *Peel* when you need another letter, and *Bananas* when you've used all your tiles. It's fast-paced so it's easy to fit in a ten-minute round while waiting for dinner or between other activities. It's also incredibly portable, which makes it great for a picnic or other outdoor excursion. You can also make it a little harder and only use words that bring you joy.

## .....PARENT FOCUS.....

**Adults, this is a time for reflection. Post this somewhere you'll see it often.**

*But I will still be glad because of what the LORD has done.*

*God my Savior fills me with joy.*

**Habakkuk 3:18 (NIRV)**

## .....QUESTIONS.....

What causes you to rejoice?

What do you think it means to rejoice in the Lord?

What about salvation that brings you joy?

In what aspects of life do you need the joy that's only found through God?

What truths about God speak to your heart today?

## .....EXTRA ACTIVITIES.....

### *Share Your Joy (K5 and older)*

How can you bring joy to others this week?  
Create a plan to share Jesus with others!

### *Smile (K2 and older)*

One of the easiest ways to bring joy to others is to smile at them. When others show us a genuine, kind smile, we feel relaxed and energized and want to smile back.

### *Give a Compliment (K4 and older)*

When was the last time you received a compliment? When was the last time that compliment was from a stranger? Try to give compliments to people you see.

### *Help Someone Out (K5 and older)*

Whether it's your best friend, your neighbor or a total stranger, bring others joy by helping them. Ask them how you can help improve their day or look for ways they might need help, especially when they're not comfortable asking. Make a conscious effort to consistently support others in need.

### *Write a Note (Grade 1 and older)*

Of course, when someone helps you, write a thank you note. Nowadays, genuine, handwritten notes are few and far between. Show someone how much they mean to you by writing, stamping and sending a real, handwritten note.

### *Spend Time with Someone (K5 and older)*

Many people experience love through spending quality time together. Show people in your life how much they mean to you by spending time with them. Spending time with others is the perfect way to bring them joy.

*God loves each of us as if we were the only ones to love.*

The final traditional Advent week is all about reflecting on how we can prepare our hearts and homes for celebrating Jesus' birth.

## .....SCRIPTURE READING .....

### *The Nativity*

Read **Luke 2:4-15 (NirV)**

As we read through the well-known Nativity account celebrated year after year and as we sing praises that tell of His glorious birth, may we never stop being amazed and curious at God's perfect timing to advance His plan of redemption for the glory of His name.

## .....QUESTIONS .....

What surprises you about how Jesus was born?

How do you think the shepherds felt when the host of angels appeared?

What gift would you have brought Jesus?

## .....THIS WEEK'S PLAYLIST .....

*Listen to the BrookwoodKiDs Spotify playlist – Love.*

**Midnight Clear** Chris Tomlin

**Somewhere in Your Silent Night** Casting Crowns

**Miracle of Love** Chris Tomlin

**Love One Another** Newsboys

**Unending Love** Hillsong

.....LOVE.....

*Tender affection for someone, a feeling of personal attachment concern for another's well-being, to take great pleasure in, to be unconcerned with self, concerned with the good of another.*

Read the Christmas story in **Luke 2:1-40 (NIRV)**.

*Consider how each of the main characters experienced or demonstrated love:*

**Mary**

**Joseph**

**Jesus**

**Shepherds**

**Angels**

**Simeon**

**Anna**

**People in Jerusalem**

.....QUESTIONS.....

**How have you experienced love from Jesus and others?**

**How have you demonstrated love from Jesus?**

**How have you demonstrated love from others?**

**How have you demonstrated love for Jesus?**

.....DEVOTIONAL.....

*Here is my command. Love one another, just as I have loved you.*

**John 15:12 (NIRV)**

Many years ago, lived a woman named Lottie Moon. She grew up in a Christian home, went to church to learn about Jesus, and became a follower of Jesus. Lottie had six brothers and sisters. One of Lottie's sisters, Edmonia, was a missionary in China. Edmonia sent letters to Lottie and they helped her come to love the Chinese people. Lottie soon decided that she also wanted to become a missionary to China.

