

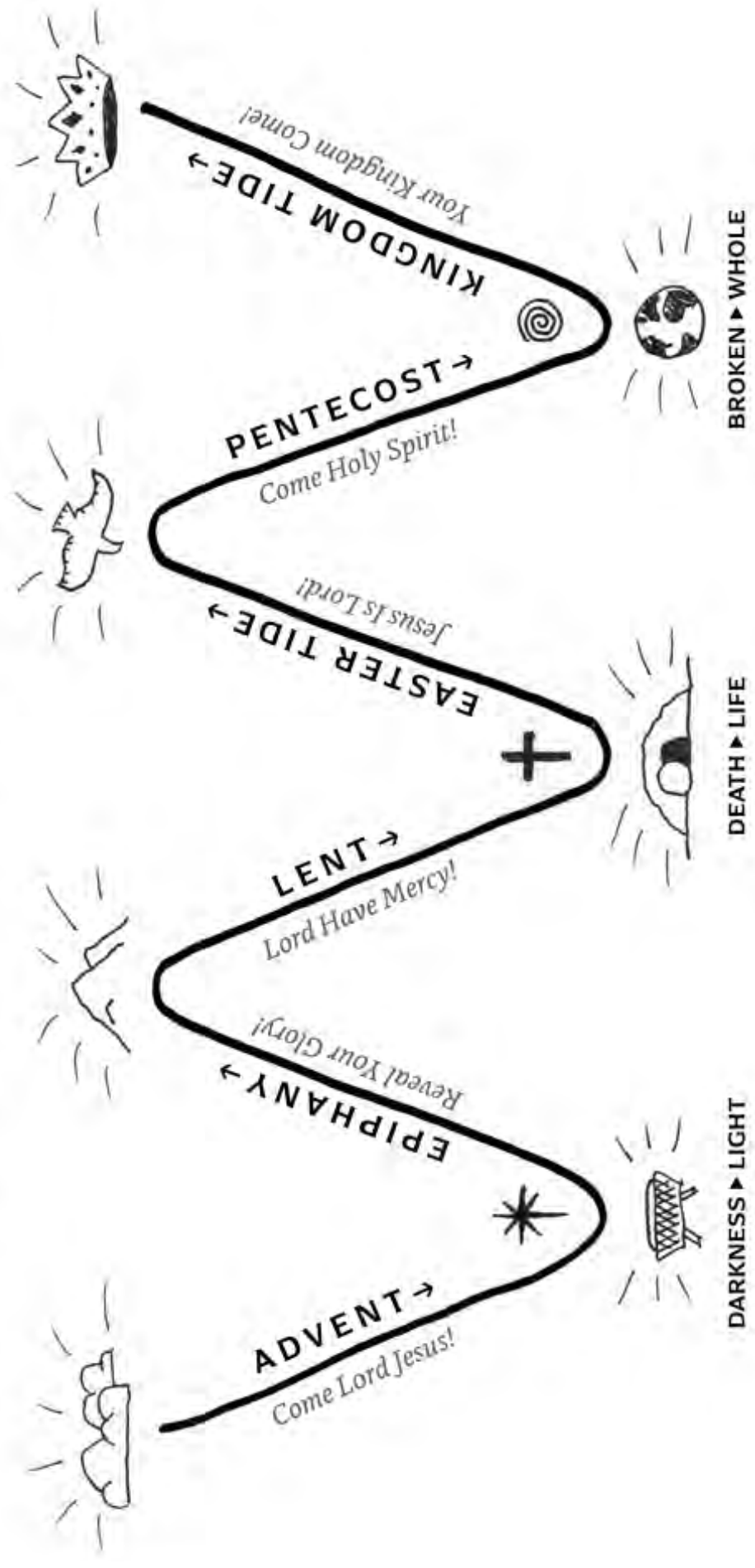
The
Seedbed
Daily Text

THE
CHRISTIAN
NEW
YEAR

Advent

J. D. WALT

THE AWAKENING CALENDAR



The
Seedbed
Daily Text

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An Invitation to Awakening

This resource comes with an invitation.

The invitation is as simple as it is comprehensive. It is not an invitation to commit your life to this or that cause or to join an organization or to purchase another book. The invitation is this: to wake up to the life you always hoped was possible and the reason you were put on planet Earth.

It begins with following Jesus Christ. In case you are unaware, Jesus was born in the first century BCE into a poor family from Nazareth, a small village located in what is modern-day Israel. While his birth was associated with extraordinary phenomena, we know little about his childhood. At approximately thirty years of age, Jesus began a public mission of preaching, teaching, and healing throughout the region known as Galilee. His mission was characterized by miraculous signs and wonders; extravagant care of the poor and marginalized; and multiple unconventional claims about his own identity and purpose. In short, he claimed to be the incarnate Son of God with the mission and power to save people from sin, deliver them from death, and bring them into the now and eternal kingdom of God—on earth as it is in heaven.

