

PIERCE THE NIGHT

Overcoming Darkness With the Light of Christ

Family Discussion Guide

READINGS FOR ADVENT

Edited by Ryan David Shelton & Aaron C. Adams

Introduction: How to Use This Guide

Our great hope for your family this Advent is that the Lord draws every one of you nearer to himself and sanctifies you all through his Word. The *Pierce the Night* Advent devotional book was written with this purpose in mind. This Family Study Guide consists of discussion questions for each day's reading and devotion, designed to cut across age differences. The questions are intended as conversation starters, and you may find that your family uses them differently from mine, which is fine. Some of the questions are observational - what does the text say? Others are geared towards application - what should we do about it? There are also suggestions for prayer or object lessons. The goal is to get your family reading, meditating on, and talking about the Bible together. Here is how I would recommend you start the first few days:

- Pray as a family for God to help you understand his Word
- Read the devotion aloud, then ask your family for their thoughts
- Read the day's questions in this guide, giving time for responses after each question
- Pick a Christ-centered Christmas carol or hymn to sing together as a family - if the family is not terribly musical, use YouTube! You can find excellent videos for any Christmas song you like, usually with lyrics right on the screen.
- Close in prayer

The whole thing should not take more than 15 minutes per day. If you get stumped or want to hear more about family devotions, please reach out to me. In the meantime, may your Advent be full of hope and longing for the return of Christ.

A word of thanks is due to Louis and Hillary Kolssak, and Pauline and Doug Limberg, who provided the questions for weeks 1 and 2, respectively. May their hard work be blessed with much Gospel fruit.

By faith,

Aaron Adams

Associate Pastor of Family Life

aaron@wbc.org

Week One: The Light of God

November 28 – Genesis 1:1

1. Read Genesis 1:1-3. What does the first sentence in the Bible say?
2. According to Genesis 1:1-3, what existed at the beginning of time, and what did not exist?
3. Who is the main character “in the beginning?” What did He do?
4. Can you describe something in your life that had a distinct beginning (e.g., the day you met your spouse, the first day of school, etc.)? What do you remember about that day?
5. Why do you think beginnings are so important?

November 29 – Matthew 5:16-18

1. What does Matthew 5:16-18 say we should do with our light?
2. What should be others’ response when we do this? Who should receive the glory?
3. Do you let your light shine before others? Why or why not?
4. Do you ever let your light shine and take the glory for yourself?
5. How should Christ’s perfect obedience be an encouragement to us?

November 30 – Exodus 25:1-2, 8-9

1. What does the word “tabernacle” mean? What was the purpose of the Tabernacle?
2. What was Israel’s initial response to the building of the Tabernacle?
3. What kind of access did Israel have to the Tabernacle?
4. How does that access compare/contrast to the access that a Christian has to God today?
5. How did (or does) Christmas change the kind of access we have to God?

December 1 – Isaiah 57:15

1. What does Isaiah 57:15 tell us about God? What is His name? Where does He dwell?
2. Besides your answer to question #1, what other words on pages 19-20 describe the nature of God? How would you define each of these terms?
3. In contrast to the nature of God, how would you describe the nature of man?
4. What does Isaiah 57:15 say about the Holy One’s relationship to man? What does He say that He will do for us?
5. How do your answers to the above questions relate to what we celebrate on Christmas?

December 2 – Job 38:31-32

1. Read Psalm 19:1-6. What do the heavens declare about God?
2. What examples can you think of that declare the awesome power and creativity of the Creator?
3. How would you describe the way Jesus came to earth? How do you think this compares to the magnitude and magnificence of His power?
4. How do you think the coming of Christ relates to Him as the “Light of the world?”

December 3 – 1 John 1:3-7

1. Read 1 John 1:3-7. What does this passage say about the source of light? Why does John say that he proclaims this message to us?
2. What does John say about where (or how) we walk if we don't have Christ?
3. How do you typically react when the light of Christ shines on an area of sin or darkness in your life? Do you ever respond with joy and gratitude (see page 24)?
4. What are some of the benefits of walking in the Light? Note how many times "fellowship" is mentioned in 1 John 1:3-7 as you answer this question.
5. How would you describe your journey from the darkness to the light? Are there any areas of darkness in your life that you need to turn over to God?