Lottie went to college to become a teacher and then went to China to help her sister teach the kids in China. When she arrived in China, Lottie started a school that taught boys and girls to read the Bible. At first, the Chinese children were not sure of Lottie. To help the kids trust her, Lottie decided to bake some cookies, but it didn't work. They were afraid to eat the cookies because they were fearful that they might be poisoned. One day, one of the boys was hungry, and he decided to try one of the cookies. When he didn't get sick, the other children decided to try them too. Lottie became known as the cookie lady. As the kids ate the cookies, they would talk with Lottie, hear Bible stories, and learn to read.

Why do you think Lottie loved the Chinese children so much? She believed what Jesus taught His disciples. Jesus said, "Love one another as I have loved you." How much did Jesus love us? He loved us so much that He gave His life for us. Lottie loved the children of China so much that she dedicated her life to teaching them how to read and write. And, more importantly, she taught them about Jesus and His love.

Jesus loves you too, and He wants you to love others as He loved you. How can you show the love of Jesus to other people? Maybe you could bake cookies for someone who is sad or lonely.

God wants all of us to be missionaries – like Lottie Moon – but you don't have to go to China to be a missionary. You can be a missionary right where you live! Think about someone whom you can bake cookies for this week.

### *Plain Tea Cakes Recipe*

2 cups of flour

1 heaping cup of sugar

1 TBSP cream

½ cup of butter

1 well-beaten egg

*Cream the butter and sugar. Add the egg and mix well. Add the flour and cream. Dust a board with flour and roll the dough very thin. Cut cookies with a round cookie cutter. Place on a greased or nonstick cookie sheet and bake at 475 degrees for about 5 minutes.*

## ..... QUESTIONS .....

How can you be missionaries in your area?

How can you show love to others?

How can we love those who are hard to love?

.....PRAYER.....

*Dear Lord,*

*Thank You for sending Your Son to this world so we can believe in Him. Thank You for providing hope and a path to a relationship with You. Help us love others who don't know You, so we can share the Good News of Jesus' arrival this Christmas season. Amen.*

.....WEEKLY ACTIVITY.....

*Giving Back to the Community*

One way to teach your children about love is to encourage them to show love and compassion beyond their circle of family and friends. You can facilitate this by serving the less fortunate in the community. Volunteer opportunities are plentiful, such as serving meals at a soup kitchen, donating toys and clothes to help families who don't have as much as you do, and more. Brookwood also has opportunities for families to volunteer together. Through these initiatives, you can talk to your child about how they feel led to spread love and happiness.

.....PARENT FOCUS.....

**Adults, this is a time for reflection. Post this somewhere you'll see it often.**

*The LORD your God is with you. He is the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you. In His love, He will no longer punish you. Instead, He will sing for joy because of you.*

**Zephaniah 3:17 (NirV)**

.....QUESTIONS.....

As your heart fills with love for God, how do you want to respond?  
(rejoice, bow down, exalt, worship, create, delight in, etc.)

How are you going to show love to  
someone outside your family this week?

## .....EXTRA ACTIVITIES.....

### *Stars of Love (K2-Grade 2)*

Buy four different color star stickers like those used on school papers. Use one color per letter to spell out the word LOVE. Hang this somewhere where everyone can see it as a reminder of God's commandment to love one another, just as He loves you.

### *Love Bears (K5-Grade 5)*

Use the template on page 40 to complete this activity. You're going to write the words listed below inside each of the corresponding letters.

L-Bears all things

O-Believes all things

V-Hopes all things

E-Endures all things

Add **never fails** on the bottom of the page. Allow each person to make it their own with different colors, paper type, fonts, etc.

