LIVING COMPASS

Living Well Through Advent 2026

Practicing Patience with All Your Heart, Spirit, Body, and Mind

A Living Compass Seasonal Resource

Offerings from The Living Compass Spirituality and Wellness Initiative

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Living Compass draws on Christian contemplative spirituality, depth psychology, family systems theory, and holistic wellness to support individuals, couples, families, and faith communities.

SOME OF OUR RESOURCES (ALL FREE) INCLUDE:

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We wish to express deep gratitude to our friends Ab and Nancy Nicholas and the Nicholas Family Foundation. While Ab passed away in 2016, their generous support continues to make this resource possible.

LIVING COMPASS

Outfitting individuals, families, congregations, and communities with tools and training to navigate life with awareness and intention.

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About the Writers

Robbin Brent is the director of publications and resource development for Living Compass, a writer, spiritual director, and founder of Wisdom Way of Knowing. She leads spiritual retreats and programs, facilitates gatherings of contemplative leaders, and is a graduate of Shalem Institute's Transforming Community and Spiritual Guidance programs. She loves spending time with family, returning to well-loved places and discovering new ones, running and hiking, and lingering over early-morning coffee with Rich as they watch the birds and other wildlife that congregate at the feeders and birdbath.

Steven Charleston is an elder in the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and the retired Bishop of Alaska. He is the author of *The Four Vision Quests of Jesus* and several other books. He has served on the faculty of three major seminaries and was the President and Dean of Episcopal Divinity School. The Charleston House of Interfaith Cooperation was named in his honor at his alma mater, Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut.

Jan Kwiatkowski is an Episcopal priest, licensed marriage and family therapist practicing Telemental Health in Wisconsin, Colorado, South Carolina, Florida and soon, in California. Jan and Dennis have been married close to 50 years. Between the families of their four adult sons, they are blessed with nine grandchildren who are the absolute joys of their lives. Gracie, Jan's dog, dancing and performing in parades with the Milwaukee Dancing Grannies, knitting, and oat milk lattes are also a source of life and joy for Jan.

Jason Lavann serves as priest at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He lives in the rectory with his partner, Kristy; dog, Blue; and cat, Leo. Jason's passion for parish ministry stems from his love of connecting with people and learning how God is alive and active in their everyday lives. Jason and Kristy love running, cycling, hiking, camping, concerts, theater, and relaxing in the church courtyard with Blue!

Amy Sander Montanez is a therapist, spiritual director, coach, retreat leader, and writer in Columbia, South Carolina. She specializes in working with clergy and seminarians and is known for her compassionate presence with couples and individuals. The author of three books and a six-time Polly Bond Award winner for spiritual writing, Amy also teaches in the Spiritual Direction program at the Lutheran Southern Theological Seminary. Hearth-making is her greatest joy—gathering friends, cooking, dancing, gardening, and cherishing life with her husband, Nick. She stays closely connected to her daughter, Maria, through the gift of technology.

Lisa Senuta is an Episcopal Priest serving in the diocese of Kansas as director of Spiritual Formation and Clergy Care. Trained through Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation in Washington DC, her vocation focuses on spiritual guidance and faith development. Her deepest pleasure is found in relationships new and old. And she loves gardening, hiking and poetry where there is no end to discovering God's joy.

Scott Stoner—founder of the Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative (2008)—has served his community for more than 40 years as an Episcopal priest, retreat leader, psychotherapist, wellness coach, and author. In addition to his coaching and pastoral counseling work, he leads wellness retreats for organizations and leadership teams. He is the host of the Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness podcast. Scott has been married to Holly Hughes Stoner for 50 years and together they are the co-creators of the Wellness Compass Initiative and co-hosts of the Wellness Compass podcast. In his free time, Scott loves cycling, running, and soccer, and being Pops with his grandsons.

Introduction

I believe that one of the core components of living a life of wellness and wholeness is learning to delay gratification. Perhaps one of the clearest ways to understand this is to consider how easy it is to compromise our well-being by seeking immediate gratification. Eating whatever we want, whenever we want, will negatively affect our physical wellness. Reacting immediately when we are flooded with anxiety or anger will almost always compromise our emotional and relational wellness. Giving in to the urge to buy more and more rather than learning to save will compromise our financial wellness. Seeking quick and simplistic answers to our questions and concerns regarding faith, rather than learning to be patient and "trust in the slow work of God" (Teilhard), will diminish our spiritual wellness.

At the heart of learning to delay gratification is learning to practice patience. In a culture that glorifies immediate gratification, learning to wait is counter-cultural. This makes *Practicing Patience* a perfect theme for our 2026 Advent reflections because the season of Advent is counter-cultural. The emphasis on immediate gratification increases tenfold as we rush full-speed ahead into the Christmas season. We are encouraged to give in to the barrage of invitations to eat more, do more, drink more, and buy more this time of year. The season of Advent—along with these reflections—provides us with the support we need to slow down in order to make counter-cultural choices, choices that will help prepare us for the true meaning of Christmas.

We are grateful for our five guest writers this Advent: Steven Charleston, Jan Kwiatkowski, Jason Lavann, Amy Sander Montanez, and Lisa Senuta. We are also blessed by the writing of my Living Compass colleague, Robbin Brent. I am immeasurably grateful for Robbin's editing of this entire devotional and also for creating all of the enriching content in the back. Each of these voices will help us to reflect on where the Spirit is calling us to practice patience in our lives.

It is good to be on this Advent journey together with you.

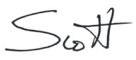
An Important Announcement About the Future of Our Devotionals

With gratitude and some sadness, we share that this will be our last printed Advent devotional. After twelve years, the cost and labor of printing and shipping 30,000 booklets each year have grown beyond what we can sustain. We will print one final devotional for Lent 2027, on the theme *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit in Heart, Spirit, Body, and Mind*, and after that we will no longer produce printed editions.

The good news is that these daily reflections are not going away. For several years we have also shared them as daily emails, on social media, and through our app and podcast, and we plan to continue offering Advent and Lent content in these digital forms. To learn what comes next, visit LivingCompass.org or subscribe to our newsletter at www.livingcompass.org/newsletter.

It has been an honor to place these devotionals in your hands for the past twelve years. We offer a deep bow of gratitude to Robbin Brent, whose writing and leadership shaped this content from the very beginning. Without her, these resources simply would not exist.

Scott Stoner



Director, Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative

The Living Compass: A Brief Overview

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.
—Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 6:5

The Living Compass Model for Well-Being offers us guidance in four dimensions of our being: heart, spirit, body, and mind. Just like a mobile or kinesthetic art, these dimensions are interconnected.

Whatever impacts one area of our lives (positively or negatively) will have an impact on the other areas. Each of the four compass points focuses on two areas of well-being, and each of the eight areas helps to guide and equip us as we commit to being more intentional about the way we live our lives. The purpose of this Compass is to provide a dynamic resource that will assist us in our search for balance and wellness. The invitation is to live an undivided life, where heart, spirit, body, and mind are integrated into both our *being* and our *doing*.

Areas of Wellness

Heart

- **Relationships.** The ability to create and maintain healthy connections with others.
- **Emotions.** The capacity to process, express, and receive emotions in a healthy way.

Spirit

- **Spirituality.** The development and practice of a strong personal value system and a meaningful purpose in life.
- **Rest and Play.** The balance between work and renewal through rest and recreation.

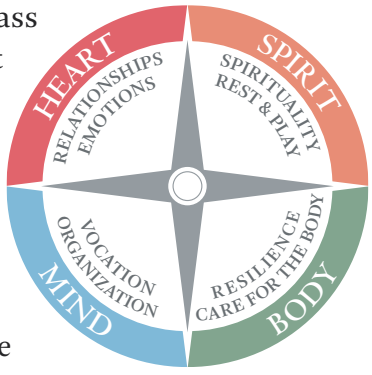
Body

- **Care for the Body.** Cultivating healthy habits and practices for our physical well-being.
- **Resilience.** The ability to deal positively with life's adversities.

Mind

- **Organization.** Effective management of belongings, finances, and time.
- **Vocation.** Making the most of employment, educational, and volunteer opportunities.

