

## **SEEKING HIM THIS ADVENT**

30 November 2025

### **SUMMARY:**

This message explores Advent as a season of spiritual awakening and preparation for Christ's coming, both historically in Bethlehem and continually in our lives. Bruce Downes emphasizes that spiritual growth requires intentional formation beyond attending Mass alone. Drawing from early church practices, he explains that Christians need two types of gatherings: Eucharistic liturgy (Mass) and worship/teaching services for prayer, instruction, and formation. The message challenges listeners to examine whether they are truly ready for God's presence, using personal stories about the pastor's father who faithfully attended Mass but lacked deep spiritual formation. The message calls believers to create space in their souls for God to speak, to find community that will pursue them in faith, and to discern God's "now word" for their lives during this Advent season.

### **KEY POINTS**

- Advent means "He is coming" and calls us to wake up and be expectant of God's presence
- Spiritual preparation involves four steps: pray, prepare, pull back, and step into God's presence
- The early church practiced two types of gatherings: breaking bread (Eucharist) and teaching/prayer/fellowship
- Mass alone is not sufficient for spiritual maturity; believers need formation through teaching and community
- Spiritual growth cannot happen accidentally. It requires rhythm, environment, teaching, and community
- The Eucharist sanctifies and gives grace, but formation transforms and strengthens us
- We need people in our lives who will pursue us if we fall away from faith
- God forms people slowly, through repetition and consistent encounters
- Advent invites us to clear space in our souls and discover what God is saying to us now
- Many Catholics lack deep spiritual knowledge because they only attend Mass without further formation

### **SCRIPTURE REFERENCES:**

- Acts 2:42 - *"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers"*

- Gospel references to Jesus saying "*stay awake*" and be ready like servants waiting for the bridegroom
- References to Lectio Divina and monastic prayer practices

## QUOTES

Advent is the season where God says to us, I'm not finished speaking to you yet. Advent is the season where the church tells us that God hasn't stopped drawing near.

You pray, you prepare, you pull back, because I can't change anybody's heart. Then you step into the presence and you expect the power to come.

The reason your children don't go to church is because you don't know anything. You're responsible for the fact that they don't go to church. It's your fault.

The Eucharist gives us grace, but the believer needs formation to live that grace. The Eucharist sanctifies us, makes us holy, formation strengthens us.

Your spiritual life cannot grow accidentally. It grows from rhythm. It grows through environment. It grows through teaching. It grows through community.

Mass is the high point. Nothing can replace it. Nothing equals it. Nothing compares to it. But the worship teaching and prayer teaching services stand alongside the church's tradition as well.

God forms people over time. God forms us slowly. He cooks us slowly. He forms people through repetition.

Advent prepares the world for the coming of Jesus, and you have to be ready. Finding a gathering place so that Advent keeps coming and Jesus keeps coming is critical to your spiritual journey.

## **HOW YOUR FAITHFULNESS BUILDS OUR FAITHFULNESS**

### **SMALL GROUP GUIDE**

This guide is designed to help your small group dive deeper into the message.

#### **OPENING PRAYER**

Begin by asking someone to pray, inviting God's presence into your time together. Ask the Holy Spirit to open hearts and minds to hear what God wants to say to each person. Pray the IMPACTERS Community Prayer.

#### **ICE BREAKER**

Question: What are your earliest memories of Advent or Christmas traditions in your family? What did they mean to you then, and what do they mean to you now?

#### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

##### **1. Advent is About Awakening and Being Ready**

- Advent means "He is coming" - it's not just a countdown to Christmas
- It's a season where God invites us to wake up, be expectant, and prepare our hearts
- The question isn't about others being ready, but: "Are YOU ready?"

