



## **Theme: Christmas Songs for the Journey Home**

### **“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel – Hoping for Home”**

#### **Weekly Memory Verse:**

<sup>2</sup> *When you go through deep waters,  
I will be with you.*

*When you go through rivers of difficulty,  
you will not drown.* – Isaiah 43:2

**Spiritual Formation or Family Activity Ideas for the Week:** Read Philippians 4:4-7. Review the events of each person’s day. Ask one another, “How often did you pray today?” Discuss what it means to pray in every situation and at all times. On a large piece of paper, draw the face of a clock. By each hour, write or draw a picture of what each person is most often doing at that time. Talk about ways to pray throughout each person’s day. (You might also want to let each person design his or her own clock and then discuss.) Also, discuss how and when you can pray together more often as a family. Commit to adding one additional time to your family life. Pray together, thanking God for always being with us and for listening to our prayers.

**Monday, November 29** – Read Romans 5:1-11. Why do people need Christ? The apostle Paul said people need Christ because he lived, died, and rose again to reconcile us to God. Being reconciled to God does not just mean “fire insurance.” It opens us to a quality of life in which we see problems differently, knowing that “trouble produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope” (verses 3-4).

 One of the themes of Christmas is peace. How has guilt or an inner fear of being undeserving before God and people, robbed you of peace? How have you opened (or how can you open) your heart to the inner peace Christ offers this Christmas season? How might that peace lead you to hope?

 We read in Acts 22:3 that the Apostle Paul was trained as a Jewish rabbi. Rabbis used a rhetorical form known by the Hebrew words *qal wahomer*, or “How much more ...” In verse 10, Paul used that form to say, in effect, “If Christ was willing to die for us, how much more sure can we be that he will stay with us and strengthen us for our daily life?” In what ways do you depend on Christ’s presence with you every day? How might it lighten your “spiritual load” to count on that more completely?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you for your willingness to die for me before I was even born, and to draw my heart to you. And thank you for staying with me to guide me into your kind of life. Amen.

**Tuesday, November 30** – Read Luke 21:20-36. Jesus had bad news as he taught in the temple the last week of his life—destruction awaited the Temple, the place where Jews met with God. Great hardship and persecution would follow the Temple’s destruction. The Roman army destroyed the Temple in 70 A.D. Despite the sad state of this world, Jesus urged his listeners to keep faith through all hard times. His central message was, “Don’t be alarmed... raise your heads, because your redemption is near.”

 The COVID-19 pandemic is the worst situation in almost all our lifetimes. That’s what the Temple’s destruction sounded like to first-century Jewish ears. Jesus told his hearers this unthinkable event would happen yet told them to keep their faith because their “redemption was near.” What do you believe he meant by “near”? What makes it hard to hold onto hope and keep your faith in hard times? How can trusting that God is near help you “weather the storm”?

 The life of faith is not always easy. Scholar N. T. Wright described it: “This is what it’s about: not an exciting battle, with adrenalin flowing and banners flying, but the steady tread, of prayer and hope and scripture and sacrament and witness, day by day and week by week.” As the pandemic (or some other difficulty you have faced) disrupts your daily routines, how do you seek to maintain the “steady tread” of your faith journey? Are there any models of living with patient faith you can draw on? How can “standing up and looking up” keep you centered?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I trust you even when life gets difficult. Give me the strength and patience I need to deal with life’s struggles, the ones I am facing now and any others in the future, knowing that as I hold onto hope you will lead me home this Christmas season. Amen.

**Wednesday, December 1** – Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9. Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth that they needed the church. One reason for that was that they could best use their gifts to carry out Christ’s mission when they did it together, an idea he expanded in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. God knew this basic truth all along: ten people can be more than ten times more effective working together than if they all work alone!

 Paul called the members of the Corinthian church in verse 2, “Those who have been made holy to God in Christ Jesus.” The rest of the letter made it clear that these people still had lots of room to grow spiritually. How clearly do you sense that as you choose to follow Christ, you are “holy to God,” part of God’s family, even when you still have room to grow?

