



ADVENT INTRODUCTION

Each week we kindle a new light. Each day, in this countdown toward Christmas, we meditate on the courage and conviction that causes us to renew that flame again and again and again.

The theme of each week offers us a gift of preparedness to live in this world, in these times. They help us understand how to both anticipate and invite the presence of Christ's light within us, among us, and around us.

Advent, rather than being experienced as a passive season of waiting for the arrival of God's renewed presence, is a period of readiness. We cultivate spiritual practices, ethical principles and worldly applications that contribute to bringing light into this world.

In this devotional, as you light Advent candles each day, we invite you to meditate on the blessings of Advent: hope, peace, joy and love. — *Rev Gail*



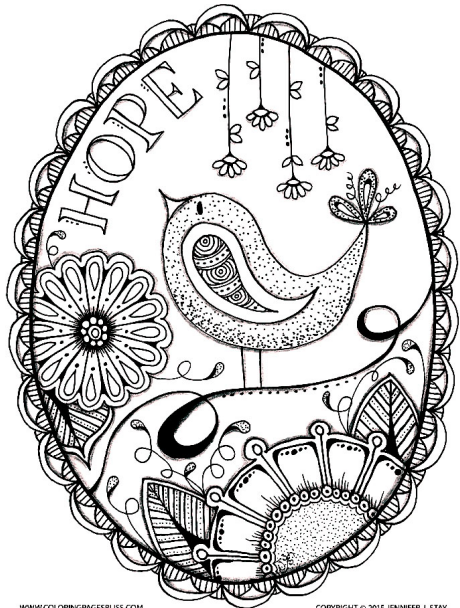
WEEK of HOPE

“Hope” is the thing with feathers — *Emily Dickinson*

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

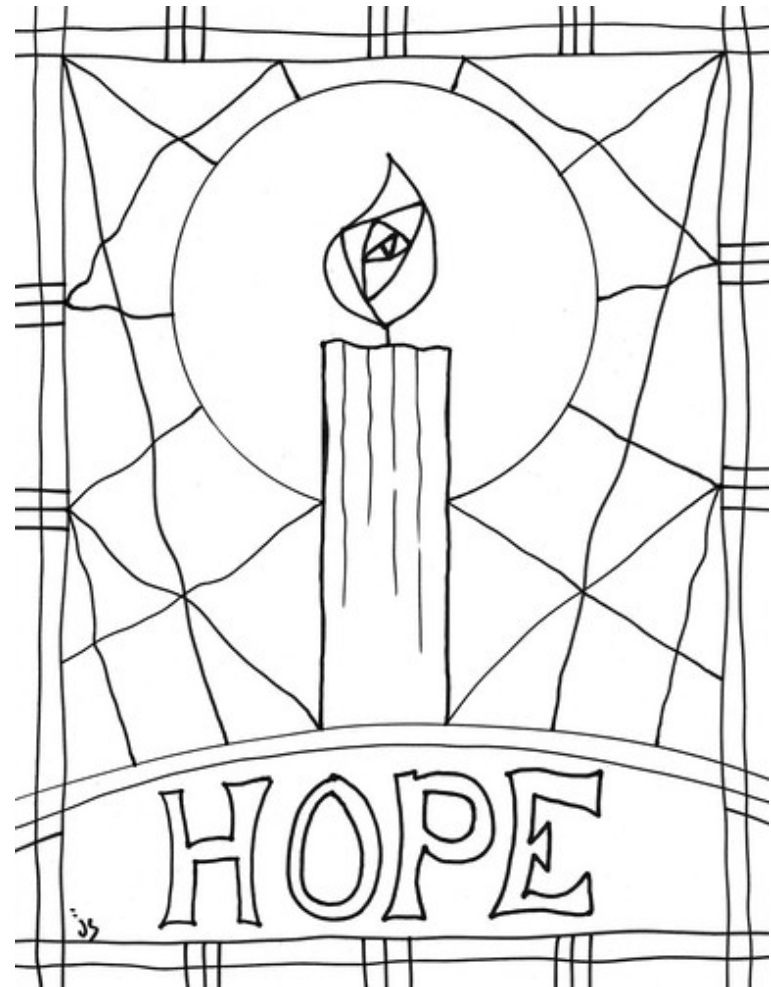
And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chilliest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.