In the spring of his thirty-third year, during the Jewish Passover celebration, Jesus was arrested by the religious

authorities, put on trial in the middle of the night, and at their urging, sentenced to death by a Roman governor. On the day known to history as Good Friday, Jesus was crucified on a Roman cross. He was buried in a borrowed tomb. On the following Sunday, according to multiple eyewitness accounts, he was physically raised from the dead. He appeared to hundreds of people, taught his disciples, and prepared for what was to come.

Forty days after the resurrection, Jesus ascended bodily into the heavens where, according to the Bible, he sits at the right hand of God, as the Lord of heaven and earth. Ten days after his ascension, in a gathering of more than three thousand people on the day of Pentecost, a Jewish day of celebration, something truly extraordinary happened. A loud and powerful wind swept over the people gathered. Pillars of what appeared to be fire descended upon the followers of Jesus. The Holy Spirit, the presence and power of God, filled the people, and the church was born. After this, the followers of Jesus went forth and began to do the very things Jesus did—preaching, teaching, and healing; planting churches and making disciples all over the world. Today, more than two thousand years later, the movement has reached us. This is the Great Awakening and it has never stopped.

Yes, two thousand years hence and more than two billion followers of Jesus later, this awakening movement of Jesus Christ and his church stands stronger than ever. Billions of ordinary people the world over have discovered in Jesus Christ an awakened life they never imagined possible. They

How the Daily Text Works

It seems obvious to say, but the Daily Text is written every day. Mostly it is written the day before it is scheduled to release online.

Before you read further, you are cordially invited to subscribe to and receive the daily e-mail. Visit seedbed.com/dailytext to get started. Also, check out the popular Facebook group, Seedbed Daily Text.

Eventually, the daily postings become part of a Daily Text discipleship resource. That's what you hold in your hands now.

It's not exactly a Bible study, though the Bible is both the source and subject. You will learn something about the Bible along the way: its history, context, original languages, and authors. The goal is not educational in nature, but transformational. Seedbed is more interested in folks knowing Jesus than knowing *about* Jesus.

To that end, each reading begins with the definitive inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the ongoing, unfolding text of Scripture. Following that is a short and, hopefully, substantive insight from the text and some aspect of its meaning. For insight to lead to deeper influence, we turn the text into prayer. Finally, influence must run its course toward impact. This is why we ask each other questions. These questions are not designed to elicit information but to crystallize intention.

HOW THE DAILY TEXT WORKS

Discipleship always leads from inspiration to intention and from attention to action.

Using the Daily Text as a Discipleship Curricular Resource for Groups

While Scripture always addresses us personally, it is not written to us individually. The content of Scripture cries out for a community to address. The Daily Text is made for discipleship in community. This resource can work in several different ways. It could be read like a traditional book, a few pages or chapters at a time. Though unadvisable, the readings could be crammed in on the night before the meeting. Keep in mind, the Daily Text is not called the Daily Text for kicks. We believe Scripture is worthy of our most focused and consistent attention. Every day. We all have misses, but let's make every day more than a noble aspiration. Let's make it our covenant with one another.

For Use with Bands

In our judgment, the best and highest use of the Daily Text is made through what we call banded discipleship. A band is a same-gender group of three to five people who read together, pray together, and meet together to become the love of God for one another and the world. With banded discipleship, the daily readings serve more as a common text for the band and grist for the interpersonal conversation mill between meetings. The band meeting is reserved for the specialized activities of high-bar discipleship.

To learn more about bands and banded discipleship, visit discipleshipbands.com. Be sure to download the free *Discipleship Bands: A Practical Field Guide* or order a supply of the printed booklets online. Also be sure to explore Discipleship Bands, our native app designed specifically for the practice of banded discipleship, available in the App Store or Google Play.

For Use with Classes and Small Groups

The Daily Text has also proven to be a helpful discipleship resource for a variety of small groups, from community groups to Sunday school classes. Here are some suggested guidelines for deploying the Daily Text as a resource for a small group or class setting:

1. Hearing the Text

Invite the group to settle into silence for a period of no less than one and no more than five minutes. Ask an appointed person to keep time and to read the biblical text covering the period of days since the last group meeting. Allow at least one minute of silence following the reading of the text.

2. Responding to the Text

Invite anyone from the group to respond to the reading by answering these prompts: What did you hear? What did you see? What did you otherwise sense from the Lord?