Creating resources grounded in the integration of spirituality and wellness is what makes Living Compass different from other wellness programs. Living Compass believes we all have many compasses that compete to guide our lives, often outside of our awareness. When we choose to make our spirituality the compass that guides decisions in all areas of our lives, we are better able to experience wellness and wholeness. It is worth noting that *health*, *healing*, *wholeness*, and *holy* all come from the same root word *hal* or *haelen*.



The Living Compass

Ways to Use Living Well Through Advent 2026

This guide can be used in several ways:

- For personal reflection.
- In groups who want to gather to discuss the daily reflections.
- As a congregational resource during Advent.
- For half- or full-day Advent retreats, where participants can use the daily readings, practices, and other resources as starting points for deeper reflection.

We've created a Facilitator Guide to provide support and guidance for leading discussions and retreats (free downloadable PDF at LivingCompass.org).

The season of Advent invites us to practice greater patience in our lives, creating space for God's quiet work within us. As you embark on this journey, we encourage you to approach the devotional with an open heart and mind. However you use this guide, may it support you in practicing your faith in ways that are deeply renewing.

The Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Advent 2026

Advent Year B	First reading	Psalm	Second reading	Gospel
First Sunday of Advent November 29, 2026	Isaiah 64:1-9	Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19	1 Corinthians 1:3-9	Mark 13:24-37
Second Sunday of Advent December 6, 2026	Isaiah 40:1-11	Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13	2 Peter 3:8-15a	Mark 1:1-8
Third Sunday of Advent December 13, 2026	Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11	Psalm 126 OR Luke 1:46b-55	1 Thessalonians 5:16-24	John 1:6-8, 19-28
Fourth Sunday of Advent December 20, 2026	2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16	Luke 1:46b-55 OR *Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26*	Romans 16:25-27	Luke 1:26-38

The First Sunday of Advent

Sunday, November 29, 2026

Seeds, Waiting, and Patience

Lisa Senuta

A seed knows how to wait.
—Hope Jaren, *Lab Girl*

In the beginning there is a seed, a thought, a spark, a light, a word; Advent is the time before the birth of Jesus Christ. You could say it is the germination moment of the new life of peace he revealed.

Most of us skip Advent. The season is brief and busy and Christmas seems like the real goal anyway. And yet, like a seed in the fertile ground waiting and waiting, hidden beneath the surface of anxious scriptures predicting final judgment, Advent is rich with spiritual guidance.

It is fair to say that we are not generally good at waiting. One click and we can purchase something that will be at our doorstep the next day. Within the stories and themes of Advent is the value of patience for growth, wholeness, and peace.

Hope Jahren, in *Lab Girl,* writes about seeds in a way that helps me to understand patience. "A seed knows how to wait. Most seeds wait for at least a year before starting to grow; a cherry seed can wait for a hundred years no problem. What exactly each seed is waiting for is known only to that seed. Some unique trigger-combination of temperature-moisture-light and many other things is required to convince a seed to jump off the deep end and take its chance—to take its one and only chance to grow."

The predictable human need for patience in traffic, with a child, or waiting in line are moments of rush and weariness. The wisdom of the humble seed teaches that patience is not about the thing we urgently want to hurry up and happen. Patience is about growth.

Our chronic need for more patience reveals a desire for ease and gratitude in ordinary life. Everyone says, "I need more patience," because most of us put off our journey toward becoming whole in one way or another.

Living Compass invites us to slow down and pay attention to the climate of our entire lives, listening like a seed for the "unique triggers" for our genuine becoming.

Civil rights activist, chaplain, and mystic Howard Thurman said it another way: "There is in every person that which waits, waits, waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in herself. There is that in every person that waits—waits and listens—for the sound of the genuine in other people. And when these two sounds come together, this is the music God heard when He said, "Let us make [humankind] in our image."

The moment we are waiting for in daily life is the same moment God is waiting for in humankind. The "sound of the genuine" reveals the ripe moment in which to say "yes" to God. Inside all of our impatience is God's invitation to trust and to grow in all our circumstances.

Enter the fertile time of Advent, "jump off the deep end and take a chance to grow," for your assent to divine action is inextricably connected to the world's becoming a peaceful flourishing place of love and wholeness.

Monday, November 30, 2026

Practicing Awareness of Our Impatience

Scott Stoner

Dear God, Give me patience, and give it to me now!
—Anonymous

Each of the four weeks of Advent will focus on a theme related to the overall theme of *practicing patience with all your heart, spirit, body, and mind*. This first week of Advent we will focus on becoming more aware of our impatience. This may seem like an odd place to start, but we think it is always wise to begin with honest self-assessment. It's hard to change or grow if we don't first acknowledge where we are. If, for example, I want to begin to manage my finances more wisely, a crucial first step would be to begin by reflecting honestly on my current spending, saving, and sharing habits.

Following this line of thinking, this week we will ask you simply to observe and become more curious about how and when impatience shows up in your life. When are you impatient with yourself? When are you impatient with others? When are you impatient with God? How does this get expressed? When do you have trouble delaying gratification or waiting?

Self-reflection can be humbling, and so we want to be sure that we are doing it with love, gentleness, and patience, toward ourselves and others. May we be blessed on our journey.

Making It Personal: On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is extremely impatient most or all the time, and 10 is being very patient at all times, how patient are you? On that same scale, where would you like to be? What are your initial ideas about practices, habits, or disciplines that could help you make the changes you desire?

Tuesday, December 1, 2026

The Heart and Patience

Scott Stoner

Inside all of our impatience is God's invitation to trust and to grow in all our circumstances.
—Lisa Senuta

The *Heart* quadrant of the Living Compass Model for Well-Being focuses on *Emotions* and *Relationships*—two areas of our lives where impatience often shows up. During this time of year, we frequently spend more time than usual with family and friends that we don't often see. Opportunities to practice patience will likely be abundant in the next few weeks.

Is there someone in your life right now with whom you feel particularly impatient? Allow yourself to name that without judgment and simply be curious about it. In her reflection for this past Sunday, Lisa Senuta wrote that as we observe our impatience more closely, what we might find is "God's invitation to trust and to grow in all our circumstances."

When we feel impatient with others, we often focus only on what bothers us about that person. One habit that can help to diminish our impatience is to choose instead to focus on something we genuinely appreciate about the person with whom we feel impatient. What we pay attention to is what tends to grow, and so shifting our focus to something we value or appreciate in another person can help us to reduce our impatience while deepening our bond with them.

Making It Personal: Bring to mind someone with whom you feel impatient right now. Do you see in that impatience, as Lisa Senuta writes about, an invitation from God to trust and grow? If so, what is your response to that invitation?

Wednesday, December 2, 2026

The Soul, Gratitude, and Patience

Robbin Brent

Spirituality comes from spiritus*, which means life, breath, aliveness. Spirituality is aliveness on all levels. … When people are grateful, they come alive.*
—Brother David Steindl-Rast

The *Spirit* quadrant of the Living Compass Model for Well-Being focuses on *Spirituality* and *Rest and Play*, two areas of our lives we can draw on for our practice of patience. When we make space for rest and play, especially when we are overstressed or overextended, we build reserves of energy and resilience that carry over into everything else, patience included. Most of us know the opposite only too well: when we're running on empty, patience is the first thing to go. Yet it's at these times we most need to slow down, take a walk, enjoy an unhurried meal, or plan an afternoon with nothing to accomplish. These are not indulgences; these are life-giving ways of restoring us.

Spirituality, Brother David reminds us, is aliveness. Breath. Life on every level. And when we are grateful, we come alive. That coming alive gives us room to breathe, and breath, it turns out, is where the seeds of patience are planted. One of those seeds, gratitude, may be among the quietest and most powerful practices we have, a true antidote to impatience. Genuine gratitude. Not scanning for the "happy" or the positive, but taking an honest look at the places and moments where we sense the loving presence of God. No matter what. Naming the things for which we are truly thankful.

One way to begin is to write down three things you are grateful for, seen through the lens of one of the eight areas of wellness. You can return to this practice through the rest of Advent to remind you of the grace and wonder that surround you, and slowly retrain your heart to expect goodness rather than lack.

Making It Personal: Take a few minutes to write down three things for which you are grateful. If you find this hard, ask whether something is getting in the way of your looking for authentic sources of gratitude. Can you see how a practice of gratitude might help you become more patient?