### *I Love You (K1-K5)*

Stories are tools for explaining abstract concepts and emotions. Read one of the following stories at bedtime as a family.

*Guess How Much I Love You* by Sam McBratney illustrates the love of a parent towards their child.

*Lost and Found* by Oliver Jeffers tells the tale of a boy who finds, then loses his penguin friend, which can lead to conversations about the importance of love and friendship.

### *Love in Action*

Call a friend you haven't spoken to in a while.

Visit a neighbor who lives alone.

Bring something special to your local homeless shelter.

Say a prayer for a different person each day.

*True love was born in a manger.*

Christmas time is one of the most wonderful times of the year. Here are some Christmas Bible verses you can read on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

.....SCRIPTURE READING.....

Prophecies are predictions of something to come. Jesus is prophesied throughout the Old Testament. Isaiah is a book in the Old Testament written 700 years before Jesus' birth and contains prophecies about a coming Messiah. Isaiah 53 is one of the most known prophecies in the Bible. It speaks of one known as the *suffering servant*, who suffers because of the sins of others. Jesus fulfills this prophecy through His death on the cross.

*Isaiah 9:6 (NIRV)*

This verse is all about Jesus. God gave His Son to pay for our sins, and *this child is born* for the rising and fall of many (Luke 2:34 NIRV), and in time, all the world will be under His power and authority because Jesus was born to be a King, and so He is the ...*Wonderful Adviser, Mighty God, Father who lives forever, Prince who will bring Peace.*

*Luke 2:11-12 (NIRV)*

Luke records the historical fact and fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 9:6 NIRV) that Jesus was born as *Christ the Lord*, born in Bethlehem. This was given as a sign that they would *find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger*, and unsurprisingly, every word of God was fulfilled as just prophesied. As it was, *there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby. It was night, and they were taking care of their sheep.* (Luke 2:8 NIRV) The shepherds came to witness this historical event.

*Matthew 1:21 (NIRV)*

The Bible prophesied that Jesus would not only be born into the flesh but would also endure our sins. Jesus' name means *Savior* and He would be born to give His life as redemption for many (Mark 10:45 NIRV). He came to save those who would trust in Him and to *give His life as the price for setting many people free.*

### *Isaiah 7:14 (NIRV)*

Again, Isaiah's focus is on Jesus being born in a lowly, humble state by a virgin who would conceive and bear a Son...the Son of God, and since He was God with us, they shall call *his name Immanuel*, which means *God with us*. God is still with us through Jesus. Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14, writing, *The virgin is going to have a baby. She will give birth to a Son. And He will be called Immanuel.* The name Immanuel means *God with us*. (Matthew 1:23 NIRV).

### *John 1:14 (NIRV)*

Jesus emptied Himself of His glory for a time to become flesh, being born into the likeness of men. Jesus as the Word of God became flesh to pay for the sins of those who follow Him, and He will dwell among us and be in us, the children of God.

### *Matthew 2:2 (NIRV)*

The Wise Men traveled thousands of miles to find the King, and it was Jesus Christ, who was born *king of the Jews*. He would also be King over all who would follow Him, repenting for their sins and putting their trust in Him. Therefore it was declared by the angels; *"May glory be given to God in the highest heaven! And may peace be given to those He is pleased with on earth!"* (Luke 2:14 NIRV)! Why? It was *"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord."* (Luke 2:11 NIRV).

### *Isaiah 11:1 (NIRV)*

Paul records Christ's arrival too: *But then the chosen time came. God sent His Son. A woman gave birth to Him. He was born under the authority of the law. He came to set free those who were under the authority of the law. He wanted us to be adopted as children...* (Galatians 4:4-6 NIRV). Jesus came during a time when people were searching for the Savior, however, the religious leaders demanded the Jews follow a multitude of rules (the law), but they didn't emphasize a relationship with God. They did not realize that this relationship could only come through Jesus Christ (John 6:44; Acts 4:12 NIRV).