3. Sharing Insights and Implications for Discipleship

Moving in an orderly rotation (or free-for-all), invite people to share insights and implications from the week's readings.

HOW THE DAILY TEXT WORKS

What did you find challenging, encouraging, provocative, comforting, invasive, inspiring, corrective, affirming, guiding, or warning? Allow group conversation to proceed at will. Limit to one sharing item per turn, with multiple rounds of discussion.

4. Shaping Intentions for Prayer

Invite each person in the group to share a single discipleship intention for the week ahead. It is helpful if the intention can also be framed as a question the group can use to check in from the prior week. At each person's turn, he or she is invited to share how their intention went during the previous week. The class or group can open and close their meeting according to their established patterns.

Preface

What is the most practical question of every day of our lives?

What time is it?

As I write, it is 9:06 a.m. on Sunday, July 26, 2020.

The answer reveals my time pieces: clock and calendar.

The clock tells me what's next today. The calendar tells me what's coming next week.

The calendar tells us what is important. The clock tells us what is urgent. For most people on planet Earth, this is about where it ends. As a result, we mostly bounce back and forth like a Ping-Pong ball between the paddles of the urgent and the important. This reality, set against the backdrop of the brokenness in our own stories, accounts for 99 percent of the anxiety in our lives. Consequently, we tend to talk about time the same way we talk about money. We spend it, waste it, invest it, desperately try to manage it, and even, at times, kill it. Even more anxiety, right?

The temptation is to try to carve out a little compartment of time every day to meditate on ultimate things. It's better than nothing, but the truth is it just brings matters of ultimate concern into its own category where it must compete with everything else for the priority of one's time. What we need is a way for ultimate things to become our overarching

PREFACE

framework and underlying foundation rather than just another compartment or category—some way of keeping the main thing the main thing all the time. But how?

So what's the main thing?

“The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever” (Isa. 40:8).

The Word of God, written down in a book we call the Bible, and incarnate in human flesh—at the right hand of God—Jesus Christ, is the main thing.

We don't keep the main thing the main thing by blocking out a few minutes every day to dedicate to reading the Bible and praying. No, we keep the main thing the main thing by making Jesus Christ Lord over all of our time; by keeping our eyes fixed on him; by taking every thought captive to him; by abiding in him second by second, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, week by week, month by month, year after year, until our life on earth ends and we go to him or he comes again and fully and finally establishes his kingdom on earth—whichever comes first.

This is what the Christian New Year is all about. This is why we have a Christian calendar. The Christian calendar is nothing more or less than the biblical way of translating the Word of God into our calendars and onto our clocks, which is the only way it can ever show up in real time in our everyday lives. It's why I call it the Awakening Calendar. The Awakening Calendar has one agenda: to keep us in constant touch with the glory of God the Father, through the love of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit—from our highest aspirations

Introduction

“Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

—Ephesians 5:14 NIV

Happy New Year! It’s time to sow for a great awakening!

Happy New Year? “But wait,” you say, “it’s not January 1.” Right, but Christians have a different year. Our year begins with the first Sunday of Advent. We begin by lifting our sights to the far horizon of the last and final great awakening—the second coming of Jesus Christ. Advent is a season of great awakening. That’s what this book you hold in your hands is all about. It is an invitation to awaken the dawn of a new year and, in doing so, to awaken to the grace of God in Jesus Christ like we never imagined possible. This means a deeper attachment to God, to our true selves, our families, our church, and our neighbors in our towns and cities and away to the ends of the earth. After all, we don’t need more connections, we need deeper and more whole and holy attachments. The sun is rising, and the light is dawning on a new year and a new day. Might we begin by awakening the dawn of Advent?

When it comes to sunrise services, we think first of Easter morning, the dawn that brought the news of the resurrection

INTRODUCTION

of Jesus Christ from the dead. I remember them as a child as unwelcome interruptions coming between hunting Easter eggs and eating chocolate Easter bunnies. But I remember them; they were unforgettable. Sitting or standing in some farmer's dew-covered field just on the outskirts of town, surrounded by the local saints from the First United Methodist Church, belting out "Up from the Grave He Arose" in our best predawn voices, and hearing the news declared once again, "He is risen!" and meeting it with our annual response, "He is risen, indeed!"

We remember them. It's funny how these peculiar activities of the people of God take acts of remembering ancient things and translate them into the indelible memories of our own time. It is as though something that happened thousands of years ago mysteriously happens again. Waking up early, showing up in pre-Sunday morning best, singing in a field . . . as a kid, you don't exactly understand it at the time, yet you never forget it.

