



5
Lessons for
Advent

Leader Guide

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Acacia Resources

The biblical witness singles out acacia wood for its uniqueness. The only wood mentioned in the building of the ark of the covenant, the tabernacle and the altar is acacia. Acacia wood is listed with other precious objects—gold, silver, fragrant incense, onyx stones—given to honor God.

The name *acacia* symbolically ties BCE's curriculum initiative to our biblical heritage. The acacia tree represents the wise value attached to the family, the diversity within families and the durability demanded for growing healthy Christians, whether they are singles, couples with children or senior adults.

Today's acacia tree is known for its ...



Value

Some acacia trees have fragrant flowers used in making perfume. The seeds are edible. The bark is rich in tannin, a substance used in tanning, dyes, inks and pharmaceuticals. Furniture, cars, tools and gunstocks are made of the hard lumber from the acacia tree.

Diversity

Some 1,200 species of acacia trees and shrubs exist throughout much of the world, including Africa, Australia and North America.

Durability

The acacia species is tough enough to survive the semiarid regions of Africa where its roots sink deep to capture the rare water which runs quickly into the soil.

Acacia Resources will guide Christians and draw them godward, as the ark of acacia wood guided the people of Israel in their journey and represented the presence of God in their midst.

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Teaching Tips

Leadership Call

Few positions influence others as that of teacher. You are a special person, chosen to teach God's Word to God's people. The role of teacher is an awesome one. James even warned that "not many . . . should become teachers" (Jas 3:1). But teaching is the only way God's Word will be communicated to people who are struggling to find a star by which to guide their lives.

You have been chosen for that special task. It is difficult, but it is so rewarding. Most of all, you are exercising the gift God has given you to teach. That means you do not teach on your own. You teach with God blessing you through the Holy Spirit.

These *Five Lessons for Advent* are windows you can open so people can let God's Spirit blow into their lives. Christmas is in danger of becoming a secular holiday instead of a spiritual holy day. Instead of emphasizing the warm fuzzy feelings often associated with Christmas, you have an opportunity to emphasize Christ's coming. Members of your class may come without hope, peace, love, joy, and praise. Your purpose as a teacher is not to impart information; it is to introduce people to God so the Spirit can work in their lives, bringing them hope, peace, love, joy, and praise.

We at Acacia Resources believe in you, and we welcome you as a significant part of the teaching team. We have provided ideas on how to communicate the truths of the lessons. However, you must take these ideas and shape them for your class.

Leadership Overview

Five Lessons for Advent is a way to look at five topics that intersect the lives of every person in your class. These are the traditional topics that churches often use as themes for Advent.

Advent is about the coming of Christ. In fact, the Latin word for advent means "coming." The Christian tradition has long celebrated the Advent Season, though it is a relatively new observance within many Baptist and evangelical circles. Advent celebration presents a way to focus on the birth of Jesus amid a highly commercialized Christmas season.

Leadership Weekly Checklist

- Start early in the week—some teachers start on Sunday afternoon.
- As you read and meditate on the lesson, think about the members of your class and how the lesson will apply to their lives.
- Read the Scripture references in several different translations.
- Look for articles in the paper or listen for current ideas on television or radio. And don't forget the experiences that have happened to you that you can apply to the lesson.
- Write out your own teaching plan.
- On Saturday or Sunday morning, pray for each member of the class as you make your final preparation.
- Ask God for help in making an impact on people you teach.

Leadership Teaching

Begin each class with prayer. Specifically pray for:

- wisdom;
- a gentle spirit that reflects the spirit of Christ;
- your members who are without hope, peace, love, joy and praise;
- the ability to have hope, peace, love, joy and praise in your life and to communicate it to those of your class who need it.

Pre-lesson Planning

Prepare an advent wreath.

