

Advent 1: My Search

Welcome to My Search! Each week during Advent you will receive suggestions for prayer, Bible study, and other spiritual disciplines to help you in your sacred search for the One who created you and loves you.

Remember: The most important thing you can do is open yourself to God, who has been watching and waiting for you from before your first breath. Advent is a time to anticipate the coming of Jesus as a baby to the earth, and to focus your soul on the gift of the presence of God in your life.

During My Search, you will have opportunities to focus on your relationship with God. You might spend 10, 15, 20 or more minutes on these Search times. You can sit and think, write, draw, doodle, sing, listen—whatever helps you connect with God. If possible, find a quiet place that will be your Sacred Space for the entire season of Advent. Each day (except where noted) light a candle to symbolize your personal time and space for this sacred search. Use the ideas provided as suggestions. Always be free to go elsewhere with God.

Day 1

Find your quiet space and light your candle. Invite God into your Sacred Space, and ask God to clear out the clutter of your life during the next few moments.

Open your Bible to Luke 1:29. Read that verse, then read verses 26-38 so you get the whole picture.

What feelings do you think Mary had when the angel first spoke to her?

Sometimes, when we hear God calling us to do something or to be someone other than what we are used to, our first reaction is fear. Change is uncomfortable. People might talk about us and look at us funny. We don't want to change if it means being different. Mary expressed fear, and the angel reassured her, saying "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

What might God be calling you to do that is scary or uncomfortable?

What do you need from God in order to do it?

Ask God for strength and courage as you leave your Sacred Space.

Day 2

Take a large piece of paper, pen, scissors, and Bible into your quiet space. Today, you won't light the candle. Instead, thank God for the courage and strength that is coming to you from the Holy Spirit, and pray for openness to what God wants to say to you today.

Open your Bible to Luke 1:34. Read that verse, then read verses 26-38.

Mary has just been told by an angel that she is favored of God and will bear God's child, but she has a big question. She is confused. It sounds like a good plan, but she's not sure how she can be a part of that plan. She knows "where babies come from," and she can't possibly be pregnant.

What is it about your Christian life that is most confusing to you? What seems like a good idea, but you're just not sure how you can fit into that plan?

Using the entire sheet of paper, write your answer to the previous questions. (Print large if you have to.) Then draw puzzle pieces on the page, and cut out the puzzle. Mix it up and hold it.

While holding the puzzle, pray about the confusion and uncertainty in your life. Your candle remains unlit. Today you are acknowledging the times when you feel "in the dark."

Life is full of confusion—sometimes answers come later than we hope, and sometimes they don't come at all the way we want them to. Close this Sacred Search on that note—knowing that confusion and uncertainty are a part of life.

Day 3

Enter your quiet space but don't light your candle. Talk to God about the things in your life that are the most frustrating, confusing, and unknown. When you've "laid it all out" before God, open your Bible and read Luke 1:37. After reading that verse, read the whole passage again—Luke 1:26-38.

The angel's answer to Mary's big question is that "With God, anything can happen." That is true for us as well as for Mary. But we also need to realize that God is not in the business of doing miraculous things whenever we want them or think we need them. But God does promise to be with us always. We can count 100 percent on God's walking with us through our doubts and confusion.

Light your candle and talk to God about the areas in your life where you would like some significant help from God. You can ask God to do the impossible. Just follow it up with "Your will be done." And then count on God to be with you no matter what the answer is and when it comes.

Turn to Matthew 6:5-15. Paraphrase the prayer in verses 9-13 and make it your own.

Close your time today knowing that God walks with you, and that with God all things are possible.

Day 4

Light the candle in your Sacred Space. Focus your eyes on the candle as you clear your mind of the "stuff" that is cluttering it. Repeat this phrase as you lose yourself in the candlelight: "Lord, be my light. Lord, be my light."

When you feel ready, open your Bible and read Luke 1:38.

Mary has had a visit from an angel, which frightened her at the beginning, then raised a big question of doubt, followed by the angel's assurance that with God all things are possible. Her response now is that she is ready to obey.

Is there an area of your life in which you are ready to obey God? Is there something that God has been nudging you about? Something that you want to say "yes" to? Take time to think about this.

If there is something that you are ready to say "yes" to, kneel in front of your candle and repeat Mary's words: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word." Continue to pray about what this new commitment involves for you.

If you don't have anything that you are saying "yes" to at this point, that's okay. It is still important to let God know that you are open to God's working in your life. Kneel in front of the candle and repeat Mary's prayer.

Close your session by focusing on the candle again, then blowing it out to symbolize your transition from this Sacred Space back into the "real world."

Day 5

Take a pen and sticky notes into your Sacred Space. Light the candle and take time to center yourself on God.

Read Luke 1:26-38 slowly one more time. Find the phrase that stands out for you the most—the one that you want to "chew on" for a few minutes today. Think about how that phrase relates to the whole story. Then think about what it is saying specifically to you. Write the phrase on a sticky note. On another sticky note, write what you think God's word is to you through that phrase (use as many notes as needed.)

Plan to take your sticky notes and put them places where you will be reminded of these words from God for your life.

Close this time by praying this blessing:

May God bless me and keep me. May the very face of God shine on me and be gracious to me. May God's presence embrace me and give me peace.

Repeat this blessing for others—your friends, family, community, church, and world situations.