Thursday, December 3, 2026

Strength and Patience

Scott Stoner

Is everything as urgent as your stress would imply?
—Carrie Latet, poet

The *Body* quadrant of the Living Compass Model of Well-Being focuses on *Care for the Body* and *Resilience*. It can be especially challenging this time of year to make good decisions in these two areas of wellness. Most of us find that we have to be particularly intentional about caring for our physical wellness and managing our stress as we negotiate the holiday season.

There is a reciprocal relationship between stress and impatience. High stress levels can lead to being more impatient—with ourselves and others. Likewise, being impatient can lead to higher stress levels, which can, in turn, drain our energy.

In our Living Compass resources, we often talk about how our faith acts as our compass in life. When we make our faith our compass in all areas of wellness, we will experience the peace that God intends for us. During this time of year, there are many other "compasses" competing to guide our decisions. The pull of our consumer culture can have a strong influence on us, as can the pull of our families, friends, and others. Other people's ideas of how we "should" be celebrating Christmas often differ from our own, and if we are not mindful, we may find our levels of stress and impatience growing.

Making It Personal: Take a moment to write down a few thoughts on what it means for you to make the compass of your faith/spirituality your primary compass for Advent and Christmas. Do you see a relationship between using faith/spirituality as your compass, and having more patience?

Friday, December 4, 2026

Expecting Shade from a Seed

Robbin Brent

The wisdom of the humble seed teaches that patience is not about the thing we urgently want to hurry up and happen. Patience is about growth.

—Lisa Senuta

The *Mind* quadrant of the Living Compass Model of Well-Being focuses on *Vocation* and *Organization*. By vocation, we mean a clear sense of meaning and purpose in all that we do. It may include our work, but it's much more than that. At its heart, vocation is less about what we do than about who we are becoming, and whether our days point toward what we desire, and what God desires for us. Organization has to do with the decisions we make about our time, money, priorities, and possessions.

Yet, for all our good intentions, the many distractions competing for our time, attention, and energy can crowd out our awareness of what matters most. We may lose sight of what we value, of what is worth waiting for. We plant a seed and then stand over it, impatient, wondering why it isn't already a tree with branches wide enough to offer shade. As Lisa Senuta wrote on Sunday, Advent reminds us that patience is about growth, not about the things we are in a hurry to have or to make happen. Beneath the soil, unseen, the real work is already underway, the roots reaching down long before there's anything to show above ground.

When we forget to bring our questions and longings to God first, it's easy to become impatient, with ourselves, with others, and with God. Perhaps that very impatience can become a kind of signal, a way of noticing when we have run out ahead of ourselves, and ahead of God's timing for who we are becoming.

Making It Personal: Do you ever find yourself feeling impatient with God's timing? How might you practice being more patient with the "seeds" that you, with God's help, have planted? How might prayer help you to be more trusting and patient?

Saturday, December 5, 2026

Impatiently Patient

Jan Kwiatkowski

Let's think of something to do while we're waiting.
—Mr. Rogers

When my three-year-old grandson became a big brother, he exuded a joy that seemed like it would burst from his entire being as he told everyone he could about his new baby brother. After a few days, the reality hit home that he would have to wait for his "not-so-instant" playmate to grow up a little. At first, he was feeling very impatient with this new awareness. Yet, with support from his parents and grandparents, he learned to navigate his situation and to better handle impatience meltdowns. He learned some things to do while waiting for his baby brother to grow.

Toward the end of his song, *Let's Think of Something to Do While We're Waiting,* Mr. Rogers sings, "You know it's really all right; in fact, it's downright quite bright, to think of something to do that's specific for you." His simple song reminds us that practicing patience is an active choice and that we all need to find our specific way.

The way impatience shows up in us can teach us how to practice patience, to think of something to do to increase our ability to practice patience. Walking, breathing, journaling, getting enough sleep, taking a time out before we say something in impatience, are just some of the things we can practice. And these practices can become prayer when we invite God into our practicing. Advent reminds us that learning to practice patience takes a lifetime and yet, God is always patient with us.

Making It Personal: Did anything surprise you (or not) about how impatience shows up in you? Is there a new "something" the Spirit might be calling you to do this Advent?

The Second Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 6, 2026

Patience As a Process

Jason Lavann

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.
—Philippians 1:6 (NLT)

One of the pleasantly frustrating qualities about my partner Kristy is her ability to fall asleep with ease. We laugh about this, but in honesty I find myself resentful because sleep never comes easily for me. Much of my struggle with falling asleep lies in my inability to deal with unfinished work. There is the professional unfinished work that keeps me awake: an ever-expanding to-do list, a homily that did not come together, a pastoral visit where I could have provided better care, or the sadness at a parish member who is disappointed with me. There is also the personal unfinished work of my life: the fact that I continually struggle with selfishness and self-consciousness, stubbornness and impatience, materialism, and wanting to be in control.

As I stir impatiently with all the unfinished work of my life, Kristy will wisely say, "The beauty of the night is that it makes room for a new day." Maybe that is why Kristy sleeps better—she carries the understanding that unfinished work is part of life, and even finds joy in facing it another day. Or, I think of the wise words my bishop said to me as I was getting ready to walk down the Cathedral aisle for my ordination: "Remember Jason, ordination does not make you a priest. It gives you permission to learn how to become one!"

Fifteen years later, I am still learning how to become a priest. I am still learning how to become a partner to Kristy, a friend to my dear friends, a student to my mentors, and ever since I emerged from the waters of Baptism when I was a few weeks old, I have been learning how to be a sheep of the Shepherd.

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

In today's second reading, Paul celebrates the gift of a God who dances in all our unfinished work: "I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns" (NLT, Philippians 1:6). The beauty of the night is that it makes room for a new day! Our birth is permission to spend the rest of our lives learning and growing. Growth is not our work to do alone, but work God delights to continually do with and within us!

Advent gives us permission to rest patiently with ourselves in the paradox of discovering that all the unfinished work of our lives is not an obstacle, but somehow becomes an invitation for God to enter and birth wisdom and growth, again and anew. Instead of lying awake dwelling impatiently on all that is left to be done, thanks to Advent, maybe I can fall asleep dreaming of what God longs to birth in the light of a new day!

Monday, December 7, 2026

Practicing Patience With Ourselves

Scott Stoner

Growth is not our work to do alone, but work God delights to continually do with and within us.
—Jason Lavann

This week we will focus on practicing patience with ourselves. This is essential because the patience we practice with others (our focus for next week) often reflects the degree to which we are patient with ourselves. To paraphrase a core Christian teaching, we are to be patient with our neighbor, as we are patient with ourselves.

Yesterday was St. Nicholas Day, a day especially loved by children around the world. Full of excitement, they place their little shoes out the night before, many impatiently I'm sure, and then awaken with delight to find their shoes filled with chocolate gold coins or other treats. The gold coins symbolize the generosity of the real St. Nicholas, who was known for being generous with those in need.

How might you, in the spirit of St. Nicholas, be more generous with yourself? Children spontaneously find joy and playfulness in the rituals associated with this day. Perhaps we might discover that there is a connection between being more patient with ourselves and allowing ourselves to be a little more spontaneous and playful, enjoying the very moment we are in, rather than looking to the future with impatience. In the spirit of St Nicholas, we encourage you to give that a try today.

Making It Personal: Do you see a connection between the way you practice patience with yourself and how you extend patience to others? Do you see a connection between being patient with yourself and your capacity to be spontaneous, playful, in the moment, and going with the flow? What is your response to Jason Lavann's belief that growth is not just our work, but also God's work with and within us?

Tuesday, December 8, 2026

Saying "No" Can Be a Spiritual Practice

Scott Stoner

To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

There is a great deal of pressure to act and feel a certain way this time of year. It is easy to get caught up in comparing our "insides" to everyone else's "outsides," meaning that we can sometimes feel like we are the only ones who might be struggling this holiday season. Maybe we don't have our usual "holiday spirit" due to a challenging time we are experiencing. Maybe we don't feel like decorating our home this year. Maybe we don't feel like doing things as we have always done them in the past.

Setting healthy boundaries that honor what we are feeling and what we need is one way we can practice patience with ourselves. Responding with a loving "no" can be just the act of self-care we may need. The pressure to say "yes"—to be the person *we think we are supposed to be*—is high, and setting healthy boundaries requires more intention, patience, and practice this time of year.