Use this wreath during the five Sundays of Advent. You can construct your own. Or you can purchase a simple metal Advent wreath in a crafts store. Place four candles around the outside: three purple and one pink. In the center of the wreath, place a large, white candle. Interweave artificial greenery around the base of the candles. Each week light the appropriate candle(s) and let them burn during the class session. (You may need to replace a couple of the purple candles by the end of Advent season. It would be a good idea to have a couple of extras on hand.)

- First Sunday of Advent—1 dark purple candle
- Second Sunday of Advent—2 dark purple candles
- Third Sunday of Advent—3 dark purple candles
- Fourth Sunday of Advent—3 dark purple candles and 1 pink candle
- Sunday after Advent—3 dark purple candles, 1 pink candle and 1 large white candle

Prepare a unit poster.

Make a large poster with a picture of an advent wreath, a manger scene, or some other Christmas scene. On the poster write: *All I want for Christmas is . . .* Place the poster on the focal wall. Make five strip posters. Place one of the following words on each poster: *Hope, Peace, Love, Joy, Praise*. Each week, place the appropriate strip poster below the topic studied the previous week.

Enlist readers.

In advance, enlist a reader(s) to read the focal passages aloud and light the advent candle(s). This can be the same person or five different people.

Keep in mind these tips for better group discussion:

- Never embarrass people by asking specific questions that have only one answer.
- Allow for silence, even though it might be uncomfortable, when you ask questions.
- Ask open questions that will allow members to share their feelings rather than closed questions that can be answered by short answers such as yes or no. A good way to generate discussion is to ask: How do you feel about . . . ?

Begin and end on time

Share the Take-home Line

The Take-home Line is a summary of the lesson and a challenge for class members to consider throughout the week. Write it on a notecard and distribute it to each class member, or ask members to write it at the top of their notes. The Take-home Line is designed to summarize the lesson so members can take this brief summary with them when they leave. Let it be the last thing they hear as they leave.



Hoping Against Hope

Luke 1:46-55; Romans 8:24-25

Take-home Line

Jesus gives hope to despairing people.

Teacher's Goal

To identify ways Jesus' coming brings hope to lives filled with hopelessness

Introduce the Lesson

Point to the unit poster. Read the words, "All I want for Christmas is . . . Hope!" Ask members to identify some of the wishes for happiness they have heard salespeople express. List these on one side of a chalkboard under the word *Happiness*. Now ask them to list causes of hopelessness they have experienced this week. List these on the other side of a chalkboard under the word *Hopelessness*. Ask: Which of these two is the more prevalent in the world today or in your own life, happiness or hopelessness? If we believe the coming of Christ makes a difference in people's lives, why is this true? (*Do not erase these; you will use them in "Offer Practical Handles."*)

Point out the Bible does speak to the hopelessness people feel and that today's lesson will identify some ways Jesus' coming brings hope to lives filled with hopelessness.

Examine the Biblical Witness

Call on the enlisted reader to read aloud Luke 1:52-54 and light the first purple candle. Ask members to scan Luke 1:46-55. Ask: Which verse from Mary's song suggests there will be a "great reversal"? (Specifically vv. 51b-53, although accept other verses if members can give good reasons.) Ask: How did these verses offer hope to the people of the first century? How do they offer hope to us today? Why would you agree, or disagree, with this statement: Power, status, and wealth are not a basis of hope in the final analysis.

Call on the enlisted reader to read aloud Romans 8:24-25. Explain the word *patience* (v. 25) means "to bear up under." Point out that Christ does

not give us hope by eliminating life's pain; rather, the hope enables us to "bear up under" the pain and despair we feel.

Offer Practical Handles

Share the illustration from the student guide about Charles and his wife Betty, who died after a long illness with Alzheimer's disease. Ask: How did Charles' faith sustain him in the face of the hopelessness he encountered?

Point to the items listed on the chalkboard under *Hopelessness*. What in today's lesson would give you hope in the face of hopelessness?

Close with the Take-home Line

Jesus gives hope to despairing people.



Peace and Peacemaking

Luke 1:78-79; John 14:25-27

Take-home Line

As we find peace for ourselves, we are able to make peace with others.