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Sun, Nov 29 – DAY 1

The candles are new: purple, pink and white. The wicks curl away, pale, unburnt. The blue-tipped match is poised to ignite when we strike it. Everything is possible as we begin our rituals today.

Think of today — the beginning of this season — as a new page, a fresh start, or a blank canvas. Recognize the present moment as a gift of potential: time upon which you may write your story. What will you inscribe here? What tale will you tell? What song will you write, poem lift up, image create? What next right thing will you choose to say or do today? — *REV Gail*

Blessing of Hope

— *Jan Richardson*

So may we know the hope
that is not just for someday
but for this day—
here, now, in this moment that opens to us:
hope not made of wishes, but of substance,
hope made of sinew and muscle and bone,
hope that has breath and a beating heart,
hope that will not keep quiet and be polite,
hope that knows how to holler
when it is called for,
hope that knows how to sing
when there seems little cause,
hope that raises us from the dead—
not someday but this day, every day,
again and again and again.



And now, O Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in you.
— *Psalms 39:7*

You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope. — *Thomas Merton*

In the middle of it, the future looks blank. The temptation to quit is huge. Don't. You are in good company... You will argue with yourself that there is no way forward. But with God, nothing is impossible. He has more ropes and ladders and tunnels out of pits than you can conceive. Wait. Pray without ceasing. Hope. — *John Piper*

The very least you can do in your life is figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live right in it, under its roof. — *Barbara Kingsolver*

Mon, Nov 30 – DAY 2

Perhaps you light the candles in a darkened room or as the sun drops beneath the horizon. The gloaming gathers. You watch the heightened contrast as the flame burns.

In that moment, become aware both of the surrounding twilight and the flickering light. Both light and its opposite — the darkness — are gifts. Each reveals some aspect of our humanity. Each allows vulnerability and calls upon strength. Each nurtures new life.

Within the deep, fecund dormancy of winter, extended sleep precipitates renewal until spring arrives. With every day, sun offers its essential contribution to the cycle of death and rebirth. Hope thrives both in the darkness and the light. — *Rev Gail*

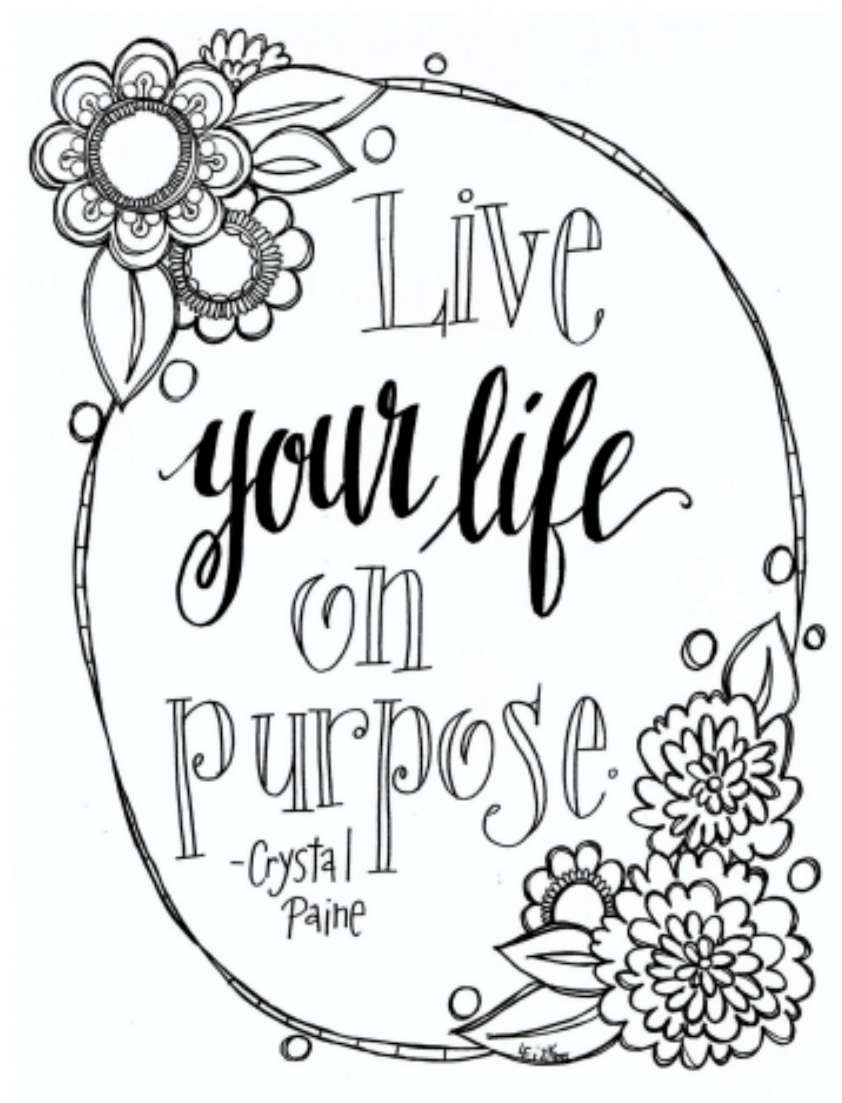
You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word. — *Psalms 119:114*