Saying "yes" to being patient with ourselves often means saying "no" to other things so that we are able to say "yes" to self-care. This is the surest way of getting more comfortable being our authentic selves in a world that is constantly trying to make us into something else.

Making It Personal: Take a moment and note any ways you feel pressured to be someone or something other than your true self right now. Is that pressure coming from within or without? How might practicing patience with yourself by saying "no" to unreasonable demands help you to be more accepting of who you are and how you feel this holiday season?

Wednesday, December 9, 2026

Serenity Now!

Robbin Brent

"The greatest illusion," said the mole,
"is that life should be perfect."
—Charlie Mackesy, *The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and the Horse*

It's nearly impossible to chase perfection and be patient with ourselves at the same time. The saying "Serenity Now!" (made famous by Frank Costanza, George's dad on Seinfeld) has become a mantra of mine whenever I catch myself scanning for incompletions, or for the things I haven't done well, aka perfectly. We don't have to know the line to recognize how perfectionism can quietly rob us of our serenity, always promising that peace is waiting just on the other side of getting everything right, a place we somehow never quite reach. The hopeful news is that serenity was never waiting there at all. Along the way I've slowly discovered that when I relax my need to do everything perfectly to be respected or loved, I find a holy perfection in everything, just as it is.

So how do we let go of perfectionism and become more available to all that God longs to offer through us? What might help us be more patient with ourselves and others, with all our heart, all our spirit, all our body, and all our mind?

When we let go of unrealistic expectations and extend kindness and patience toward ourselves when we make mistakes, we are freer to receive the gift of perfection already present in all of God's creation, right here, right now. Kindness toward ourselves is not lowering the bar. It is remembering that we are beloved before we are finished, and that God's love was never a reward for getting it all right.

Making It Personal: Can you see the relationship between striving to make things perfect and a lack of patience or kindness toward yourself? What might you ask God to help you let go of, so you can more freely enter God's prayer for your life?

Thursday, December 10, 2026

Grieving and Patience

Scott Stoner

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul.

—Psalm 23:1-3 (KJV)

It has been said that grief is the uninvited guest at every holiday gathering. The holidays always bring with them many emotions, and for many, the experience of grief is the one that catches us the most off-guard. It may be that this will be our first Christmas without a loved one being present, either because they have passed away, are away this year, or for some other reason. The holiday season is a marker of the passage of time and thus can bring its own unique blend of losses and change.

To be accepting and compassionate with ourselves through any grief we are experiencing requires us to be patient with ourselves and the process of grieving. If we were not raised to be comfortable with feeling or expressing sadness, this could be especially challenging. The paradox is that repressing our grief takes a great deal of psychological energy, and often we are more exhausted when we try not to feel our grief. On the other hand, patiently making room for grief and inviting it into our consciousness will help us from getting stuck in it, or allowing it to define our whole experience of the holidays. And, as Christians, our faith promises us that love has the power to heal our grieving hearts.

Making It Personal: Are you experiencing any sense of grief or loss this holiday season? If so, are you able to be patient with yourself and acknowledge to yourself and others what you are feeling? Can you think of someone with whom you could share any grief or loss you are experiencing?

Friday, December 11, 2026

Gratitude and Patience

Robbin Brent

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
—1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Scripture encourages us to be grateful *in* all things, not necessarily *for* all things. As we noted last week, a regular practice of gratitude helps us notice what keeps us in the flow of God's love, and what pulls us out of it: a rushed morning, a sharp word we wish we could take back, a worry we keep circling. Noticing gently, without turning on ourselves, is itself a kind of patience.

Some days the gratitude is for a plain sense of wonder. Other days it's for a prayer, or a small nudge that something in our lives is quietly asking for our attention. Gratitude has a way of widening our vision, so that we begin to notice the small mercies we had been moving too quickly to see: a kindness, an unhurried moment, a breath of grace in the ordinary.

Over time, a gratitude practice can show us what touches our hearts and the hearts of others, and what creates a sense of lasting joy. It also helps us to listen more deeply for the ways our prayer joins with God's prayer for us in every area of our lives. Slowly, being grateful becomes less a task and more a way of seeing.

Today we might take a few moments to reflect on the difference between being grateful in our circumstances and being grateful for them. We do not thank God for the loss or the fear itself, but we can still look for God within it: the hand held out in the dark, the unexpected steadiness, the love that never leaves us. Then we could list a few things for which we are honestly grateful, and end with a simple prayer of thanksgiving.

Making It Personal: If you made a list of things for which you are grateful, how did it make you feel? How might a regular practice of gratitude strengthen your ability to be more patient with yourself?

Saturday, December 12, 2026

First Pause, Then Cross

Jan Kwiatkowski

Don't cross the bridge until you come to it.
—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Today we reach the midpoint in our Advent journey. This is a good time to pause to look back at where we started, notice where we are now, and then to wonder or be hopeful about the final days of our journey. As we reflect we need to remember that there was a start, and there will be an end, to this Advent time. Truly, the only time we have is now, this moment.

We know Christmas is coming, but it is not here. The world around us may have rushed across the bridge to Christmas, but we have chosen to patiently journey to Christmas one Advent day at a time. We've come to the bridge that takes us into the final two weeks of Advent. Immanuel, God is with us.

Before crossing the bridge, simply pause and be as present as you can to this day and to each moment of this day. One way to do that is to notice what you are grateful for in heart, spirit, body, and mind. Another is to reflect on what you have learned about practicing patience with all your heart, spirit, body, and mind. Practice this pause in whatever ways Spirit is nudging you.

Making It Personal: In the rush of the season, what is it like for you to simply pause and be present? What bridge are you crossing into the last two weeks of Advent? Is there something you'd like to leave behind or take with you as you cross the bridge?

The Third Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 13, 2026

Authentic Patience

Amy Sander Montanez

Out
Of a great need
We are all holding hands
And climbing.
Not loving is a letting go.
Listen,
The terrain around here
Is
Far too
Dangerous
For
That.
—Rumi

I have a confession to make. I never pray for patience, and I don't encourage others to pray for patience either. On a light-hearted level, I quip that if you pray for patience, God is sure to provide a reason for you to have to learn patience. After all, the root word *patior* means "to suffer." No thank you to that idea. I find it difficult to pray for patience because I believe there is a complex relationship between patience and other virtues, like authenticity, truthfulness, integrity, perseverance, and my least favorite, surrender.

I kind of love it that in the Gospel of Matthew, John the Baptizer calls the crowd a "brood of vipers." I cheer him on when he shouts what I think in my head. I have taught myself not to say things like this out loud. But I *think* things like that about people sometimes, especially when they disappoint me, because being disappointed by another is the hardest emotion for me to process. Or maybe disappointing myself is the hardest? I just know that I have such high expectations. And I ask

this question often: ***Is that really the best you or I can do?*** "Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Luke 3:9). Brood of vipers we all are.

These challenging and divisive times have tested my patience with others, and I imagine they have tested yours too. How do we have patience with others when their actions may be threatening to us? What does patience look like in our faith communities when others may want very different things than we do? I don't think my heart is much more patient with others at the end of the day, but I do think I have become more gracious. And kinder. Thanks be to God.

I have lived enough years and been a therapist and spiritual director long enough to answer my own question. And honestly, I really don't like the answer. ***Yes, people—including me—are doing the best they can.*** Given the raw material they are working with, the history, the childhood, the traumas, and the stories we know nothing about, yes, people are doing the best they can. Now I have to find a way to move forward in relationship with authenticity, truthfulness, integrity, and surrender. Oh, and gentleness, like Paul encourages in his letter to the Philippians: "Let your gentleness be known to everyone."

I still don't pray for patience, but I pray for understanding, for gentleness, for the eyes of Christ to help me see others more clearly, and for the peace of God, which surely surpasses my own understanding, to guard my heart—and my lips—until my thoughts and actions look something like patience.

Monday, December 14, 2026

Practicing Patience with Others

Scott Stoner

Why is patience so important? Because it makes us pay attention.
—Paulo Coelho

This week we invite you to shift your focus to practicing patience with others. We encourage you not only to practice patience with others "in general," but to choose a specific person with whom you would like to be more patient, and focus on practicing patience with them. This very likely will be someone with whom you live, work, or interact with regularly. In yesterday's reflection, Amy Sander Montanez wrote, "I seek to find a way to move forward in relationship with authenticity, truthfulness, integrity, and surrender." Let us draw inspiration from her journey this coming week.