Teacher's Goal

To show how Jesus' coming guides us to live lives that bring peace in the world in which we move

Introduce the Lesson

Point to the unit poster. Read the words, "All I want for Christmas is . . . Peace!" Distribute some newspapers collected this past week to the members. Ask them to find examples where peace is needed in the following areas: internationally, nationally, locally, in families, individually. If you have as many as five people, you can assign each person one of these areas. If you have more than five people, you can ask more than one person to research certain areas.

Allow about three minutes for research and then ask members to share the articles they have found. Ask: How does so much unrest and peacelessness affect you? Point out that today's lesson will show us how Jesus' coming guides us to live lives that bring peace to the worlds in which we move.

Distribute a hymnal to each person. Ask members to find hymns relating to peace. Ask volunteers to read a stanza or two of their chosen hymn.

Examine the Biblical Witness

Call on the enlisted reader to read aloud Luke 1:67-79, and light the first and second purple candles. Share the brief information on the word *peace* from the student guide. As an additional study, you may want to look up "peace" in a Bible dictionary, sharing highlights of the word's meaning with your class. Ask members if they can think of instances where peace is mentioned in the story of Jesus' birth (Lk 1:79; 2:14, 29).

Explain that we see the fullest use of the prayer for peace in Zechariah's prophecy. Briefly summarize the material in the students' guide about Zechariah. Read aloud verse 79b: "to guide our feet into the way of

peace." Ask: What does the expression, "way of peace," mean? (The way we live, the choices we make, the wisdom we follow.) Ask: What would it mean for us to follow "the way of peace"?

Call on the enlisted reader to read John 14:25-27. Ask: How have you received the peace Christ offers? Point out having Christ's peace is the prerequisite to being a peacemaker. Through Christ we can experience wholeness, mercy, forgiveness and healing. Only when we become whole persons, not divided and fractured within ourselves, can we begin to work for peace in the world. We cannot make peace if we are not at peace in our own lives.

Offer Practical Handles

Share the illustration from the student guide about the man who overcame his anger about losing his job. (If you have a personal example, refer to the illustration and then share your example.)

Ask: What is the first step believers can take to make peace? (Accept Christ's peace in our lives.) What is our responsibility for being peacemakers after we have received Christ's peace? In what areas can we be peacemakers?

Distribute paper and pencil to each person. Ask members to identify a specific situation in their lives in which peace is needed. Ask: What particular steps can you take this week to be a peacemaker in this specific situation? Encourage members to list ways they can let Jesus guide their feet in the way of peace this coming week.

Close with the Take-home Line

As we find peace for ourselves, we are able to make peace with others.



Love Unlimited

Luke 2:1-7; I John 3:18-24

Take-home Line

The only way people can know God's love is by seeing it displayed in the lives of those who have experienced it.

Teacher's Goal

To show how God's love revealed in Jesus' coming can help us respond to unlovely situations and unlovely people with genuine love

Introduce the Lesson

Point to the unit poster. Read the words, "All I want for Christmas is . . . Love!" In advance, enlist a member to become familiar with the story of Mel in the students' guide and tell it to the class. After the enlisted person has shared, ask members for their reaction to the pastor's statement about how God saw Mel. Suggest that today's lesson describes the extraordinary lengths to which God went to show us love through Jesus Christ.

Examine the Biblical Witness

Call on the enlisted reader to read aloud Luke 2:1-7 and light all three of the purple candles. Ask: Has anyone been in a barn lately? What was it like? Have you ever had to sleep in one?

Say: We often make the barn in which Jesus was born a clean, antiseptic place—much like a hayride. But barns were likely no different then than they are now. They likely were as smelly and unsanitary as they are now. Only persons who absolutely had no other place to stay would choose to share a barn with livestock.

Ask: If Jesus is God's Son, why would God choose such a dirty, unsanitary place for Jesus to be born? What purpose did it serve then? Now?