O hope of Israel, its savior in time of trouble, why should you be like a stranger in the land, like a traveler turning aside for the night? — *Jeremiah 14:8*

Hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: you don't give up.
— *Anne Lamott*

Hope is the dream of a soul awake. — *French proverb*



**Tue, Dec 1 – DAY 3**

The first Advent candle has melted slightly. Been put to use. It stands upright as it reaches toward heaven, yet remains rooted in its secure place. Between its certainty of position and its daring rise, it fulfills its purpose.

Hope grows out of a sense of purpose. Any human, at any age, may make a difference in the world. See something that needs to be changed or accomplished. Name it. Approach it. Address it. Find others who are also passionate about a similar cause. Build relationships so that more can happen by learning and working together.

Consider your passions and how they lead you to a calling in your life. If you remain uncertain about the 'why' in your life, this season offers a wonderful time to pray and listen, to invite awareness about your particular passions and purpose. Celebrate how passion and purpose manifests as the light of hope that burns within you. — *Rev Gail*

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. — *Jeremiah 29:11*

They say a person needs just three things to be truly happy in this world: someone to love, something to do, and something to hope for. — *Tom Bodett*

Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose. — *Viktor Frankl*

Wed, Dec 2 – DAY 4

Patience comes as a form of discipline as we look toward Christmas. It builds up the muscles of hope.

Whatever is coming, it isn't here just yet. Whatever we anticipate, imagine and envision, it is still a work in progress. Yet here we are: in this time and place. What can we do with it? How can we fully experience it?

Patience helps us become okay with finding simple, achievable measures for our time, energy and human connections. Maybe it means using postage stamps and handwriting notes, versus using texts and email. Crafting our own gift instead of buying one. Cooking from scratch versus buying a prepared meal. Walking instead of driving. Finding one next action, one next step, one next choice or word to move along.

This spiritual practice counteracts the expectation for instant gratification. Patience requires that we pace ourselves. Doing so, we lay the groundwork for the next steps in our connections with others and our accomplishment of goals.

While hope relies on willingness to pursue dreams by making plans, it also requires being present to what is happening at this time, in this place. Choose manageable steps, and work on objectives day by day. Tomorrow will be here soon enough, but the only day you're sure to have is this one.

Savor this time, appreciate it, immerse yourself in it. Part of patience — a bridge builder for hope — begins with accepting where and when you are in this moment, and taking full advantage of all that it offers. — *Rev Gail*

But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. — *Isaiah 40:31*

Hope lies in dreams, in imagination, and in the courage of those who dare to make dreams into reality. — *Jonas Salk*

Few things in the world are more powerful than a positive push. A smile. A world of optimism and hope. A 'you can do it' when things are tough. — *Richard M. DeVos*

A lot of people have their big dreams and get knocked down and don't have things go their way. And you never give up hope, and you really just hold on to it. Hard work and perseverance. You just keep getting up and getting up, and then you get that breakthrough. — *Robert Kraft*



Thurs, Dec 3 – DAY 5

Hope fosters comfort with stillness and silence, as aspects of not-knowing. In these times, we're enduring personal pressures and communal, national and global stresses.