December 4 – John 1:4

1. What besides light do we find in Christ? (see John 1:4)
2. What are some of the ways in which our culture seeks to extend or enhance life? How effective do you think we are at extending our lives on our own?
3. Does God offer a different approach for extending and enhancing our lives? How does it differ from the approach our culture generally offers?
4. Which approach is more appealing to you and why?
5. How can we celebrate the Light and the Life of Christ as we prepare for Christmas? Take a few minutes to thank God for the fullness and completeness of the Life that He provides.

Week Two: The Night of Sin

December 5 – Genesis 1:2

1. When you read Genesis 1:2, do you think God was afraid of the dark? Why, or why not? Why do you think people are afraid of the dark?
2. Most people think darkness and the absence of light are a bad thing. Are there times when darkness is a good thing?
3. Have you ever been in complete blackness? Or worn a blindfold for a very long time? What is it like to not be able to see? Then, when the blindfold was taken off, how did it feel to be able to see again?
4. How does darkness relate to spiritual blindness? How does light relate to spiritual awareness?

December 6 – John 3:16-19

1. What does it mean in John 3:19 that "light has come into the world"? What does it mean that people "loved the darkness rather than the light"? Do people still love the darkness? How do you know?
2. Have you ever played with a really strong rubber band, or a bungee cord? What would it be like to try to run away from an immovable object, like a big tree, while you're attached to it with one or two bungee cords? Try it!
3. If the tree in the previous question represents something sinful, what would the action of the bungee cord, attached to you, represent?

4. Think of an example of something sinful that kept pulling you back toward it. What are some ways to deal with this so it stops happening?

December 7 – Genesis 3:6-8

1. In Genesis 3:7, what do you know about Adam and Eve because of the fig leaves? What do you know about them because they hid from God in verse 8? Is it possible that Adam and Eve didn't know God's rules for them?
2. Have you ever watched a movie where people walked around in the dark and didn't turn on a light? What was the tone of that scene? How is the picture of Adam and Eve in the Garden similar?
3. What could have been avoided by turning on the light?
4. Adam and Eve played the first ever game of "Hide and Go Seek" with God. What does it feel like to be hidden but not yet found? What thoughts go through your mind as you're waiting? How might this relate to what happened in the Garden?

December 8 – Ezekiel 8:9-12

1. Have you ever watched TV during dinner and tried to hold a conversation with another person? Did anything distract you from communicating your thoughts? What happens when the phone rings during dinner? How does the interruption make you feel?
2. How would you feel if someone took spray paint and graffitied the cover and pages of your favorite Bible, the one with all your notes? What would you do about it? What if you couldn't replace it, and it was corrupted with a bunch of bad words and false statements about God?
3. Have you ever seen things that you're not supposed to look at, but you feel drawn to looking at them anyway? What are some steps you can take to do the right thing?

December 9 – Psalm 130:1, 3-6

1. Make a list of the ways you've been 'wronged' in the last 24 hours. Make another list of all the ways you've been forgiven or blessed by someone else. Which list was easier to make? Which list do you think God wants us to more easily think of?
2. When was the last time you gathered around a fireplace or fire pit? What are some characteristics of a fire that make people gather around it?
3. How is studying the Bible like gathering around a fire? Think about things that draw people close, what makes the fire bigger or smaller, and things that can stop or prevent people from gathering.
4. Add a watchman to the previous scene. What is the job of a watchman around a fire? In what way would a watchman serve in gathering centered around the Bible?
5. How is the light of a fire like the light experienced from the Bible?

December 10 – 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

1. Have you ever known a person who is blind? What types of things might not be in their house things that would require sight?
2. What is required for a blind person to be able to safely walk down a busy sidewalk? What would happen to them without help?