One of the foundational teachings of our Living Compass resources is, "Whatever we pay attention to is what will grow." If we pay more attention to what annoys or concerns us about someone and how they are not living up to our expectations, our impatience with that person will grow. If instead we pay more attention to what is good and what we appreciate about the other person, our patience and gratitude toward that person will grow. This week we invite you to practice paying attention to what delights you about the person you have chosen to focus on, and to see if your patience with them grows.

Because emotions tend to run high during the holiday season, we will have opportunities to practice patience with friends and family members whom we don't see that often, which can be a gift if we choose to see it that way.

Making It Personal: Do you see a connection between practicing patience and noticing what you are paying attention to about others? As you begin to pay attention to how you practice patience with others, what do you notice and learn about yourself?

Tuesday, December 15, 2026

Love Is Patient

Scott Stoner

Love is patient; love is kind; … It does not insist on its own way.
—1 Corinthians 13:4-5

Paul's words about love in the First Letter to the Corinthians are some of the most inspiring and well-known in the Bible. From Paul we learn that love is much more than a feeling. It is, in fact, a decision, an act of our will. "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; … It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

How might our patience with others be enhanced by viewing patience as a decision, not simply a feeling? One possibility is that we could decide to act with patience toward another person, even when we might not be feeling particularly so at the moment. For example, getting up at 3AM with a sick child or other loved one in our care for the third night in a row calls forth a decision to be patient and to show love, even when that is not what we might be feeling in the moment.

The decision to practice patience with others requires attention and discipline, and it is often challenging. Yet the rewards can be great, for our own emotional and spiritual growth, as well as for our relationship with the other person.

Making It Personal: Can you think of a time when you acted with patience even when you were not feeling particularly patient? What made that possible? What could help you decide to act more patiently toward someone in your life right now, even if that is not how you are currently feeling?

Wednesday, December 16, 2026

Listening and Patience

Robbin Brent

Silence is God's first language.
—St. John of the Cross

Silence isn't simply the absence of talking. It's the opening of the ears of the heart to hear what God is whispering to us. All it asks of us is patience, and a willingness to listen for what the Spirit is saying to each of us as God's beloved. One of the most gracious gifts we can give ourselves, and others, is patience with our own slow growth as listeners, trusting that we will, in time, hear God in the silence.

In a season crowded with noise and busyness, silence becomes an oasis where we join our longings and prayers with God's longings and prayers for us. There is a listening that reaches beneath words, to the settling of a house at dusk, the pause between one breath and the next, and, underneath it all, to the nearness of God. "Be still and know that I am God," says Psalm 46:10. But listening, like anything worth learning, takes practice. And so does asking honest questions, like: How much of the noise is the world's, and how much is our own?

Today, try one simple way of deepening silence. Several times during the day, stop whatever you are doing and let your attention rest on everything around you. Notice, and then listen for the silence beneath the sounds. Even a few moments can bear surprising fruit. When you feel complete, you might offer a simple prayer of thanksgiving. Over time, this small practice can grow your capacity to hear God in the quiet. And what you hear may be no words at all, only a sense of being known, and held, and never alone.

Making It Personal: As you try this simple practice, notice whether it helps you become more aware of God's loving presence. What might get in the way of your valuing silence as part of your day? Is there another practice for deepening silence you would like to try during Advent?

Thursday, December 17, 2026

Gentleness, Peace, and Patience

Scott Stoner

Let your gentleness be known to everyone. … And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
—Philippians 4:5, 7

When we think of strength, we typically think of power, assertiveness, and toughness. While these attributes describe particular aspects of strength, there are other qualities of strength. The Philippians passage that Amy Montanez referenced in her Sunday reflection talks about one type of strength that directly applies to practicing patience: "Let your gentleness be known to everyone."

One sure way to let our gentleness be known to everyone is by being patient with others. Patience and gentleness tend to go together. When we are impatient or irritable with others, we come across as the opposite of gentle, often acting in ways that are rude and abrasive. True emotional and spiritual strength is expressed through patience and gentleness.

The same passage from Philippians also talks about the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding. This is another reminder that God's peace transcends our usual patterns of thought and practice, and is much more than simply the absence of conflict. This understanding of peace can be helpful as we practice patience with others. Being patient with others is much more than simply not being impatient with them. It means being gentle, loving, and kind, and in doing so, modeling the more profound understanding of the peace and patience to which God calls us.

Making It Personal: Think of a time when you responded with impatience and rudeness toward someone. Now think of a time when you responded with patience and gentleness. What was the difference for you between the two exchanges? For the other person? What helps your ability to be gentle and patient more often?

Friday, December 18, 2026

Trust in the Slow Work of God

Robbin Brent

As spring and summer follow ... winter, so our lives
have seasons. Help us to live in the eternal moment,
awaiting your perfect timing in all things.
—Nan Merrill, from Psalm 105, *Psalms for Praying*

Scott Stoner opened this season with a single line from Teilhard de Chardin: "Trust in the slow work of God." Here is a little more of that prayer, in which Teilhard names so tenderly the struggle with patience so many of us feel this time of year.

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to
something unknown, something new.
—Teilhard de Chardin, from *Hearts on Fire*

During this busy season, pulled in a dozen directions, we can grow quick to anger, easily annoyed by the demands of others. Often these feelings surface when our days have drifted out of sync with what we most value. Then we can feel anxious and irritable, and it often spills over onto those closest to us. The remedy is rarely to try harder. More often it is to slow down enough to remember what we love, and to let our days settle back into that shape.

When we notice our patience thinning, it can be steadying and healing to remember Teilhard's counsel: to trust, again, the slow work of God, and God's timing in all things. The season itself is teaching this, quietly, the way winter teaches spring. Nothing green is rushed into being; it comes in its own hidden time, and so, Teilhard trusts, do we.

Making It Personal: What is your response to Teilhard's prayer about the challenge of trusting in God's timing? What practices help you to be more patient, and to trust God more deeply?

Saturday, December 19, 2026

Notice, Listen, Practice

Jan Kwiatkowski

I love humanity. It's people I don't like.
—Linus (Charles Schultz)

There are days when Linus' words say it all for me. I don't know anyone who doesn't have moments like Linus. We are human and we will always have a need to practice patience. We were invited this week to pay attention as we chose specific people who might give us the gift of practicing patience. We reflected on what it might take for us to exercise emotional and spiritual muscles needed to choose patience. Amy Sander Montanez pointed us to virtues associated with patience, such as authenticity, truthfulness, integrity, perseverance, and surrender.

Today, simply notice which words, phrases, wonderings, or reflections caught your attention this past week. As we transition into the last week of Advent, consider if any of the nudgings from this past week, or perhaps from the previous weeks, might be calling you to carry them into the final days of Advent, or into the Christmas season, and beyond.

Perhaps the reflections might be inviting you to let go of something in order to make practicing patience a little easier. Or perhaps you might simply be thankful for the people who have provided an opportunity to more deeply love humanity *and* people.

Making It Personal: Is the Spirit inviting you to carry forward, or to let go of, something as you practice patience? How has your understanding of patience evolved during this Advent season? What, if anything, about this Advent season and the practice of patience has surprised you?

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 20, 2026

Holy Patience

The Rt. Rev. Steven Charleston

And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? … And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."
—Luke 1:43,45

When you suddenly recognize that your life is about to change, do you ever find yourself saying what Elizabeth says: "And why is this happening to me …?"

If so, you are not alone. "Why me?" Most people have asked that question at some point in their lives. We ask it when we are surprised by what we take to be good fortune. We ask it when we are confronted by our own fragility. We ask it when we receive a gift or when we face an illness. In many ways, "why me?" is the Advent question.

Advent is the season of questions because it is the season of expectations. What will happen? When will it happen? And perhaps most of all, why are we a part of it?

Deep change presents us with the graphic reminder that we are not in control of life. Things happen that we can neither predict nor prevent. This change may be joyful or heartbreaking, yet either way, we adapt to the situation. We celebrate or we learn to cope. Like Elizabeth and Mary, we are players on the stage of human life without a script, improvising our lines as we go. These two women recognize that they are about to give birth to a change they can only dimly understand. As St. Paul says, they see their part in God's great story "as through a glass but darkly." Mary's vision of what is to come is a description, not a definition. Her task is not to write the script, but to be faithful in playing her part as it comes to her. She does that by accepting the ambiguity of change, accepting the

fact she may not have an answer to "why me?" but never wavering in her trust in God. She is patient in believing all will be well.

