

Study Guide

This book has been written primarily for individuals to read daily through the season of Advent. However, it can also be helpfully used in a small group setting where members are following the readings and reflections each day. The questions below are based on each week's readings and are designed to prompt both further individual reflection and thoughtful discussion and prayer.

1–7 December: Starting out

- 1 'The Bible tells us who created the world, science tells us how.' How far would you agree with that statement?
- 2 On his 2010 visit to the UK, Pope Benedict XVI called on everyone, no matter what their faith, to uphold the dignity of each and every person. Is that call a legitimate outworking of being 'made in the image of God', would you say?
- 3 'Stewardship', for a Christian, has been defined as wise use of our talents, our time and our treasure. Which do you find most difficult to manage and why?
- 4 Marriage is more about being the right kind of person than finding 'the right person'. Would you agree? How can you help marriages in crisis in your church or social network?

Prayer

Father, grant me the grace to use whatever gifts and talents I have to promote your kingdom each day of my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

8–14 December: Crashing badly

- 1 The Lord's Prayer reminds us to pray, 'Lead us not into temptation.' What practical steps have you found helpful in avoiding your particular weaknesses?
- 2 'Because people have lost "the fear of God" they behave like they do.' Is that the only reason why humans behave as badly as they do at times? In contrast, what explains 'good' behaviour in a fallen world, do you think?
- 3 Can you share any experiences of why and when you experienced a sense of alienation from God and/or people? How has the gospel of Christ helped you overcome that sense of estrangement?
- 4 Have you put in place all necessary arrangements for your eventual death—a will; clearly communicating your wishes for your funeral; making wise financial decisions while you can; being forgiven and forgiving others; telling those you love that you love them? Most of all, have you found peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ?

Prayer

Lord, I live in a broken world, and I myself am weak and apt to stray. Fill me with the power of your Holy Spirit so that I may be part of your solution for this world's ills and not just more of its problem. In the name of Christ my Lord, Amen.

15–21 December: Detouring often

- 1 In addition to the seven Old Testament characters we have considered this week, who else would you add to the list of those who prepared the way for the coming of Jesus? Why do you think your 'addition' is important?
- 2 We suggested that Joseph's career could be summarised as 'from pit to prison to palace', and provides a model of Christ. Are there other parts of his life that do so? How far is Joseph a parallel to our lives as he heads for an ultimate 'happy ending'?
- 3 Many people assume that the Ten Commandments are like an exam paper: only three out of ten questions are to be addressed! Which ones do you find the most difficult and the most helpful? Why?
- 4 We noted that King David, like us all, was a mixture of 'triumphs and disasters' in his personal life. Some of us feel more encouraged by his disasters because God still stuck by him; others of us are more inspired by his triumphs to go and fight our 'Goliaths'. Which side of his character do you prefer and why?

Prayer

Father, thank you for choosing such unlikely and unpromising people to forward your kingdom on earth—Abraham, Moses, David and others—and even people like me. To you be the glory through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

22–28 December: Arriving on time

- 1 What is your favourite part of the Christmas story? Can you attempt to tell it simply in your group so that a junior school assembly, for instance, would get the message?
- 2 Why is the incarnation the most spectacular miracle in the Bible? How can Jesus be both ‘God and man’ at the same time?
- 3 Joseph is often an ‘unsung hero’ in the Christmas story, yet he displayed great courage and amazing obedience. How far is he an ideal model for anyone in a stepfamily? Pause and pray especially for people you know who are in such families, for similar courage, patience, tact and love.
- 4 Astrology and other occultic practices are a growth industry in the UK today, Hallowe’en being a huge money-spinner, for instance. Is it all harmless ‘fun’? Do the wise men as star-gazers give it legitimacy? If not, why not?

Prayer

Lord, thank you that your purpose of sending Jesus to this world was long-planned, carefully monitored, patiently implemented and brilliantly executed on time. Praise be to you, Almighty Father, for your amazing gift of Jesus, your own eternal Son, Amen.

29 December–4 January: Journeying on

- 1 Undoubtedly, the book of Revelation is not immediately easy to understand. However, its ‘big message’ assures us that God’s ultimate purposes for this world are going to be fulfilled. Can you recall verses both in Revelation and

elsewhere that remind us of that truth? Should Christians therefore always be optimists, even in a world threatened by wars, famines and global warming?

- 2 Jesus Christ, from the very first chapter, dominates the book of Revelation. What titles (such as ‘Son of Man’ or ‘Lamb’) are ascribed to him, and what do they mean for us as his people?
- 3 Is being ‘Messy Church’ inevitable? Are there things in our local church that we need to ‘clean up’ and other things that are best just left alone? Can you illustrate and suggest ways forward? Why not enumerate your top five ‘must haves’ for your local church’s effectiveness to be increased, and five areas that you would abandon immediately if that would aid the process?
- 4 Conflict is inevitable in the Christian life, as Revelation graphically illustrates. What resources are available to arm us for the battles of life? (You may wish, for instance, to meditate on Ephesians 6:10–18.)

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the theme of the angels’ song, the joy of heaven and your Father’s delight. You who fill the whole cosmos by your Spirit, please fill me with your life and love in order to serve others, in your name, Amen.

5–6 January: Homeward bound

- 1 How helpful or otherwise is the analogy that the Christian life is lived between the ‘D-Day’ of the cross and the ‘V-Day’ of the Lord’s return?

The Incredible Journey

- 2 Since the Christian life is lived in both the 'now' and the 'not yet', can you list what we definitely have 'now' in Christ and what is 'not yet', for which we therefore wait? Should we expect more of the 'not yet' in our 'now'—things like healing, for example? Can you suggest others?
- 3 If a new heaven and a new earth are coming, should we therefore be indifferent to this present world? If not, why not?

Prayer

Gracious heavenly Father, thank you for the joy of Christmas; for the great truth that you were in Christ reconciling the world to yourself; that through Jesus you intend to make all things new; and that in the here and now your purposes are on track till the day your will is done on earth as it is in heaven. To Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, be glory both now and for ever more, Amen.