3. How is spiritual blindness like physical blindness? What happens to spiritually blind people who don't have a helper or guide?
4. Who do you know that struggles with spiritual blindness? Is there any hope for them?

December 11 – John 1:5

1. In our area, there are different kinds of Christmas lights. What are your favorite kind? How do they make you feel when they light up the darkness?
2. Christmas also seems to be a popular time of year for lists. How many lists can you think of from the Bible? (There are many!)
3. Make a list of God's attributes. (A fun way to do this is to name one attribute or characteristic for each letter of the alphabet. Add Scripture references if you can.) We grow in our knowledge of God and learn His will for us by understanding who He is through His names and attributes.
4. Do you ever ask God for things? How is this similar or different from when you ask for things by making a Christmas list? What if you made a list and asked God for things of spiritual value? These things would last and never fade. They would be things that God values, and you could have forever, even for eternity. What things would be on this list?

Week Three: The Dawn of Christ

December 12 – Genesis 1:3

1. What does today's verse say about how light was created? Does creation appear to be difficult or easy for God?
2. When we speak, do our words have the same power as God's words? Why are God's words so powerful?
3. How does light make our world more wonderful? What would we miss out on if God had not made light?
4. Because God is all-knowing and because he created everything, God did not need light to be able to know everything about his creation. But we need light. How is light a gift of love from God to us?
5. The Good News about Jesus is like light because it is the perfect gift of love from God to us that saves us from the darkness of our sins. How can you share the light of Jesus with someone today?
6. How is being saved like God saying "Let there be light" in us?

December 13 – Luke 2:29–32

1. Simeon describes Jesus in three different ways in today's text. Can you find all three?
2. How do these three descriptions help us understand how great Jesus is?
3. Think about a time when you were too little to do something that you are able to do now. Maybe you can do a cartwheel, or write in beautiful cursive, or do complex math! Everyone in the family should name something, and then do it once for everyone! Cheer each other on. How much of this could you do when you were a baby? Simeon looked at baby Jesus and understood what that little baby would do when he was grown up. What great things did Jesus do when he was grown up?
4. How did Jesus become God's salvation for all peoples?

December 14 – Genesis 22:15-18

1. As a family, re-tell the story of Abraham and Isaac. You can look back in earlier chapters of Genesis if you

like. How was Isaac's birth special? What did God ask Abraham to do before today's reading? Why did God stop Abraham at the last moment?

2. Abraham and Isaac's story has many things in common with the story of Jesus. Talk as a family about how each story involves a) a miraculous birth; b) a promise to bless others through the son; c) a sacrifice; and d) the promise of resurrection.
3. Why do you think God gave us patterns like these in the Old Testament stories? Do they help us understand the story of Jesus?

December 15 – Ezekiel 34:11–12, 14

1. What does the Lord God say he will do for his people in this passage?
2. What are some things that a shepherd does? What would be different about a good shepherd as opposed to a bad shepherd?
3. Why is it wonderful that God searches for his people like a shepherd?
4. In the last two paragraphs of today's reading, we see how God the Son came to be our good shepherd, quoting John 10:11 and 14. How does the good shepherd rescue his sheep according to those verses?
5. Do you know the good shepherd?

December 16 – Psalm 112:1, 4–7

1. To "fear the LORD" isn't the same as other kinds of fear. It doesn't mean we're afraid of God. It means we know he is the maker and master of all Creation, and that he can do all things. For people that aren't saved from their sins, that's scary because he will not let them get away with their sins forever. But for people who have been saved, they aren't afraid because they know he loves them. They fear and trust him at the same time (see verses 1 and 7). This passage gives many descriptions of the person who fears the LORD. What are they?
2. What are some of God's commandments? Do you delight in them?
3. Today's reading says that "saved people become Christ-like people" because God is changing us to be like Jesus. What are some ways that you would like to be more like Jesus?
4. How can your family become more like the one described in today's Bible reading?