## ..... QUESTIONS .....

What is a prophet?

What are the names Jesus is called in Isaiah 9:6 (NirV)?

How do you think the wise men (Matthew 2:2 NirV) felt when they found what was prophesied in Isaiah 9:6 (NirV)?

Why does Matthew 1:21 (NirV) say Jesus came to earth?

What is sin?

## .... FAMILY FUN FOR CHRISTMAS EVE ....

### *Go Look at Christmas Lights*

Christmas Eve is the perfect time to look at Christmas light displays in your community. Make some hot cocoa or warm apple cider for everyone, grab some fresh-baked cookies and listen to Christmas music while you drive or walk around.

### *Have a Special Christmas Eve Dinner*

Food is the basis of so many family traditions, so why not Christmas Eve? Make it your tradition. Here are some ideas: Fondue, Chinese take-out and homemade pizzas.

### *Play a Family Game*

Game time is the perfect way to set the tone of family togetherness. If you have a favorite family game, then Christmas Eve is a wonderful time to get together and play.

### *Watch a Special Christmas Movie*

Almost every family has a particular Christmas movie everyone loves. Whatever that movie is for you, get cozy, make some popcorn, and settle in for your Christmas Eve movie night!

### *Create a Christmas Eve Box*

What is a Christmas Eve box? It's a designated box that you can reuse every year with some little treats for the kids. You can make your own with a crate or go all in with a personalized, wooden Christmas Eve Box that will last for years.

Ideas of items to put in the box: Christmas pajamas, a Christmas book, a little treat/candy/popcorn, and a hot cocoa mix with a special mug. Basically, a few little things for the kids to enjoy during your Christmas Eve family night!

## ..... CHRISTMAS DAY PRAYER.....

*Lord,*

*First, we thank You for this day, the celebration of Jesus' birth, for our family and our friends, for the gift of grace that heaven gives, and for the countless blessings You provide. Thank you, Jesus, for them all. For the great ones and the small ones. When we're happy, when we're sad. On the good days and the bad. We are grateful, and we are glad. Amen.*

## ..... EXTRA ACTIVITIES.....

### *Read the Christmas Story in the Bible*

Reading the story of Christ's birth is a wonderful way to celebrate Christmas. A lot of times Christmas day is filled with presents, visiting family and everything that goes along with a big dinner. So, it's a good idea to take time before the action-packed day to soak in what the holiday is all about. If you have smaller children, you can read from a Children's Bible like *The Jesus Storybook Bible* to make it more kid friendly.

### *Mary and Joseph (Grade 5 and older)*

For older children, read Matthew 1:18-25 and then discuss:

How do you think Mary, a virgin, felt when she discovered she was pregnant?

How do you think Joseph felt when he learned of Mary's pregnancy?

Why did Joseph and Mary have the courage to believe God and suffer ridicule from others?

Who did they (and you) turn to when life wasn't what they anticipated?

Why can we always trust God even when His ways are different from ours?

### *Cupcake Party (K2 and older)*

Bake cupcakes and decorate them together. Sing Happy Birthday to Jesus or talk through why Jesus was born and His death for our sins. Thank Jesus for His gift.

*The New Year is Here!*

.....ONE WORD FOR THE YEAR.....

One Word is a movement encouraging us to forget New Year's resolutions. Instead pray and ask God to give you one word to focus on every day, for an entire year. This one word sums up who God wants you to be or how He wants you to live. Below are three steps to help you find the one word God has for you this year. *You can do this individually and as a family.*

.....LOOKING FORWARD.....

After looking back, it's time to turn our look forward into the New Year. It's helpful to have a few weeks to process between looking back and looking forward. It allows perspective, allows us time to think through ideas, and offers a slower transition into the new, instead of diving in headfirst.

If you're just starting to think about the New Year and a new word, that's great. Don't feel like you have to know your word by January 1. You won't lose ground or miss out on anything if you take the time to pray, think and listen. You can easily take the month of January to decide on your new word and then get going with it in February.

