



All I want  
for Christmas!

HOPE, PEACE, JOY, LOVE

DEVOTIONAL

2023



*Week 4*

*LOVE*

Saturday, December 9th and Sunday, December 10th

# The Weekend-A Recap

**Spend some time this weekend reflecting on your experience of worship (whether online or in-person). Use the following questions to help guide your through this reflection.**

Which part of the message encourage or challenged you the most, and why?

If you were to restate the message in one sentence, what would it be?

Where in your life do you need to rest in God's love? How can you make more time to be with God?

How can you make the choice to love others whenever it gets or feels difficult?

**PRAYER** Loving God, thank you for expressing your love through the life of Jesus, through our lives, and the lives of those around us. Help us to remember that your love will never end. Amen.

## LISTEN

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*Love Came Down at Christmas*

1. Love came down at Christmas,  
Love all lovely, love divine,

Love was born at Christmas,  
Star and angels gave the sign.

V.2) Worship we the God-head,  
Love incarnate, love divine,

Worship we our Jesus,  
Bur wherewith for sacred sign.

V.3) Love shall be our token;  
Love be yours and love be mine;

Love for God and neighbor,  
Love for plea and gift and sign.

You can listen to the song  
below



Sunday, December 17th

# Celebrating Advent

Gather your family together over dinner, invite over some friends, or feel free to Zoom or Facetime them. You can also celebrate individually.

Collect some art supplies. This can be whatever you have available. Paper, markers/crayons/paints, etc...

Think about what the holidays mean for you (or for your family/your small group of friends). Using the paper and whatever art supplies you have, feel free to create a picture that reflects what this season means. This can be anything! And it doesn't have to look any certain way. Allow yourself (and others) to be creative.

**Then whenever everyone is finished, go around and share your picture. If you are doing this individually, feel free to use this time to pray with God a prayer of gratitude and thanksgiving.**

Turn down the lights, gather around the Advent wreath, and read aloud **John 1**.

Light the second purple candle and spend a few minutes in silence.

**Thank you, God for the flame of love. As we prepare for Christ's coming, help us to be people of love as we strive to love you more fully.**

Tuesday, December 19th

## Love & Wholeness

*If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

**1 Corinthians 13:1-3**

What isn't to love about love? We like the warm and fuzzies. We like the idea of love during the holidays (have you watched any Hallmark Christmas Movies yet this season?). However, love is more than a sentimental emotion. Love is the very fabric that holds the tapestry of our lives together. We are reminded in Corinthians that without love, our words, knowledge, faith, and deeds are incomplete.

Consider the image of a puzzle. Each piece contributes to the overall picture, and without one, the entire image is compromised. Similarly, love is the missing piece that completes the intricate design of our existence. Without love, our lives may seem functional, but they lack the depth and beauty that comes from being fully ourselves.

In the Advent season, we celebrate the ultimate act of love—the incarnation of Jesus Christ. God, in His infinite love, chose to dwell among us, bridging the gap between divinity and humanity. This act of love brought wholeness to a broken world, offering us the opportunity to experience true and transformative love.

As we meditate on the significance of love, let us also reflect on our relationships—with ourselves, with others, and with God. How are we incorporating love into our daily interactions? Are we allowing love to shape and mold us into our truest selves?

### PRAY

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Gracious God, during this Advent season, open our hearts to the transformative power of your love. Help us recognize that without love, we cannot be fully ourselves. May we embody the love exemplified in the birth of Jesus Christ and extend it to those around us. Amen.

# Loving Through Difficulty

## PUTTING LOVE INTO ACTION

Have you ever taken a moment to reflect on how amazing it is that God cherishes people? Every single one of us? God is so invested in who we are and who we are becoming that God is constantly entering into our stories to share in our hopes, dreams, and fears. Not only that, but God entrusts to us the care of and the call to build up God's kingdom. How cool is that?

The Christmas story is really a story of how God gave us more, not just in the redemption narrative. Think about it. God relied on Mary and Joseph for the care of God's only Son. This is not only a lot of responsibility, but also takes an extraordinary amount of trust. God entrusted the story to the Shepherds. Sure God could have relied on the Angels to share with all people as they did with the Shepherds, but God called them to the task instead.