December 17 – Hebrews 10:1, 4–7, 11–14, 18

1. Take out a flashlight or turn on a bright overhead light where you can make a shadow. Wiggle your fingers or do a dance, and watch your shadow do the same. Everyone should get a turn. How is your shadow like you? How is it different from you? What details does the shadow have? What details is it missing?
2. If I get soap on my hands, can I wash my face with the shadows of my soapy hands? Why or why not?
3. Today's Bible lesson tells us that the sacrifices of bulls and goats that the Old Testament required were like shadows. They taught God's people about the way he would take away their sins and got them ready for Jesus. But just like your shadow can't wash your face, the sacrifices couldn't wash away sin. There was just one sacrifice that could do that, according to today's Bible lesson. What was that sacrifice?
4. Take some time to thank God as a family for the forgiveness of sins that we have because of Jesus' sacrifice for us.

December 18 – John 1:9

1. Recreate the experience written about in today's devotion. You can use a candle, like his teacher did, or use a flashlight. Start with all the lights on and say, "This light represents the light of Christ." Then close the doors or turn off some of the lights and say, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Then turn off all the rest of the lights so that only the candle or flashlight remains. Can you still see each other clearly? Does the light only shine for one of you, or for all of you? If your candle or flashlight gives enough light, read the rest of today's questions without turning the lights back on.
2. John 1:9 calls Jesus "the true light, which gives light to everyone." Earlier in John 1, we saw that everything in all of creation was made by him. Just like a candle gives light to everyone in a room and not just to some, everyone who lives is alive because Jesus made them. But not everyone loves Jesus and thanks him for creating them. Take turns closing your eyes and covering them. Did the candle/flashlight go out when you covered your eyes?
3. The end of today's reading says that the light of Jesus does two things - what are they?
4. Why is it surprising that the light of Jesus both helps us realize that we are sinners and shows us the way to salvation?
5. Take some time to pray, asking God to help you see your sin and repent of it, and ask Him to help you see the light of Jesus more clearly.

Week Four: The Day Draws Near

December 19 – Genesis 1:4

1. What are some things God does in this verse?
2. Take a flashlight and a spoon into a room that can get very dark, like a bathroom. Turn the flashlight on and point it at the spoon, then turn off the rest of the lights. Can the spoon be in the light and in the darkness at the same time?
3. Today's devotion says that the difference between holiness and sin, or between right and wrong, is like the light and darkness - they are totally separate. But because we are sinners, we often have trouble knowing right from wrong, even though right and wrong are always very clear to God. What are some ways we can learn to love what God says is right and turn away from what God says is wrong?
4. The Bible tells us that when Jesus returns, he will separate people like he separated the light from the darkness - those whose sins are forgiven will come into eternal life with God, but those who have refused to trust in Jesus will go to eternal judgment. It also says that for those who receive eternal life, Jesus will wipe away every tear from their eyes. As a family, pray for Jesus to return soon and and take away every sorrow and sadness. Also pray for someone you know who needs to know Jesus.

December 20 – Matthew 24:29–31

1. Is today's Bible passage hard to understand, or easy to understand? What is it about?
2. This passage is about when Jesus, here called the Son of Man, returns. It will be a day of mourning for people aren't saved from their sins, but it will be a day of great gladness for God's people. Here God's people are called "his elect," which means "his chosen ones." What special thing will happen to God's people when Jesus returns?

3. Today's devotion says that when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, it "passed without much notice." But when Jesus returns, it will not be a secret, or hidden from people, or quiet. What are some things in today's Bible passage that tell how Jesus' return will be public, seen by everyone, and definitely-not-secret?
4. Today's devotion says "Those who loved Christ's supremacy in his First Advent will rejoice in his return... Do we love the glory of Christ more than the presents?" What can your family do this Christmas to make sure that your celebration is more about Jesus than about presents and food and other things?

Parents, Operation Christmas Child's YouTube channel has many videos that may be appropriate for your kids. These are ways for your children to see how the Gospel can be front-and-center when we give gifts at Christmas. The story of Alina and her music box (<https://youtu.be/bvhcm90Rj2k>) is one story worth sharing.