*Activities*

Take New Year's Day to talk to God about things you want Him to do in you. Discuss activities, events and growth you want to experience as a family and things you want to accomplish this year.

Sleep in and then have a big meal together, whether it's breakfast, lunch or dinner. Have a gift for everyone to use throughout the new year to help keep track of what God is doing. A journal with special writing utensils, a sketch pad and colored pencils, something that's geared for each person.

## .... HOW TO FIND YOUR ONE WORD ....

Here are some ideas. Use what works for you. Tweak it to fit your family.

*Find Definitions.* Use a dictionary and a Bible dictionary. But also get definitions from others - authors, pastors, friends, etc. Then sit with those definitions. Look up words that are in the definition itself. You should end up with a full-bodied definition.

*Look up Synonyms.* Use a thesaurus to find these. Then look up their definitions too. The more you can add to your understanding of the interconnecting ideas of related words, the greater understanding you'll have.

*Scriptures.* Search online to identify key verses or passages. Keep your eyes open for a word or related ideas as you read or listen to sermons. Find a verse or passage to memorize. The goal is to sit with the scripture God leads you to until it has spoken to your heart.

*Read.* Find books related to the word itself or the idea of your word. For example, there aren't many books about delight. But it IS a delight to read or listen to a book just for the pleasure of doing so. Also, look for online articles or blogs on the topic.

*Quotes.* Keep your eyes and ears open as you go throughout your days. God will give you bits of knowledge and understanding connected to your word. You may find them in the things you read, in a sermon you hear, in a conversation, and in that still small voice that only you can hear. Let them help change your heart.

### *Record Your Insights.*

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This can be as regular (or irregular) and as formal (or relaxed) as you want it to be. Write down *aha* moments. Record changes that you see. Capture answers to prayer or shiftings of your soul. Doing this along the way will allow you to look back and see all that God did in you during the year.

## ..LOOKING BACK ON THE YEAR: REFLECT..

Depending on your personality, you're probably either amazed at what was accomplished during the year (no matter how small) or annoyed (because there's always more to do). The beauty though is that God doesn't look at us from either perspective.

God does, however, celebrate the ways you've grown closer to Him. The times you trusted Him instead of trusting yourself. The times you ran to Him instead of running away. The times you submitted to His will instead of fighting for your will. He celebrates the ways your heart and mind have changed to be more like Jesus during the year.

This is the key to looking back and reflecting on the past year. Think about what God has done, not what you've done, and identify how your heart and mind have changed.

*Here are some questions to help:*

What did your word teach you about yourself?

Did that knowledge cause you to draw closer to God?

What did your word teach you about God?

Did this knowledge affect your closeness with him?

How has God used your word to change the way you think about life?

How has God used your word to change you?

## ..... LOOKING BACK: CELEBRATE .....

If you take time to reflect on these questions, you'll see that change occurred in your life. It might not be what you hoped for, but it's progress. God was at work and when God works, He changes us in ways that are more meaningful than changes we make on our own.

Aspects of your word may have irritated you during the year, or challenges may have come while you lived out your word. It's easy to let our minds lock onto those aspects, but when we do, we diminish the good things that happen, and we can feel disheartened.

Instead, dwell on what was good, what God taught you, and what changed in your life, and then celebrate those things!

### *Activities*

On New Year's Eve, focus on all that God has done in the past year for you and your family. Have each person write down what they remember. Use photos, social media posts, and memories to help everyone. Have dinner together and share the memories and blessings.

Stay up, watch the countdown, and ring in the New Year. If staying up is not a possibility for your family, then be creative. Choose a country that will jump into the New Year earlier. Make an appetizer or dish from that country for your dinner. Use one of their customs or watch online and ring in the new year with them.