Patience is trust lived. When we are uncertain as to why we have either been blessed or challenged, we come to that place where we can only wait upon the Lord. Whether life brings us moments to rejoice like a baby dancing in the womb, or presents us with challenges we need to adapt to with all of our coping skills, we trust that we are never alone on the stage. We are confident that God is with us. So confident, we can abide in holy patience. Time itself becomes our expression of faith. We know that even if we do not fully understand the unfolding play of which we are a part, we will. In the meantime, like Elizabeth and Mary, we trust in God, with a trust that is as patient with God, as God is patient with us.

Monday, December 21, 2026

Practicing Patience with God

Scott Stoner

Patience is trust lived.
—Steven Charleston

In this last week of Advent we turn our attention to practicing patience with God. Patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit named in Galatians, Chapter 5, which reminds us that patience is a natural outgrowth of our spiritual lives. Just as we can grow in our practice of being more patient with ourselves and with others, so too can we deepen our faith in God's timing in a way that manifests itself as enhanced patience and trust.

The Gospel for yesterday, the fourth Sunday of Advent, describes the patience and trust exhibited by both Mary and Elizabeth as they wait to see what God has in store for them and their soon-to-be-born babies. As Steven Charleston wrote in yesterday's reflection, "Patience is trust lived," which is a perfect description of Mary and Elizabeth.

The idea that patience is trust lived in our lives both awakens and challenges us. It's one thing for me to think I am a patient person and trust God; it's quite another to manifest that in the way I live my life. I wonder if people who know me well would describe me as a person who exhibits patience and trust in God? I wonder how much it shows in the way I treat others and the way I order my life? Join me in reflecting on how practicing patience with God manifests itself in your life during this final week of Advent.

Making It Personal: What do you think of Steven Charleston's idea that "patience is trust lived"? Do you think others would describe you as a person who exhibits patience and trust with God? What spiritual practices help you to be more patient with God?

Tuesday, December 22, 2026

Patience In the Midst of Deep Change

Scott Stoner

God grant me the serenity to accept the things
I cannot change; courage to change the things I
can; and wisdom to know the difference.
—Reinhold Niebuhr

"Deep change presents us with the graphic reminder that we are not in control of life. Things happen that we can neither predict nor prevent." These words from Steven Charleston's reflection remind us that one of the most significant challenges to our emotional and spiritual well-being is our ability to deal with change and loss. If we have experienced a recent significant loss, the holiday season will often magnify our grief.

None of us like the feeling of not being in control. When we experience that feeling, we have choices as to how we will respond. We can attempt to avoid the feelings altogether by repressing or numbing those feelings or pretending they don't exist. We can choose to overcompensate by trying to increase control over some other aspect of our lives. Or, we can choose to use the experience of feeling out of control as an opportunity to deepen our practice of the opening lines of the Serenity Prayer shared above.

When we use avoidance or over-functioning, we build a wall around our feelings. Not only does this not work, it creates a barrier between ourselves and God. Acknowledging and accepting our vulnerability is an essential step in deepening our spiritual root system so that we can, with God's help, persevere in the midst of deep change in our lives.

Making It Personal: In general, how do you react when you feel some critical part of your life is out of control? Are you experiencing any of those feelings right now? If so, what would it mean for you to turn to God with those feelings?

Wednesday, December 23, 2026

Dealing with Unrealistic Expectations

Scott Stoner

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
—Luke 1:46-48

One of the root causes of impatience, whether with ourselves, others, or with God, is unrealistic expectations. I can become impatient with myself or others because there is some goal I have set that is not being met in the way I desire. Similarly, I can become impatient with God because God is not answering my prayers according to my plans and assumptions. The common theme here is my unrealistic and self-centered expectations. Too often the temptation is there for me to try and bend life and others, including God, to the needs of my own ego.

It is not unusual to struggle with unrealistic expectations this time of year. Maybe this holiday season isn't going as we expected. It is easy to get fooled by social media posts that show everyone else having the "perfect" Christmas. Naming and letting go of any unrealistic expectations can help us reconnect with the spiritual meaning of Advent and Christmas, something the dominant culture around us often fails to understand.

Mary and Joseph undoubtedly had expectations for how their lives would unfold, and it is safe to say that they could never have expected what happened to them. And yet, this week's Bible stories tell of how they let go of their expectations and learned to trust God in a whole new way. May we be inspired by these stories and do the same.

Making It Personal: Are you aware of any unrealistic expectations you are carrying right now, either of yourself, others, or of God? What can help you to let go and make room for the experience of God's presence in your life today and for the remaining days of Advent?

Christmas Eve

December 24, 2026

God's Patient Promise

Robbin Brent

Make our hearts leap with joy, and fill our mouths with songs of praise, that we may announce glad tidings of peace, and welcome the Christ in our midst.
—prayer excerpt from *Daily Prayer for All Seasons*

During a contemplative retreat I attended, we were invited to introduce ourselves and to name what we were bringing with us or leaving behind. One young woman introduced herself by saying, "I let go of hurry ..." while dropping her left shoe to the floor, "and worry," as her right shoe fell. I can still hear the sound of those two shoes hitting the floor, and still feel the quiet wisdom in her noticing how closely hurry and worry are bound together. Her small gesture inspired me to see how hurry and worry so often work as co-conspirators in the sabotage of my own well-being, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Set them down, one and then the other, and something in us can finally exhale, leaving a little more room for patience.

The story of Jesus' birth unfolds in God's time, not ours. As many of us scurry through last-minute preparations today, we can pause and welcome, with joy and song and open-hearted hospitality, the birth we have been waiting for, now only a few hours away. Tonight the waiting is almost over. In homes and churches, candles are being lit, children are too excited to sleep, and the whole tired world leans toward a stable where God chose to arrive small, and quiet, and unhurried. In the midst of whatever hurry and worry we carry, we can hold on to God's promise of joy, peace, and love for all the world, and wait as patiently as God has waited for us.

Making It Personal: Have you noticed a connection between the stress of hurry and worry and your ability to be patient, with yourself, with others, or with God? In your desire to be more patient, what practices have you found helpful?

Christmas Day

December 25, 2026

Good News of Great Joy

Robbin Brent, Jan Kwiatkowski, and Scott Stoner

And the Word became flesh and lived among us.
—John 1:14

Today is the day we have been waiting for! It is Christmas, and we celebrate the good news:

> *Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.*
> —Luke 2:10-11

The Word has become flesh. A Savior, the Messiah, has come. And how has the Savior come to us? As a person with great political power? As a person with great military strength? No, the Savior has come in the most vulnerable way possible: as a newborn child.

And think of how patient Mary and Joseph had to be, and indeed all who wondered who this child would grow up to be.

The true gift of Christmas, the gift of the Word made flesh, is not like any other gift we will receive on Christmas. It is a gift we spend a lifetime opening and reopening.

And now it is God's turn to wait, God's turn to be patient. God waits as we continue to mature in our understanding of what the Gift truly means for us, and how we are called to share this gift with the world.

It has been an honor to travel this Advent journey with you and we thank you for joining us. We have learned much about practicing patience, and trust that you have as well.

We wish you a Merry Christmas and God's blessings to each of you.

Notes/Reflections

Scripture, Quotes, Prayers & Practices for Advent

Scripture

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul.

—Psalm 23:1-3 (KJV)

Show me your ways, O LORD, and teach me your paths.

—Psalm 25:4

Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

—Psalm 25:5

Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him;

—Psalm 37:7

For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him.

—Psalm 62:5

Better is the end of a thing than its beginning; the patient in spirit are better than the proud in spirit.

—Ecclesiastes 7:8

Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

—John 13:7

For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

—Romans 8:24-25

Love is patient; love is kind; … It does not insist on its own way.

—1 Corinthians 13:4-5

So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.

—Galatians 6:9

With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

—Ephesians 4:2-3

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

—Philippians 1:6 (NLT)

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

—Philippians 4:6

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

—Colossians 3:12

You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

—James 5:8

Quotes

We are saved by hope for that which we do not see and we wait for it with patience.

