



Advent Virtues (NextSunday Studies)

Eric Porterfield

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The phrase “holiday rush” is not an exaggeration. The frantic pace required to purchase gifts, bake holiday foods, and attend Christmas parties, plays, and performances takes its toll; we arrive at Christmas Day exhausted. Within the context of December busyness, the ancient Christian season of Advent takes on new meaning and acquires renewed importance. Amid the holiday rush, observing the season of Advent creates an inward calm. When we approach the four weeks before Christmas as opportunities for reflection on Christ’s birth, and when we put ourselves in the shoes of the Israelites long ago as they longed for the Messiah to come, we keep ourselves focused on what really matters in our lives. We also make ourselves open to God’s transforming power, so that the Advent season becomes a time not just of giving and receiving but of becoming more of who God desires us to be. The church has traditionally assigned four virtues to each of the four Sundays in Advent: hope, peace, joy, and love. Our lessons during Advent will explore these virtues. On the Sunday after Christmas, we complete the unit with a lesson on faith. What would your holiday season look like if you sought to practice these virtues during Advent? Two elements are essential to each of these virtues: trust in God and attention to neighbor. Our only hope for practicing hope, peace, joy, and love, and the only basis for faith, is the trustworthiness and faithfulness of God. Because God keeps promises and loves us beyond anything we can comprehend, we can attempt to live by these virtues. In the same manner, since God loves us we can also love our neighbors, giving them our attention as we listen and serve. We serve neighbors because of our *hope*, we work for *peace* when we serve our neighbors, we experience *joy* in the context of loving God and loving neighbor, we express *love* for our God when we love our neighbor, and the greatest testimony of our *faith* is found in the way we live our faith among and for our neighbors. May God instill these virtues in each of us this Advent, not in spite of the busyness of the season, but in the very midst of the hustle and bustle as we love God and love our neighbors.

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