Organize the class in two groups. Ask **Group 1** to list the benefits of Jesus' birth in the stable. Ask **Group 2** to list the benefits if he had been born in a palace. As each group reports, ask the other group to list disadvantages of being born in such a place. Allow three to four minutes for groups to work and then call for reports from **Group 1**. Ask **Group 2** to respond with

disadvantages. Now call on **Group 2** to share their report and ask **Group 1** to respond with disadvantages. (If you do not want to form two groups, you can do this by letting the class as a whole work as a group; it will just take longer.)

Distribute paper and pencil to each person. Ask members to open their Bibles to 1 John 3:18-24. Ask the enlisted reader to read these verses. Now ask members to write a definition of love based on these verses. Allow volunteers to read their definitions.

Offer Practical Handles

Ask: How does genuine love influence the way we live? Why? Share the illustration in the students' guide about the writer's daughter and her friend. Ask: How can we separate our love for people from the sin in their lives? Why are some sins more difficult for us to handle? Can we win people to Christ if we do not love them?

Ask the two groups used earlier to list other areas in which believers need to respond with genuine love to unlovely situations and unlovely people. Allow three minutes for groups to work and then call for reports.

Ask members to take the sheet of paper on which they wrote their definition of love and write one area suggested by the groups. Then ask them to apply their definition to that area by listing three things they can do to respond to an unlovely situation or unlovely people. Allow volunteers to read their responses but do not force anyone to do so.

Close with the Take-home Line

The only way people can know God's love is by seeing it displayed in the lives of those who have experienced it.



Joy to the World

Luke 2:8-20; John 15:11

“Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns;

Let men their songs employ;

While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains

Repeat the sounding joy.”

Take-home Line

Believers can experience joy in the midst of sadness, hurt, pain and grief.

Teacher’s Goal

To explain why those who have Christ’s joy can demonstrate it in the face of sadness, pain and grief

Introduce the Lesson

Point to the unit poster. Read the words, “All I want for Christmas is . . . Joy!” In advance, enlist a member to tell the story in the students’ guide about the grieving families in a hospital waiting room. He wrote, “This capacity for joy in the midst of difficulty is a gift from God.”

Ask the class to define joy. Share Webster’s dictionary definition: “Pleasure caused by the acquisition or expectation of good” and “To rejoice; to be glad.”

Point out that joy is not tied to circumstances. Joy can be present when times are good and when life gets hard.

Examine the Biblical Witness

Call on the enlisted reader to read aloud Luke 2:8-20 and light all three of the purple candles and the pink one. Reread verse 10. Briefly summarize the information in the student guide on the shepherds’ experience.

Point out that the students’ guide states: “The expression that is translated ‘I am bringing you good news’ is the verb form of the word for ‘gospel.’ Literally, the angel said, ‘I am bringing you a gospel of great joy for all people.’ Of course, the gospel he was referring to was the birth of Jesus, the Savior of the world.”

Ask the class to sing (or read) the first verse of “Joy to the World.” Then recite these words from the second verse:

Do these words evoke the biblical witness?

Ask the enlisted reader to read John 15:11.

Offer Practical Handles

Read aloud this statement from the students’ guide: “If happiness is what we feel when we think we’ve got what we want, then joy is what we feel when we discover we already have what we need.”

On a chalkboard write *Joy* in one column and *Happiness* in another. Ask members to suggest characteristics of joy. After listing these characteristics, in the *Happiness* column, write how each characteristic of joy listed contrasts with happiness. (Some may be the same; some will be different.)

Ask: How can the joy of a relationship with Jesus provide a way to deal with the bad things that happen to us? Jesus described the joy he gives us as “complete joy.” Is this joy related to power and possessions? Is it related to circumstances? Is there such a thing as “incomplete joy”? Why can believers experience joy in the midst of sadness, hurt, pain and grief?

Give opportunities to members to share experiences in which they have experienced Christ’s joy in the midst of sadness, hurt, pain and grief.