# Please



# Thank You



*Your Bill*

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*Total*



THANKFUL

*Your Bill*

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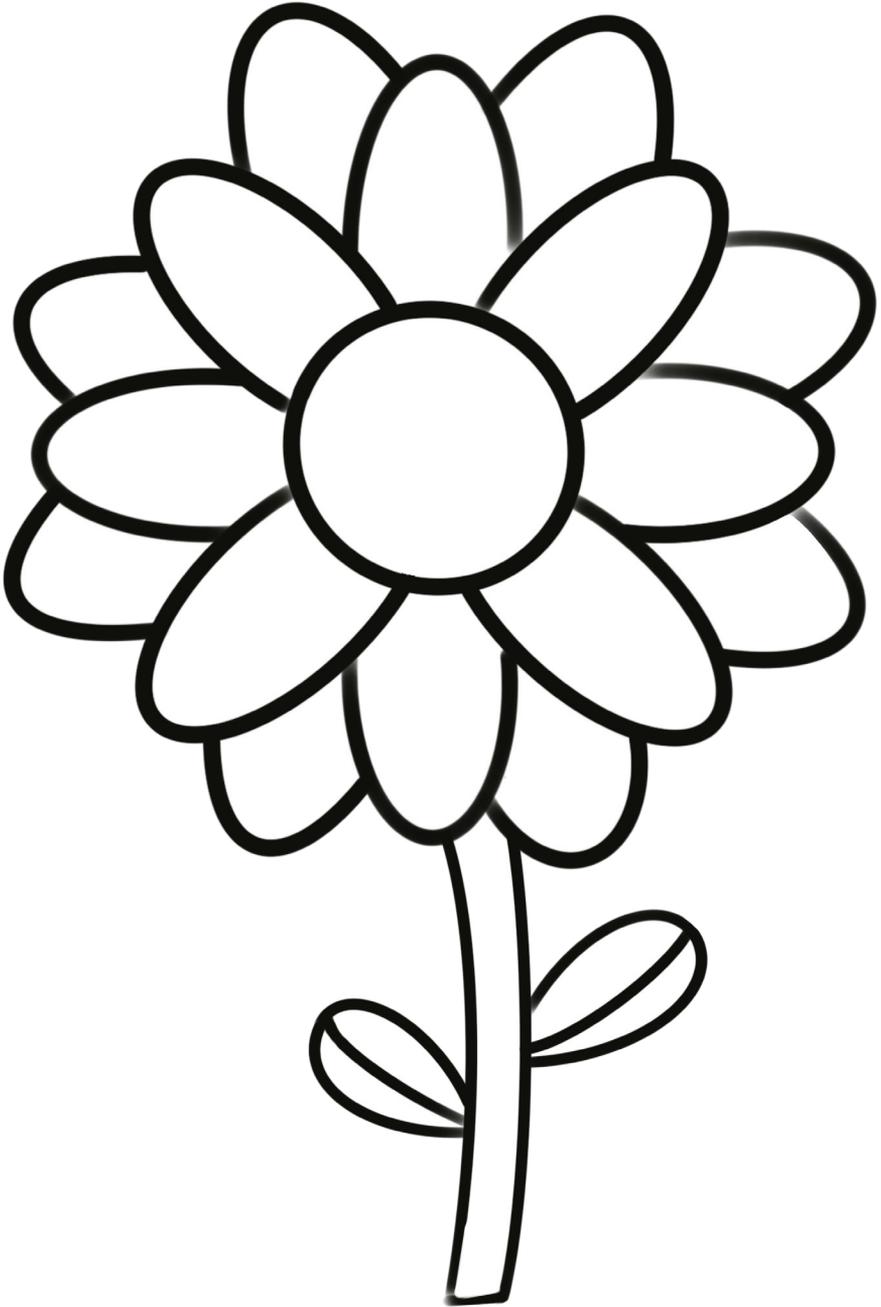
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THANKFUL



LOVE