Hope supports resilience in a culture that offers round-the-clock data feeds. We give ourselves permission to unplug and turn down the noise. We need this capacity in any era, but certainly in these times, when our culture promotes 24/7 access to information and each other, with exaggerated extremes of emotion and perspective.

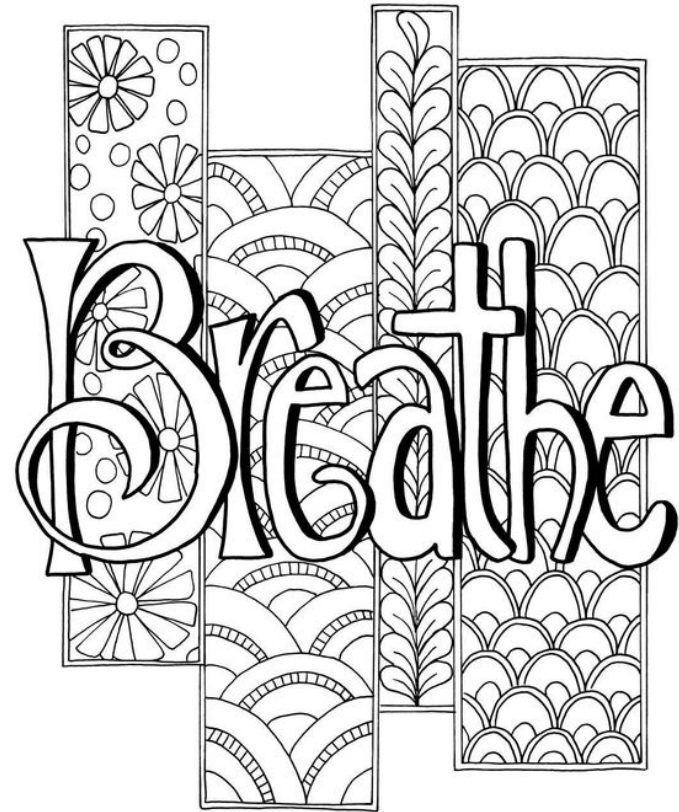
What if we slow it all down? Sometimes the constant stimulation provides a false sense of certainty. It also mimics intimacy.

Hope invites us into a time that can be quiet. It allows us to cope with lack of information. It enables us to wait to find out what comes next. It assures us that we will manage, when even when we do not or cannot know the answer.

Hope allows us to stay centered and become comfortable with our own company. We learn to trust ourselves and each other, without external stimulation. We learn to catch our breath, and listen actively to the stillness rather than yearning for noise. And find out that in the stillness, we may come to learn and know more than we expected. — *Rev Gail*

He says, "Be still, and know that I am God." — *Psalms 46:10*

Do not lose hope — what you seek will be found ... Trust those that you have helped to help you in their turn. Trust dreams. Trust your heart, and trust your story. — *Neil Gaiman*



If you re-channel those energies into being aware of what is going on in the present moment, you will be able to make a breakthrough and discover joy and peace right in the present moment, inside of yourself and all around you.

— *Thich Nhat Hahn*

The spiritual task of life is to feed hope. Hope is not something to be found outside of us. It lies in the spiritual life we cultivate within. — *Joan Chittister*

Dum spiro, spero: While I breath, I hope. — *Latin proverb*

Fri, Dec 4 – DAY 6

Hope often involves learning from our experiences. Gaining insight from our past, the hard parts and the good ones, and putting them to use.

Hope is controlling the one thing we're able to affect: our own response to whatever has already happened and what is happening now. How will we react? What will we do with what is going on? How will we make meaning from it, and transform it into something that gives us energy, power, and motivation?