##### **2. Two Types of Gatherings in Christian Life**

- Eucharist/Mass: The source and summit of Catholic life - nothing replaces it
- Worship & Teaching Services: For prayer, teaching, formation, and mission preparation
- Both are essential - the early church practiced both from the beginning

##### **3. Faith Requires Intentional Formation**

- Spiritual life doesn't grow accidentally - it grows through rhythm, environment, teaching, and community
- Mass alone isn't enough for spiritual maturity (though it remains central)
- We need places where we're formed, taught, and held accountable

##### **4. The Four Steps of Spiritual Preparation**

- Pray - Seek God first
- Prepare - Do the work you can do
- Pull Back - Recognize your limitations; God must do what only He can do
- Step into the Presence - Move forward in faith, expecting God's power

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

### **Section 1: Personal Readiness (15-20 minutes)**

1. Bruce Downes asked: "Have you heard everything God wants to say to you?" What is your honest answer to that question? What might be blocking you from hearing God's voice?
2. Reflect on the story of the Bruce's father - a faithful man who never missed Mass but didn't know how to pray or help his family spiritually. Can you relate to this? In what areas of your faith do you feel "faithful" but not necessarily "formed"?
3. What is the "now word" of God for you? What is God saying to you right now in this season of your life? (Take time for each person to share.)

### **Section 2: Formation and Growth (15-20 minutes)**

1. The message stated: "*Eucharist sanctifies, formation transforms.*" What does this mean to you? How have you experienced both in your spiritual journey?
2. Think about your spiritual rhythm. Beyond attending Mass, what are you doing to intentionally grow in your faith? What rhythms, environments, teachings, or communities are shaping you?
3. Bruce Downes asked: "*If you became half-hearted, if you stopped praying, if you stopped living out your faith - who would come after you?*" Do you have that kind of community? If not, what steps could you take to find or build it?

### **Section 3: Advent Application (15-20 minutes)**

1. Advent invites us to "*clear space in the soul.*" What needs to be cleared out of your life to make room for God this Advent season? (Busyness, distractions, worries, habits?)
2. The message emphasized repetition in spiritual growth. What is one truth you've heard many times but haven't fully lived out yet? What would it look like to actually apply it this week?
3. Reflect on the story of Rosemary's faith versus Bruce's worry. When have you seen someone close to you demonstrate greater faith than you had? How did it challenge or encourage you?

## **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

Choose 1-2 of these to commit to during Advent:

- Daily Prayer Rhythm: Set aside 10-15 minutes each day to pray and read Scripture
- Identify Your "Now Word": Write down what you sense God is saying to you this season
- Attend Both Gatherings: Commit to both Mass and a formation/teaching gathering weekly

- Practice the Four Steps: Apply Pray-Prepare-Pull Back-Step into Presence to a specific situation this week
- Clear Space: Identify one thing to remove from your schedule or life to make room for God
- Find Community: Reach out to someone about joining or forming an accountability relationship
- Study Advent: Research the meaning and traditions of Advent to deepen your understanding

### **REFLECTION EXERCISE**

**Silent Reflection:** Give everyone 5 minutes of silence to answer these questions in their journal or notebook:

1. On a scale of 1-10, how "ready" am I for Jesus this Advent?
2. What is one area where I've been spiritually "asleep" that God is calling me to wake up to?
3. What is one specific action I will take this week to prepare my heart?

**Sharing:** Invite anyone who feels comfortable to share their reflections.

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Go around the circle and have each person pray a one-sentence prayer, either:

- Thanking God for something from today's discussion
- Asking God for help in a specific area
- Declaring readiness to hear what God wants to say

Close with a group prayer asking God to make this Advent a season of true transformation, not just tradition.

### **FOR NEXT WEEK**

- Reflect daily on the question: "What is God saying to me now?"
- Practice the Pray-Prepare-Pull Back-Step into Presence pattern in your daily life
- Come prepared to share one way you experienced God's presence this week

### **LEADER NOTES**

- **Create a safe space** where people can be honest about struggles and doubts
- **Don't rush** through questions - silence is okay as people think
- **Be vulnerable first** - share your own struggles with spiritual formation
- **Follow up** during the week with group members, especially those who shared struggles

- **Remember:** The goal isn't perfect answers but honest engagement with God's invitation