

Beloved ones,

I don't know about you, but this Advent, I am tired.

I'm tired of the pandemic. I'm tired of people dying, and I'm tired of virtual meetings and mask-wearing – even though these are the precautions we need to take to keep each other safe. I'm tired of racism and climate change, and I'm tired of people in power not doing all they can to reverse these injustices.

So this Advent, I'm inviting you to rest. Not to ignore the realities of the world around us, but to dwell with God in quiet, in slowness, in Creation, and with each other. I believe that this practice of rest will help save us – not only providing some immediate relief, but showing us a way toward a world driven by love and justice, rather than consumption and competition.

Each week's devotional includes a short scripture passage for reflection, as well as suggested spiritual practices. These practices are intended to be possible to take up at home, with whoever is in your family. They are meant to help feed and sustain you, not to be one more item on your to-do list! Advent reminds us of the Good News of God's incarnation – it's about delighting in God's creation, in all of its forms. So whatever might bring you genuine delight will be a way of honoring God and God's Creation.

Advent blessings,

Emma

Rev. Emma Brewer-Wallin, Minister of Environmental & Economic Justice

p.s. – the idea for this devotional was inspired by the [Green Sabbath Project](#), encouraging us to *do nothing* for the sake of the earth and ourselves.

week 1: rest from producing

Yet, O LORD, you are our Creator; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. - Isaiah 64:8

The season of Advent reminds us of the Good News that God becomes human and lives among us, in a body. As we prepare to welcome God in the form of a newborn baby, we remember that we too are holy just for being who we are. Like a baby, we do not need to work to be worthy. We are God's beloved, just as we are.

Reflect and share:

- What do others (parents, teachers, co-workers) expect from you?
- Do you expect yourself to be perfect?
- Do you feel pressure to do something "more" or "better" than what you have before? Do you compare what you do with what others do?
- If you set aside one piece of your work, what would happen?

Spiritual practices:

- As a family, celebrate each other's qualities and characteristics rather than work. For example, *I love how kind you are* or *I love the sound of your laugh* rather than *you did such a good job at the soccer game* or *this dinner is delicious*
- Touch, smell, taste, or listen to things that are wonderful just as they are. For example, delight in the feeling of evergreen branches, the taste of hot chocolate, the sound of rain on the windowpanes, the smell of a candle – or other familiar parts of the holiday season
- During dinner or at bedtime, reflect on how God was present throughout the day – how God helps to shape us, as a potter shapes clay. Wonder *when did you feel close to God? When did you feel far from God? How might God be shaping you through these experiences?*

Further reading on sabbath-keeping and pausing our work: "[What if the Real Act of Holiness is Rest?](#)" by Margaret Renkl

week 2: rest from consuming

God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. - Luke 1:52-53

You've probably noticed that advertisements for holiday shopping seems to start earlier every year. You've probably noticed that this doesn't seem consistent with what the bible teaches us about Christmas: a young woman proclaiming a radical vision of an upside-down economic system or rich wise-men traveling huge distances to visit a baby born in a barn.

Reflect and share:

- When you go to a store during Christmastime or see ads, how do you feel?
- What is a favorite gift you have received? What made it special?
- Why do you think that most people in this country celebrate Christmas by giving gifts?

Spiritual practices:

- Practice gratitude throughout Advent by making a paper chain, with each link in the chain describing something you are grateful for. Continue to grow in gratitude and Advent festivity throughout the season! ([See more from Traci Smith](#))
- When you think about what to give someone, wonder what you can give them that cannot be wrapped. For example, can you write them a letter or draw a picture describing how much you love them? Can you pray for them or bless them? Can you give the gift of time together, such as playing a game, baking, or spending time outside?
- How can you take care of something someone already has, rather than giving them something new? Consider something that means a lot to them, and explore ways to repair it or keep it going, rather than replacing it or giving them something else new.

Further reading on the "blessing and curse" of our stuff: "[Blessing and Curse](#)," Joanna Harader

week 3: rest from rushing

The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. - 2 Peter 3:9

The season of Advent is a time of waiting, preparing, and hoping for God to show up in our lives. The need for compassion, love, justice can feel urgent, and we may feel the need to be busy to make this happen. But God doesn't ask us to rush – God asks us to rest, to be patient, and to delight in the little things along the way.

Reflect and share:

- When during your day or week do you feel rushed?
- What do you miss out on when you are rushing?
- What are you waiting for? Are you feeling patient? Hopeful? Impatient? Hopeless?
- When have you slowed down? What did that show you?

Spiritual practices:

- Give yourself permission to be late for something!
- Rushing often keeps us from really listening. Set aside some time this week for deep listening with a loved one – sit and listen to whatever is on their heart for as long as they want to tell it.
- Listen to a favorite recording of [Do you hear what I hear?](#) Pair this with going outside for a few minutes of quiet and noting everything you can hear.
- As a family, make [these mini-sabbath notecards](#) to help you take a restful break when you realize everyone is rushed:

week 4: rest from technology

For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. - Isaiah 61:11

I often find that my usage of technology fills my day with noise – whether the sounds of music, podcasts, and tv shows, or the mental “noise” of notifications to respond to and news to keep up with. The season of Advent is an opportunity to reconnect with the world God created, including through spending time with plants or animals (whether outdoors or in!) and in our human relationships.

Reflect and share:

- Which kinds of technology (e.g., email, Instagram, Netflix) do you spend the most time with? How does this make your life better? What does it keep you from?
- How long do you think you could go without using that technology? What worries you when you imagine this?
- Have you ever felt ignored by someone checking their phone? Have you ever ignored someone because you were using your phone (or other device)?

Spiritual practices:

- Before going to bed, put your devices away, and instead sing or listen to [Silent Night](#)
- If you find yourself frequently checking the news, try [this eco-anxiety meditation](#) to reorient your fears about climate change and environmental injustice. You may also find this adaptable for other forms of anxiety from the news, such as from reports of the pandemic or racism.
- Take a walk, unplugged from any devices – what do you notice in the world around you? [This guide](#) is particularly good for wondering with young ones while on a walk:
- Do a jigsaw puzzle together. Take your time!

Further reading on the attention we give our devices: [“The Case for Doing Nothing,”](#) Jenny Odell