—Thomas Merton

Dear God, Give me patience, and give it to me now!.

—Anonymous

Adopt the pace of nature: her secret is patience.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Have patience with all things, but first with yourself.

—Saint Francis de Sales

Rivers know this: there is no hurry. We shall get there some day.

—A.A. Milne, Winnie-the-Pooh

The strongest of all warriors are these two—Time and Patience.

—Leo Tolstoy

Have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart. Try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books written in a foreign language. Do not now look for the answers. They cannot now be given to you because you could not live them. It is a question of experiencing everything. At present you need to live the question. Perhaps you will gradually, without even noticing it, find yourself experiencing the answer, some distant day.

—Rainer Maria Rilke

A waiting person is a patient person. The word patience means the willingness to stay where we are and live the situation out to the full in the belief that something hidden there will manifest itself to us.

—Henri Nouwen

Is everything as urgent as your stress would imply?

—Carrie Latet, poet

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Why is patience so important? Because it makes us pay attention.

—Paulo Coelho

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
for hope would be hope for the wrong thing;
wait without love for love would be love of the wrong thing;
there is yet faith.
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought;
so the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

—T.S. Eliot, *East Coker*

The wisdom of the humble seed teaches that patience is not about the thing we urgently want to hurry up and happen. Patience is about growth.

—Lisa Senuta

Don't cross the bridge until you come to it.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Patience is trust lived.

—Steven Charleston

To welcome and to let go is one of the most radically loving, faith-filled gestures we can make in each moment of each day. It is an open-hearted embrace of all that is in ourselves and in the world.

—Mary Mrozowski, creator of the Welcoming Prayer

Prayers

As spring and summer follow … winter, so our lives have seasons. Help us to live in the eternal moment, awaiting your perfect timing in all things. [Amen.]

—Nan Merrill, from Psalm 105, *Psalms for Praying*

O God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference; living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as a pathway to peace; taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that You will make all things right if I surrender to Your will; so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with You forever in the next. [Amen.]

—Reinhold Niebuhr

Let nothing upset you;
Let nothing frighten you.
Everything is changing;
God alone is changeless.
Patience attains the goal.
Who has God lacks nothing;
God alone fills every need.
[Amen.]

—Saint Teresa of Avila

O Lord and Master of Life,
Keep from us the spirit of indifference and discouragement,
Lust of power and idle chatter.
Instead, grant to us, your servants,
The spirit of wholeness of being,
Humble-mindedness, patience and love.
Our Lord and King,
Grant us the grace to be aware of our sins
And not to judge our brothers and sisters;
For you are the Blessed
now and ever and forever. Amen.

—Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian

Lord, take me where You want me to go,
Let me meet who You want me to meet,
Tell me what you want me to say,
And keep me out of Your way. Amen.

—Mychal's Prayer

This is another day, O Lord. I know not what it will bring forth, but make me ready, Lord, for whatever it may be. If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely. If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly. If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently. And if I am to do nothing, let me do it gallantly. Make these words more than words, and give me the Spirit of Jesus. Amen.

—The Book of Common Prayer, p. 461

Teach me patience beyond work—
and, beyond patience, the blest
Sabbath of Thy unresting love
which lights all things and gives rest. [Amen.]

—Wendell Berry, *Given: Poems*

For You alone my soul waits in silence:
my hope is from the Beloved.
Enfolding me with strength and steadfast love,
my faith shall remain firm. [Amen.]

—from Psalm 62, Nan Merrill, *Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness*

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions; take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—For the Unity of the Church, The Book of Common Prayer, p. 255

O God, early in the morning I cry to you.
Help me to pray
And to concentrate my thoughts on you:
I cannot do this alone.
In me there is darkness,
But with you there is light;
I am lonely, but you do not leave me;
I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help;
I am restless, but with you there is peace.
In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience;
I do not understand your ways,
But you know the way for me . . .
Restore me to liberty,
And enable me so to live now
That I may answer before you and before me.
Lord, whatever this day may bring,
Your name be praised. [Amen.]
—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, written while awaiting execution in a Nazi prison

Prayer and Contemplative Practices

Prayer connects us with the divine presence already permeating our lives. When we approach prayer as honest, intimate conversation with a loving presence, rooted in the simple needs and desires of our hearts, we find ourselves more at ease and inspired to pray in ways that truly resonate with our own experiences.

The Lord's Prayer offers a rich framework for integrating prayer and contemplative practice. After each line we offer suggestions for ways to more deeply engage with the prayer—and these practices can be applied to any of the prayers in the previous section as well:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Consider cultivating greater awareness of God's presence through practices like centering prayer or breath prayer.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

You might explore aligning your heart with compassion and divine will through *lectio divina* or Lovingkindness meditation.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Gratitude practice or mindful eating can deepen appreciation for daily sustenance.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

The examen of conscience offers one way to practice forgiveness and self-reflection.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Discernment prayer or the welcoming prayer can support you in navigating life's challenges.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Contemplative worship or nature meditation are possibilities for embracing trust and surrender.

These are simply suggestions—ways you might deepen your sense of connection with God. You'll find several of these practices described more fully in the Contemplative Practices section that follows.

Contemplative Practices

Contemplative Walk

Walking as a contemplative practice is an ancient tradition, as is expressed by both Augustine: "It is solved by walking," and Friedrich Nietzsche: "All truly great thoughts are conceived while walking." You can learn more about contemplative walking, also known as walking meditation, on our website: LivingCompass.org/ro2f.

The invitation to take a contemplative walk is both for those who are able to walk, as well as for those who are not able to walk. Perhaps you are sick, or confined to a place for other reasons, or you cannot physically walk. If this is true for you, try this practice with your eyes closed, or while watching a video or gazing at photographs of places in nature that inspire you. There are many ways to take a contemplative walk as you focus on the inner walk of faith. Here are three simple ideas to help you get started. Note that any of these can be done solo, with another person, or with a small group.

- **Choose a question, situation, or challenge you wish to ponder and wonder about, perhaps related to practicing patience.** As you walk, open your heart, mind, and soul to the wisdom of the Spirit as you consider, silently or aloud, "I wonder what I might do or say about _____?" "I wonder what God might guide me to do or say about _____?" Allow yourself to be curious. Don't force an answer or resolution; simply walk and reflect on possible insights you may not previously have been able to see.
- **Walk with a Scripture verse.** The daily reflections in this devotional offer many choices, as well as the collection on pp. 43–44.
- **Walk in nature.** Walk slowly, noticing the wonder of God's creation, perhaps pausing from time to time to pay attention to how nature itself demonstrates the eternal rhythm of patient growth—the abundance of a flowering tree, the roots and seeds lying dormant beneath frozen ground, the faithful return of seasons and cycles.

Lovingkindness Prayer Practice

As we practice patience with ourselves and others, we can offer this prayer:

May you be happy.

May you be healthy.

May you be safe.

May you live with ease.

May you know God's peace.

May you share God's love.

Each time you say this prayer, first think of those you love. Then, as you repeat the prayer, you may want to bring in those you find challenging to love right now, and those you have never met. Be sure to pray for yourself.

Receive & Release Practice

This practice focuses on two words: *receive* and *release*. Here are some simple instructions for getting started.

- First, find a comfortable sitting position and begin to take deep, slow breaths.
- After you have relaxed and settled into the gentle rhythm of your breathing, begin to say the word *receive* silently in your mind each time you inhale, and the word *release* as you exhale. So, it's *receive* as you inhale, and *release* as you exhale. These two words will also help to focus your mind whenever it begins to wander.
- As you repeat the word *receive*, imagine yourself receiving the gift of love and deep care God has to offer you and wants to give to you right now.
- As you repeat the word *release*, imagine yourself releasing to God what it is you need to let go of at this time.
- Start by doing this practice for three to five minutes (it can be helpful to set a quiet timer at the beginning).
- If you have a particular prayer concern, you can use this practice to assist you in finding peace and guidance regarding your concern. Bring the concern to mind as you begin the "Receive, Release" practice. You may even find that you are given a different word or phrase that comes to mind to use in place of *receive* or *release*. You might, for example, find yourself mindfully repeating "patience," "peace," "joy," or "kindness," on your in-breath and perhaps something like "control," "anger," "fear," or "judgment" on the out-breath.