We are called and empowered to love others, but it can sometimes be incredibly difficult. So what can we do when love becomes difficult? Here are two great beginning points:

### **Start by being aware of your heart!**

Our gut reaction when someone does something we perceive to be difficult is usually a result of something we are wrestling with within our hearts. If we are aware of how we are doing, we can make the choice to respond to difficult situations rather than constantly reacting.

Also, when we are aware of what is happening internally, we can make healthy choices to care for ourselves. This can be the practice of self-care and self-compassion; but it can also be the practice of margins or boundary setting and even forgiveness. If we aren't familiar with how to love ourselves, it's so much more difficult to love others.

### **Embrace with Empathy and Compassion in healthy conflict!**

Your story is your story, and the best way to honor your story and others' story is by embracing healthy conflict when needed. But do this with the spirit of empathy and compassion rather than picking a fight to fight, to control the relationship, or to try and win it! Healthy conflict can help lead the relationship to a new place that is far healthier for both parties, or it can help you create the boundaries needed to show others love. Don't repress or hide from conflict--it will never resolve and only continue to fester until the relationship gets extremely toxic.

Thursday, December 21st

## Love Is Costly

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

**Philippians 2:5-8**

The story of Christmas is not merely a sweet tale of a baby in a manger, of cute little shepherds and angels who help unfold the tale. It is a narrative, an epic, of a God who spared nothing to demonstrate the depths of love, who chose to enter into our journey's in a very real and messy way. Jesus, who was in the very nature of God, willingly relinquished glory and majesty (not seeing his relationship as something to be used for personal gain). Jesus, who saw the significance of relationships and the power of love. Who intentionally came to experience all parts of what it means to be human.

He embraced the limitations (and wonders) of humanity, experiencing the joys and pains of our existence. Love compelled Him to set aside heavenly splendor. Love compelled him to preach and teach, to heal and to encourage, to shepherd and to embrace.

Love, in its truest form, demands something of us—it requires a giving up of self, a relinquishing of comfort, and a commitment to prioritizing the well-being of others. It requires that we quiet our ego's in healthy ways, to step outside of our beliefs and all the noise of fear and division.

This act of love was not convenient or painless; it was a costly sacrifice that demonstrated the lengths to which God would go to reconcile humanity to Godself.

### GO AND DO

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Take a moment to reflect on your relationships and interactions. Consider how you can infuse love into your words and deeds. Reach out to someone you may have overlooked, offering a gesture of love and kindness. Reflect on the ways you can emulate Christ's selflessness in your relationships and interactions. Remember that love, when truly understood, compels us to give of ourselves for the sake of others.

# Love & Wonder

*Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them. Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever. He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and compassionate. He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever.*

**Psalm 111:2-4**

Love invites us to be curious, to explore the depths of our relationships and the world around us, and it forms in us a spirit of wonder. It encourages us to step aside of our own agenda's to be present with others. Each person is as full of possibilities and endless worth as the God we worship and celebrate every Christmas.

God's love for us is boundless, and as we love others, let us approach them with a curiosity that seeks to understand, appreciate, and learn. In curiosity, we find the seeds of compassion. In curiosity, we find a mutual path towards reconciliation and understanding. In curiosity, we grow in the likeness of Christ who always sought to ask more questions than offering simple answers. Who always encouraged openness and vulnerability than the comforts of shallow relationships.

When it comes to our relationships, curiosity can be a powerful tool for building intimacy and connection. By asking questions, listening deeply, and seeking to understand our loved ones, we can create a safe and supportive space for them to share their thoughts and feelings with us. This can help us to build deeper bonds and stronger relationships based on trust and mutual respect.

Ultimately, love and curiosity go hand-in-hand. It's nearly impossible to have the one without the other.

## REFLECT

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Do you consider yourself a curious person? If not, why? What keeps you from asking questions, from responding to others with open curiosity?

How can you create pauses to be more present with others in your life?