December 21 – 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8

1. Today's Bible passage says several things that Christians are not, and several things that Christians are. What are they?
2. Today's passage also has instructions: What does it say we should NOT do? What does it say we SHOULD do?
3. When today's Bible passage says we should not sleep, it doesn't mean we should stay up all the time. It means we should be ready for Jesus to return. Two ways we can do that are by growing in love for Jesus and telling others about Him, because when Jesus comes back, it will be too late for our unbelieving neighbors and friends to trust in Him. How can you grow in love for Jesus? How can you help others come to know Him?
4. When the passage says we should be sober, it means we should not fill up our lives with things that distract us from God, and should not participate in ungodly activities. What is one thing you could do that would help you keep thinking more about Jesus and the Gospel, and not be distracted by worldly things?

December 22 – Isaiah 25:6-9

1. In today's Bible text, what kind things does God do for His people?
2. What will the people do because of God's kindness and love?
3. What is the best blessing that God gives in this Bible passage?
4. Today's Bible passage talks about a great feast for God's people. Have you ever smelled dinner cooking or seen a beautiful pumpkin pie or other dessert just waiting to be eaten, and wanted the food to hurry up and be ready? That's how God wants us to think about Jesus' return. Today's devotion says we should wait for Jesus' return "with hope and longing." Why is the return of Christ something to hope and long for?

December 23 – Colossians 3:1-4

1. While we wait for Jesus to return, we should be seeking and setting our minds on "the things above," that is, the things of God and the Gospel and His Kingdom. What are some of these things that we should be seeking and thinking about?
2. What are some of the things we spend time thinking about and seeking instead of the things above?

3. When we spend time praying together and reading the Bible as a family, we are helping each other seek the things that are above. What is the best time for your family to read the Bible and pray together? What if you commit to spend time every day doing this as a family? Would you have to adjust your other priorities? Would that mean spending less time setting your mind on the things that are on earth?
4. What are some other ways you can help each other seek the things above?

December 24 – 2 Peter 1:16–19

Dear Parent: You may want to pre-read today's devotion before reading it aloud to your children. There is a line or two that may invite questions about certain gift-giving traditions if your children set out cookies and milk... if you know what I mean. As we say in our household, "Even though we don't play the game, we don't want to spoil it for the other children."

1. Peter wrote today's Bible passage. As a family, share your favorite stories you remember from Peter's life.
2. What made Peter's testimony about Jesus special, and better than "cleverly devised myths"? When did Peter hear God say "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased?" Read Matthew 17:1-9 as a family.
3. What makes God's Word even more trustworthy (as today's text says, "more fully confirmed") than an eyewitness? How are human eyewitnesses limited? Does God have those kinds of limits?
4. How can your family pay attention to God's Word "as to a lamp shining in a dark place"?

December 25 – John 1:14 and Rev 21:23

1. The word "glory" is important in today's Bible verses. What is glory? After your family thinks about this question and gives some answers, read this definition, taken from page 240 of Marty Machowski's book *The Ology: Ancient Truths Ever New*: "Glory - perfect splendor - The display of one or more of God's attributes - his holiness, perfection, love, mercy, and justice, to name a few. John says that Jesus glorified the Father by going to the cross (John 17:1-5). That's because Jesus dying for his people was the greatest display of love in the whole world. When we love people like Jesus did, we display God's glory too."
2. How does this definition help us understand how Jesus displayed God's glory?
3. Today's devotion says that "let us ache for the last shadows of night to be pierced and overcome by the glorious Day of Christ's return." Today is a wonderful day, filled with feasting and family. On days like today, do you ache for Jesus to return?
4. Our Advent readings have encouraged us to think about and desire Jesus' return, because it will be so much better than any good thing we experience in this broken world. Think about it! Every tear will be wiped away, and we will get the true gift of Christmas - God With Us, Emmanuel - forever. Pray as a family for God to help you ache for His return, and then pray for His return. Then go eat some pie and remember that God's feast will be even better.