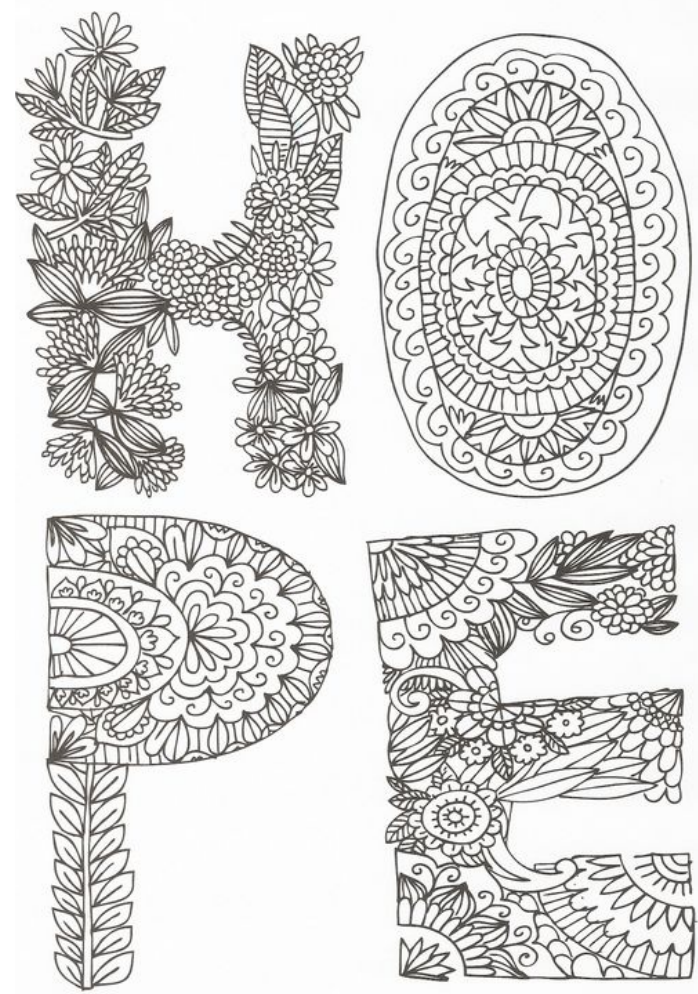
Hope comes from finding the most healing, sustainable, productive, purpose-driven way to name and acknowledge current circumstances. Then to adapt to them as needed. And change them if that is desirable and possible.

And what if we cannot change circumstances, even if it's preferable to do so? Sometimes bearing witness is what we can do. By seeing, listening, recognizing a reality, we are remaining present to ourselves and others. That is a form of response, and also a way of cultivating hope. — *Rev Gail*

Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.
— *Psalm 130:7*

Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.
— *Psalm 31:24*

We dream to give ourselves hope. To stop dreaming - well, that's like saying you can never change your fate.
— *Amy Tan*



Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom. — *Victor Frankl*

It's the possibility that keeps me going, not the guarantee.
— *Nicholas Sparks*

Sat, Dec 5 – DAY 7

Lighting the candle requires multiple tools and actions. Hands to manipulate the match and candle. Fuel to ignite the spark. Oxygen to feed the flame. All these elements exemplify interconnection and dependency on each other in order to move from potential to reality.

Hope permits us to seek connection and support. Hope suggests that we are never alone. God is present to us. And we are designed to be in community with others.

Tangible hope shows up as relationships. Embodied by family, friends, and community. Showing up through family, partners, companions, classmates, collaborators, colleagues, care providers, mentors, peers or acquaintances. Put into practice by churches, schools, workplaces, classrooms, creative spaces, teams, workshops, clubs, charitable organizations, or public agencies.

Hope invites vulnerability and models strength through these connections. Hope admits that we require help. Says we don't know all the answers or have enough resources to do it alone. Acknowledges that we belong to each other and need each other. Hope reaches out to offer or opens up to receive support and connection.

— *Rev Gail*

I rise before dawn and cry for help; I put my hope in your words. — *Psalms 119:147*

Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope.

— *Maya Angelou*

Our human compassion binds us the one to the other – not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future. — *Nelson Mandela*