So why are we talking about Easter in Advent? For starters, it's only because of Easter that we have Advent. It's an obvious thing to say that there would be no Easter without Christmas. The corollary is less obvious, yet even more true: there would be no Christmas without Easter. If Jesus is not raised from the dead, there would be no point in having Christmas. A miraculous birth story of a Galilean peasant would fade into the sunset of history as a curious myth of no consequence.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead gives history its meaning, and it gives the future its deepest destiny.

Remember the Future

1

REVELATION 21:1-4 NIV | Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Consider This

The word *advent* has a very simple meaning: the arrival or coming of a notable person, thing, or event. The church has an ancient saying we call “The Mystery of Faith.” During the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, the people speak this mystery in unison. We declare, “Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.” Most of the time, the church is pretty faithful to remember and celebrate the first two elements of this great mystery, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When it comes to the third element, the second coming of Jesus, we can be a little more reticent. We believe it, but because it remains in the future, we can’t exactly remember it. Or can we?

By the grace of the revelation of the Word of God, we know the whole story: from beginning to end; from creation to new creation. “Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.” For centuries, the season of Advent has created an opportunity to remember that which remains in the future. In fact, before Advent was ever about the first coming of Jesus Christ, it was about his second coming. The second coming of Jesus will mark the end of all things broken and the beginning of all things made new. It will be a glorious day, and yet we must be prepared. It is only in remembering the future second coming that we can most deeply appreciate and appropriate Christmas, his first coming.

Whether fact or fiction, stories come with three parts: beginning, middle, and end. The best stories have the longest middles, but the risk of a long middle is that we can lose sight of the end. It’s not the plot that keeps us turning the pages, but the glorious hope of the end, the final resolution. The end is not our death and going to a better place, which is mere comfort. The end is a new heaven and a new earth. That is hope. In this light, I want to ask you to read the following words from the end of the story. Read them aloud, slowly, and deliberately, as though your life depends on it. Why? Because your life depends on it.

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

With the first Advent of Jesus Christ, the story shifted from a miry middle to a new beginning—the beginning of the end. We now find ourselves awaiting his coming again when he will bring the new creation. And so we begin again, in a brand new year, with clear vision and renewed hope, somewhere in the middle of the beginning of the end.

The Prayer

Our Father in heaven, nearer than my breath, thank you for these days of Advent and this new year in Christ. You are the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Awaken me to you afresh. I am ready to begin again—not starting over, for with you nothing is lost or wasted, but beginning again. Filled with faith, hope, and love, I will awaken now, somewhere in the middle of the beginning of the end. In the name of Jesus Messiah—the one who has come, is here, and is coming again—for his glory and our good. Amen.

The Questions

- What might a new year, a new beginning, a fresh start look like for you on this first day of December? How will you mark this time—neither with idealism or realism but with faith, hope, and love?

2

Learning to Stand on a Word

LUKE 21:25–36 | “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Titles in the Seedbed Daily Text series:

The Advent Mission: Advent by Omar Rikabi
Between You and Me: 2 John, 3 John, Philemon, Titus, and Jude by Omar Rikabi
The Christian New Year: Advent by J. D. Walt
The Domino Effect: Colossians by J. D. Walt
The First Real Christian: James by J. D. Walt
First Word. Last Word. God's Word: The Bible by J. D. Walt
God Is Here: Advent by Casey Page Culbreth
The Gospel of the Holy Spirit: Mark by J. D. Walt
Listen to Him: Lent by J. D. Walt
People Who Say Such Things: Faith by J. D. Walt
Protagonist: Advent by Matt LeRoy and Josh LeRoy
Reset: Advent by J. D. Walt
Right Here, Right Now, Jesus: Prayer by J. D. Walt
Soundtrack: Lent by J. D. Walt
This Is How We Know: 1 John by J. D. Walt
(un)Puzzled: Ephesians by J. D. Walt

Jesus doesn't want a
slot on your calendar.
He wants the whole thing.

The Seedbed Daily Text

Happy New Year, Christian!

But it's not January 1, you say. For the followers of Jesus, the new year begins with Advent. And what a beginning it is as we start by looking to the very end of the age and the second coming of Christ. Advent issues a clarion call to wake from our slumber, realign life, and get in step with the Holy Spirit.

The Christian New Year unfolds a journey from the second coming all the way to Bethlehem and the first coming, setting the stage for the year ahead. Gather with family, friends, and neighbors and take the journey together. Our calendar is the most important document in life for it reveals to us how we spend the most valuable thing we have: our time. *The Christian New Year* will help us understand our calendar like never before and live into our times with the fullness of life.

John David (J. D.) Walt serves as the sower-in-chief for Seedbed. Preacher, poet, author, and songwriter, J. D. lives with his four children in Franklin, Tennessee. He writes daily for the Seedbed Daily Text at seedbed.com/dailytext.

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