Close with the Take-home Line

Believers can experience joy in the midst of sadness, hurt, pain and grief.



Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow

Luke 2:36-38; Matthew 2:1-12

Take-home Line

Praising God adds meaning to a believer's life.

Teacher's Goal

To describe why and how we can praise God and the benefits received from making praise a part of our lives

Introduce the Lesson

Point to the unit poster. Read the words, "All I want for Christmas is . . . Praise!" Ask: What is our highest purpose as human beings? Write answers on the chalkboard. After members have responded, read the answer in the students' guide from the old Westminster Larger Catechism: "Man's [people's] chief end is to glorify God and fully enjoy him forever." Ask: Do we normally think of "enjoying God" as our highest purpose? Why?

Point out that we have just journeyed through Advent in which we have talked about hope, peace, love and joy. We often talk about these topics, but far too seldom do we let them filter into our lives and influence the way we live. This lesson on praise is a way to implement these elements in our daily lives. Praising God offers us a way to apply the elements of hope, peace, love and joy.

Examine the Biblical Witness

Call on the enlisted reader to read aloud Luke 2:36-38 and Matthew 2:1-12 and light all three of the purple candles, the pink one and the white one.

In advance, write the following on a chalkboard (do not include the material in the *Response* column):

Person/Group	Scripture	Response
<i>Shepherds</i>	<i>Luke 2:20</i>	<i>(Glorified/praised God)</i>
<i>Simeon</i>	<i>Luke 2:25</i>	<i>(Praised God)</i>
<i>Anna</i>	<i>Luke 2:38</i>	<i>(Praised God)</i>
<i>The Magi</i>	<i>Matthew 2:11</i>	<i>(Paid homage/gave gifts)</i>

Ask without waiting for any answer: What was the response of the first four people or groups of people who saw Jesus? Ask a fourth of the class to turn to Luke 2:20; a fourth to Luke 2:25; a fourth to Luke 2:38; and a fourth to Matthew 2:11. As members respond write their responses in the *Response* column.

Now ask the same four groups to look at the context from which their Scripture came and suggest what the human "happiness quotient" was for each of these four people/groups. (Shepherds were low on the social scale, and from a human standpoint they had little to be happy about; we don't really know enough about Simeon to be too exact about his situation, but he may have been middle class; Anna had been a widow for probably more than 60 years after a marriage of only 7 years and had little social standing or little reason to be happy; the Magi had many of the world's goods and social standing and from a human standpoint they had reasons to be happy.)

Ask: Based on the experiences of these four people/groups, what is the relationship between wealth/social standing and the ability to praise God? (None.) Point out that the overwhelming response of those who first met Jesus was worship and praise.

On a chalkboard write: *Reasons to Praise* and *Benefits Received*. Ask: What do you think enabled these people to praise God? List members' suggestions on the chalkboard. Ask: What benefits did they receive? List these responses on the chalkboard.

Offer Practical Handles

Share the illustration from the student guide about the man who wanted the funeral for his wife to be a service of praise. (If you have a personal experience that illustrates how one can praise God in the midst of suffering and/or conflict, you might want to share it instead.)

Distribute paper, envelopes and pencils to members. On each paper write: *I will seek to praise God . . .* Read the following statement from the student guide: "But in all things, and in all circumstances, the greatest step we can take is to love God and seek to enjoy God fully with the whole of our lives." Ask: In light of this lesson and the previous four lessons, how can we enjoy God and live our lives in praise this coming week and year? List responses on the chalkboard. When all responses have been given, ask members to do the following:

- choose one of these responses and write it on their piece of paper,

- place the paper in the envelope and seal it,
- address the envelopes to themselves.

Collect the envelopes and mail them to members on April 1 as a reminder of their decision today. (If you choose not to mail them, ask members to keep the piece of paper in their Bibles as a reminder.)

Close with the Take-home Line

Praising God adds meaning to a believer's life.

