

WEEK ONE

Advent Devotional

Preparing Our Hearts for Christmas



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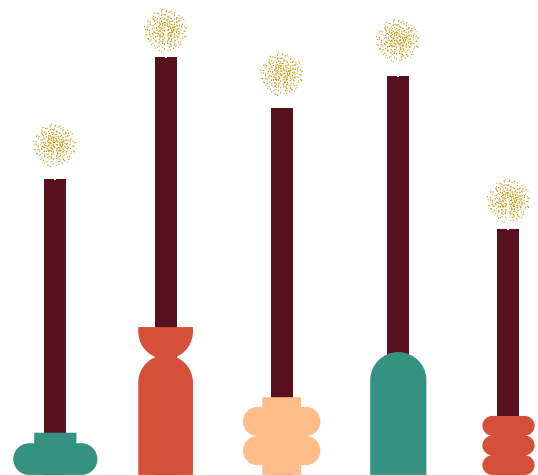
Love for the Lost

WEEK ONE

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in Him, and He in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”

1 John 4:7-16 ESV



PERSONAL REFLECTION

Entering Advent, we often hear reminders to slow down to experience God's love during Christmas. But to be honest, sometimes the idea of slowing down seems like an unattainable dream. Busy schedules, holiday gatherings, and family commitments all seem to conspire against us, and we find ourselves longing for a pace of life that feels just out of reach. We can't always just clear our calendars on a whim in the name of creating margin to cherish the Christmas season.

Or maybe the opposite is true, and the slow pace of the season serves as a reminder of the person you lost, the place you left, the broken relationship, or the emptiness that comes from entering a new and uncharted season of life.

Each one of us is entering into Advent with a different set of experiences and expectations. And sometimes, the ideal pace at which we long to experience Christmas seems to be nothing more than an elusive fantasy.

However, the Christmas story reminds us that a change in our circumstances isn't required to experience God's love, and God often reveals his love to us in unexpected ways in the midst of our everyday lives.

At the birth of Jesus, Mary didn't experience God's love in a comfortable home surrounded by beauty and splendor. Instead, she experienced His love in poverty, through the pain of childbirth, and while listening to the cries of a newborn baby.

The angels didn't pronounce Jesus' birth to the rich or the influential but to shepherds, who experienced God's love in the midst of their everyday jobs. And God revealed the evidence of His love as they peered over the sides of a worn manger, cradling the most precious gift the world had ever received.

And as we look forward to the purpose for which Jesus came, God's ultimate act of love wasn't marked by joy and laughter. Instead, He displayed His love on the cross through physical pain, profound grief, and wooden beams dripping with the sweat and blood of our Savior.

A lonely stable and a splintered cross may seem unlikely places to encounter God's love, but that is exactly what scripture tells us is true. In 1 John 4:9, we see the greatest expression of God's love for us in the simplicity of the Christmas message:

God sent His only Son so we could live. Jesus came to save the lost, to redeem what was broken, and to rescue those who had done nothing to earn His love.

The challenges in our lives don't press pause simply because there's a tree in our living rooms. Sickness doesn't end with a candy cane and a cup of hot cocoa. Conflict doesn't cease when we put an inflatable snowman in the front yard. And a full calendar often leads to more stress than joy.

So, how do we rediscover the wonder of God's love this Christmas?

We look for God's love in the least likely of places, because God invites us to experience His love in the messiness of real life. Maybe God is showing up in the craziness of your travel plans. Maybe He's working in the lives of the people at the company Christmas party you didn't really want to attend. Maybe His love can be felt as you read that same Christmas book to your kid at bedtime for the 20th time.

Wherever you find yourself this season, God is actively working and pursuing you in love. We just have to have eyes to see it.

Take time to respond by considering the following questions.

What experiences and expectations are you bringing with you into Advent this year? How can being honest about areas where you are both hopeful and apprehensive help you to focus on God's love this season?

Life is messy, and we're all real stinkin' people. Where do you see God's love showing up in the reality of your day-to-day life?



Family Experience

CANDLE LIGHTING

Read: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

John 3:16-17

Pray: Heavenly Father, we praise You for being a good and loving God. Please forgive us for not always loving You as we should. Thank You for sending us the most wonderful gift -- Your Son, Jesus. Because of Jesus, it's possible for us to have a relationship with You that will last forever. Thank You for loving us that much! Help us to keep Jesus at the forefront as we celebrate this Christmas season. Guide us to see You in all the messiness of real life and help us love You and others more each day. We pray in Jesus' name, amen

Listen: Silent Night

[Click Here to Listen](#)



Family Experience

READ

Read **1 John 4:7-16** together as a family. Depending on the age of your children, you may or may not choose to read the personal reflection together.

DISCUSS

Take time to discuss the following questions.

Younger Kids

- 1** Read the first part of John 3:16 to your child: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son.” **Ask:** Who gave us Jesus? **(God did.)** Why did God give us Jesus? **(Because He loves us so much.)**
- 2** When we celebrate Christmas we celebrate God’s love and the best gift EVER. Who is the best gift EVER? **(Jesus)** Let’s clap and say “YAY! Jesus”
- 3** God loves us so much and He wants us to share His love with everyone. How can we show God’s love to our friends and family? **(sharing, being kind, helping, being nice, etc.)**

Older Kids

- 1** Our reflection today said, “Jesus came to save the lost, to redeem what was broken, and to rescue those who had done nothing to earn His love.” What does it mean to you to know that God loves you so much that He sent Jesus?
- 2** Share about a time that you felt God’s love for you.
- 3** What specific ways can we as a family show love to others as a reflection of God’s love for us?

PRAY

If celebrating advent with children, pray the following scripture over each child you are celebrating with. Feel free to add to this prayer or pray other specific requests over your child as you feel led.

May _____, being rooted and firmly established in love, be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God’s love, and that _____ would know Christ’s love that surpasses knowledge, so that he/she may be filled with all the fullness of God. **(from Ephesians 3:17-19 CSB)**

Celebrate

You already need to eat, so make one dinner this week an intentional celebration of the love we have received in Christ. Pull out a tablecloth, set out the fine china (or Christmas paper plates), turn on your favorite Christmas music, light some candles, and have a special dinner at home. The main course? Think of something the kids will love! Maybe its pancakes shaped like snowmen, topped with whipped cream and sprinkles. Maybe you go crazy and serve ice cream for dinner. Either way, make it memorable and fun.

As you enjoy your meal, go around the table and share about how you have seen and experienced God's love this year. Talk about how Jesus is the greatest example of God's love for us!

Discussion Prompts for Kids:

- ★ What's your favorite thing about Christmas?
- ★ What are you most excited to do this Christmas together as a family?
- ★ Is there anything you're feeling worried or sad about right now?
- ★ How can we be praying for you?
- ★ Let's pretend: What would be the most exciting thing about seeing baby Jesus lying in the manger? What would you do or want to do?