Rosebush Examen for Children* (of all ages)

In this approach to learning the Examen, the authors suggested asking children to picture a rosebush. However, we found that metaphor really helpful for ourselves and others either new to the practice, or too tired at the end of a long day to remember all the steps in their proper order. Perhaps it might be helpful for you too.

Here are the instructions: Picture a rosebush, which has roses, thorns, and buds. Then think of them this way: • Roses = joyful thing or things from the day where you experienced patience, or the grace to wait with greater patience. • Thorns = a painful or challenging experience where you struggled to be more patient. • Buds = possibilities for growth in practicing patience in heart, soul, body, or mind.

What roses, thorns, and buds did your day or week hold?

**From* New Directions for Holy Questions *by Claire Brown and Anita Peebles, shared in Seasons of Wonder by Bonnie Smith Whitehouse, pp. 181–182*

Examen Practice

A way of paying attention as we listen for God. The Daily Examen is an ancient and powerful way of reflecting on the day so that we can more clearly identify how and where God has shown up in our lives and where God may be guiding us. Following is a brief description of the practice.

At the end of the day, sit quietly for a few minutes, seeking God's presence. Then:

- Remember times in the day when you felt most alive, when you experienced or shared patience, kindness, connection, or love, and thank God for those moments.
- Remember instances when you felt the least grateful, and offer those with thanks to God.
- Notice times in the day when you experienced being aligned with God's purpose for you, and give thanks for those times.
- Notice any moments when you felt far from living out God's purpose for your life, when practicing patience felt challenging, and offer those to God.
- Ask God to help you live ever more closely to God's plan and purpose for you tomorrow, growing in patience and trust, and then turn everything over to God to hold while you rest.

—For more resources, a good place to start is the Ignatian Spirituality's website: bit.ly/38De8gc

Welcoming Prayer Practice

As we focus on practicing greater patience this Advent, this practice has the capacity to quickly and effectively dislodge us from our habitual reactions, emotional patterns, and limiting comfort zones. Using it can help move us through challenging or painful experiences, times of disturbed emotion or anguish, seasons of impatience or waiting, and even moments where unhelpful control tendencies and self-inflation take us over.

Three steps for the Welcoming Prayer Practice:

1. **Focus or "sink in"** to become aware and physically present to the particular experience or upset without analyzing or judging yourself or the situation. Don't try to change anything at this stage—just stay present.
2. **Welcome and lightly name** the response that is being triggered by the difficult situation, such as *fear* or *anger* or *pain*. Acknowledge the response as sensation, and recognize that in this moment, if the experience is not being rejected or repressed, it can be endured. Ever so gently, begin to say "welcome," such as "welcome fear," "welcome resentment," etc. Though this step is counter-intuitive and the impulse is most likely to try to push away the unpleasant emotion, Cynthia Bourgeault explains: "By welcoming it instead, you create an atmosphere of inner hospitality. By embracing the thing you once defended yourself against or ran from, you are actually disarming it, removing its power to hurt you or chase you back into your smaller self." This practice of gentle, generous welcome creates space for the patience we seek.
3. **Transition to a "letting go,"** whereby the intensity of the situation can recede. This enables the natural fluidity of sensation to come and then go.

—For more on the Welcome Prayer/Practice, go to: https://bit.ly/2Sqtj0R

Centering Prayer Practice

A way to sit with God without using language. It is to consent to the Divine Presence within. Dwelling in God who dwells in us. The present moment is where we meet God and where we have an opportunity to enter more deeply into the mystery of God's love and to cultivate the gifts that flow from that love.

The Four Guidelines (from Thomas Keating, Contemplative Outreach):

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. (You can pray for God to give you an image/word that is just what you need at this time.)
2. Sit comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and then silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts,* return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.

   **includes body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections*
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

Additional Practices in Our Living Compass App

We offer guided experiences with the contemplative practices in this section, as well as other Prayer Practices, on our App website: App.LivingCompass.org

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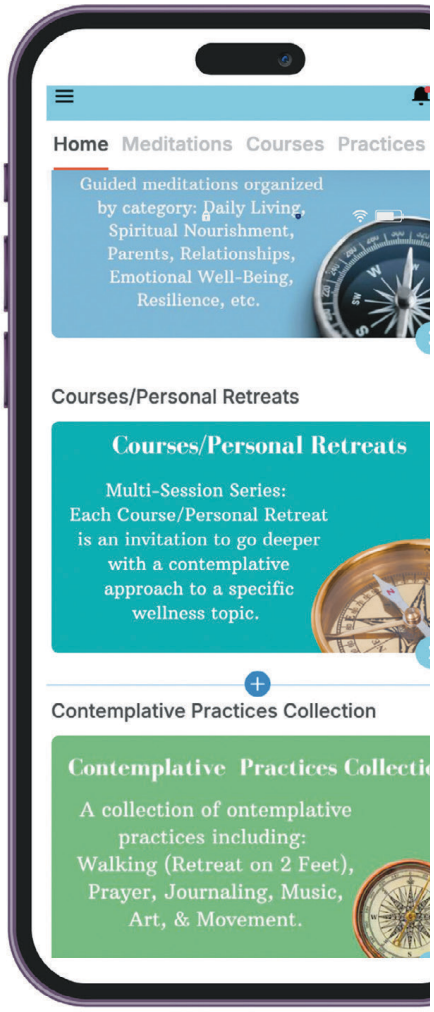
This FREE app is available in Apple and Google app stores
(search "Living Compass")
Or from your browser:
App.LivingCompass.org

Help us shape this resource—share your feedback.



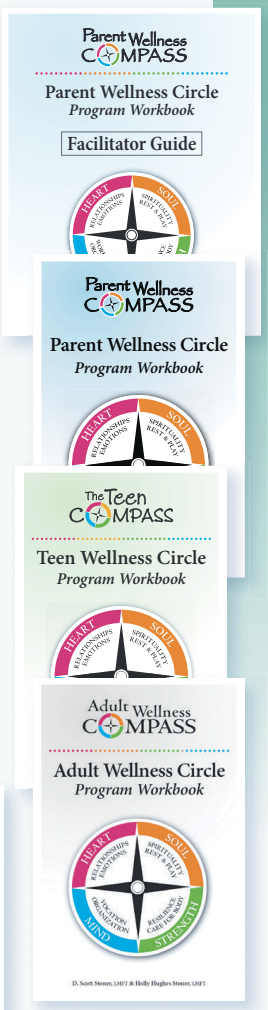
The Wellness Compass: A Whole-Person Individual and Family Wellness Initiative

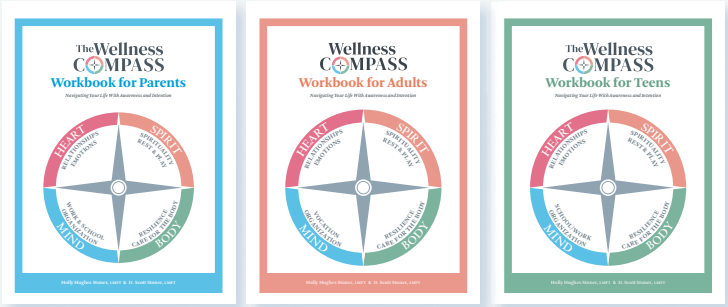
For the past fifteen years, alongside the spiritually grounded Living Compass, we have also offered Wellness Compass, the same whole-person approach to mental and emotional well-being, grounded in depth psychology, family systems theory, and holistic wellness. Wellness Compass is the creation of Holly Hughes Stoner and Scott Stoner, marriage and family therapists with more than forty years of experience.

Some of our resources include:

- **Wellness Circle Programs.** Six-week facilitated small-group programs for Adults, Parents, and Teens (each with a participant workbook).
- **Wellness Compass Workbooks.** Self-guided workbooks for Adults, Parents, and Teens to use on their own or in a group setting to navigate life with more awareness and intention.
- **Coaching.** Individual coaching, plus compassion resilience coaching and in-services for nonprofits and other care providers.
- **Weekly Column and Podcast.** Regular reflections on living a more integrated life.
- **Training and Consultation.** For those who would like to lead their own groups or bring Wellness Compass to their organization.

All of these resources are free (all workbooks and other resources can be downloaded from our website).





To learn more, visit WellnessCompass.org or contact our Program Director, Carolyn Karl, at Carolyn@WellnessCompass.org

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