 Paul thanked God for the people in the church at Corinth, and he told them that by God’s grace, “you were made rich through him in everything.” Thanksgiving was six days ago. How has your intention to thank God “in every situation,” as we read in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, held up through “Black Friday” and getting back to regular routines this week? What can you thank God for today? How can thanking God bring us a sense of hope as we move towards Christmas?

**Prayer:** Lord God, I thank you that you haven't called me to make life's journey all by myself. Thank you for those who walk the pathway with me. Amen.

**Thursday, December 2** – Read Ephesians 1:15-23. “His body, the church, is the fullness of Christ.” Those are strong words we just! Paul was sure that people need Christ's church—not buildings or policies, but deeply committed people serving together. The church is an environment where God's people can experience God's power more fully—the same awesome cosmic power that was at work when Christ arose from the dead (verse 20).

 Verse 23 said Christ, “fills everything in every way.” Scholar Dallas Willard noted that the Greek word often translated “heaven” (which we think is very distant) was plural—“heavens”—and for Hebrews included the very air around us. He wrote, “The Judeo-Christian witness regards space as full of God ... God occupies and overflows space ... we should assume that space is anything but empty.” When have you sensed God near you? In what ways can you make God the air you breathe?

 We sing, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” each year before Christmas to remind us of the promise that God is with us. Try to find a version of this song you like, such as one of the ones linked below, and listen to it today. What phrase or words grabbed you and why? How can this song bring us hope this Christmas season?

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkvYR4BcHYc&ab\\_channel=forKING%26COUNTRY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkvYR4BcHYc&ab_channel=forKING%26COUNTRY)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtOi0IP0DCo&ab\\_channel=TRIBL](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtOi0IP0DCo&ab_channel=TRIBL)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pi6vzfk8II&ab\\_channel=HymnsAndHers](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pi6vzfk8II&ab_channel=HymnsAndHers)

**Prayer:** Dear God, you are awesomely great, and wonderfully good. Your great power and gracious goodness are on my side. I can experience them as I worship and share life with your people. I thank and praise you! Amen.

**Friday, December 3** – Read John 1:9-18 and 3:16-17. People need Christ's salvation and reconciliation for the present as well as the future. John wrote that in Christ we can find our true identity. Christ, who was God, “authorized us” to become God's children. As we claim that identity, we realize that God is on our side, and find that as God's children we can live a life filled with grace and truth.

 John knew the sad reality that many people, then and now, turned away from the light Jesus brought into the world. What are some of the forces, external or internal, that lead people to ignore or reject the light of Christ? What influences helped you to overcome those forces in your own life, and respond to Christ's light?

 The Light of Christ is a powerful image of hope during the Christmas season. Why do you suppose that is? Think of a time that you were in the dark and scared. How has light coming in that moment changed your heart and brought you comfort? How might you experience that light this season?

**Prayer:** Kyrie, eleison—“Lord, have mercy,” a prayer Christians have used for centuries. As I think of your light in the darkness, and your loving offer to make me your child, I pray it again. Lord, have mercy on me. Amen.

**Saturday, December 4** – Read Ephesians 4:11-16. To whom does our church belong? The answer is straightforward: our church (and every church) belongs to Jesus Christ, its divine

head! He is the one we can trust to lead us to God's goal of spiritual maturity which is meant to be our home, "measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ." As we serve and grow together, we must always be listening to his voice. A big part of the journey home is recognizing that our home is in Christ, and with the body of Christ, the church.

🔥 Scholar William Barclay wrote, "Paul says that a body is only healthy and efficient when every part is thoroughly coordinated. He says that the Church is like that; and the Church can be like that only when Christ is really the head and when every member is moving under his control." What does it mean in day-to-day terms for you to "move under [God's] control"? When have you been set free from hurtful feelings and ways of thinking to move beyond your usual actions/reactions and step into God's world, where love is the guiding principle?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, be the head of my life, as you are the head of the church. I open myself to your wise and loving direction of my life. Amen.*