

How does understanding that God loved us before we ever sinned or succeeded change the way you view your relationship with Him?

In what ways have you experienced conditional love from people that makes it difficult to receive God's unconditional love?

Why do you think God chose ordinary, overlooked people like shepherds and a young couple for the first Christmas story?

What does it mean practically for you that nothing in creation can separate you from God's love according to Romans 8:38?

How can meditating on the depth and width of God's love as described in Ephesians 3:17-19 transform your daily life?

Who in your life is difficult to love, and how might God's overflow of love through you change that relationship?

What prevents you from believing that God's love is truly enough for you, and how can you surrender those barriers to Him?

How does viewing Jesus's birth not as the start but as the revelation of God's eternal love shift your understanding of Christmas?

In what tangible ways can you demonstrate God's love to someone this Christmas season who feels unlovable or overlooked?

If God's love calls us to action like laying down our lives for others as described in 1 John 3:16, what specific action is God calling you to take?

Small Group Guide: "Because He Loves, We Love"

Sermon Series: Advent - Week 4

Text: 1 John 4:9-11

Key Theme: God's Love at Christmas

Opening Prayer & Icebreaker (10 minutes)

Icebreaker Question:

What's your favorite Christmas tradition that makes you feel loved? How does your family express love during the holidays?

Sermon Review (5 minutes)

Main Point: Because He loves, we love.

Key Scriptures:

1 John 4:9-11

John 3:16

Ephesians 1:4-6

Romans 8:38-39

Three Main Ideas:

God loved first

God's love is enough

God's love overflows

Discussion Questions

Part 1: God Loved First (15 minutes)

Read Ephesians 1:4-6. What does it mean that God chose us "before the creation of the world"? How does this change your understanding of God's love?

The pastor said, "Christmas is not the start of God's love. It's the revelation of God's love." What's the difference? Why does this distinction matter?

Many people try to "earn" God's love through performance or good behavior. Have you ever felt this way? What makes it hard to simply receive God's love?

Reflection: How does knowing that God loved you before you ever sinned (or succeeded) change the way you approach Him today?

Part 2: God's Love Is Enough (15 minutes)

The sermon mentioned that some of us struggle to believe God loves us because we've "learned love from broken people." How have past experiences with conditional or disappointing love affected your ability to receive God's love?

Read 1 John 4:9-10. What does it mean that God "made the first move toward us"? How is this different from other relationships in your life?

Look at the cast of characters in the Christmas story (Mary, Joseph, shepherds, wise men). What does God's choice of "ordinary" people tell us about who He loves?

Read Romans 8:38-39. Which item on Paul's list do you most need to hear today? (death, life, angels, demons, present, future, powers, height, depth, anything else in creation)

Personal Application: If you're struggling to believe God's love is really for you, what would it look like to "return home" to Him this week?

Part 3: God's Love Overflows (15 minutes)

Read 1 Peter 1:22 and 1 John 4:11. Why is it impossible to truly love others without first experiencing God's love for us?

The pastor mentioned that "sometimes the unlovable people are those closest to us." Who in your life is hardest to love right now? (You don't have to name them—just reflect honestly.)

How does "abiding in God's love" make it possible to love difficult people? What's the difference between loving in our own strength versus loving from the overflow of God's love?

Christmas Challenge: The sermon encouraged us to invite others to Christmas Eve services. Who in your life needs to experience God's love this Christmas? How can you extend that invitation this week?

Key Takeaways (5 minutes)

Have group members share which truth resonated most with them:

God loved you first - His love doesn't depend on your performance

God's love is enough - Nothing can separate you from it

God's love overflows - Because He loves you, you can love others

Practical Applications (10 minutes)

This Week's Challenge:

Choose one (or more) of these action steps:

1. Dwell in God's Love

Read one of these passages daily and meditate on God's love for you:

Day 1: John 3:16-17

Day 2: 1 John 4:9-11

Day 3: Romans 8:38-39

Day 4: Ephesians 3:17-19

Day 5: 1 John 3:16

2. Receive God's Love

If you've been distant from God, take a step back toward Him this week through prayer, confession, or conversation with a trusted Christian friend.

3. Share God's Love

Pick up Christmas Eve invitation cards and invite at least 2-3 people to attend with you

Pray for those people by name daily before Christmas Eve

Plan to follow up with them after the service to discuss their experience

4. Love the Unlovable

Identify one difficult relationship in your life

Before each interaction this week, pray: "God, help me love them with Your love, not my own"

Do one specific act of kindness for that person

Prayer Time (10 minutes)

Prayer Prompts:

Thanksgiving: Thank God for His love demonstrated through sending Jesus

Personal: Ask God to help you grasp how deep, wide, high, and long His love is for you

Others: Pray for those you're inviting to Christmas Eve services

Overflow: Ask God to help His love overflow from you to difficult people in your life

Group Prayer Focus:

Go around the circle and have each person complete this sentence:

"God, help me to love _____ the way You've loved me."

Closing (2 minutes)

Reminder: Christmas Eve Services at 3:00 PM and 4:30 PM

Memory Verse for the Week:

"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." - 1 John 4:10

Final Thought:

You are more loved than you realize. Because He loves you, love others.

Leader Notes

Be sensitive to those who may be struggling with feeling unloved or distant from God

Create a safe space for honest sharing about difficult relationships

Have tissues available—this topic can be emotional during the holidays

Consider having Christmas Eve invitation cards available for your group

Follow up individually with anyone who seems to be struggling with receiving God's love

5-Day Advent Devotional: Because He Loves

Day 1: God Loved First

Reading: Ephesians 1:3-6

Devotional: Before you took your first breath, before you achieved anything or failed spectacularly, God loved you. His love didn't begin when you got your act together—it existed before the foundation of the world. This Christmas season, rest in this profound truth: you don't have to hustle for God's affection. You don't earn points to unlock His love. God's nature is love itself, and He chose you in Christ before creation began. Today, release the exhaustion of trying to earn what has already been freely given. God's love starts with Him, not with your performance. Let this truth wash over your weary soul—you are loved, simply because He is love.

Reflection: What areas of your life are you still trying to earn God's love? How does knowing He loved you first change your perspective?

Day 2: Love Came Down

Reading: John 3:16-17 and 1 John 4:9-10

Devotional: Christmas isn't just nostalgia—it's the gospel made visible. God didn't send a greeting card or good wishes; He sent His Son. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. The manger and the cross stand together in God's rescue mission. When you look at that baby in Bethlehem, you're seeing love crash into our broken world. Jesus came not because we deserved it, but because God's love demanded action. His love isn't passive or distant—it's a love that moves, sacrifices, and transforms. This Christmas, receive the greatest gift: God Himself, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger for you.

Reflection: How does understanding Jesus' birth as God's love in action change how you celebrate Christmas?

Day 3: God's Love Is Enough

Reading: Romans 8:35-39

Devotional: Many of us struggle to believe God's love is for us because we've learned love from broken people—conditional love with strings attached, love that disappeared when we failed. But God's love is radically different. Nothing—not death, life, angels, demons, present, future, height, depth, or anything in creation—can separate you from God's love in Christ Jesus. His love doesn't have an expiration date. It doesn't give way to frustration when you mess up again. You don't need more information this Christmas; you need reassurance. So hear this: God loves you purely, perfectly, wholly, lavishly. His love is enough because Jesus is enough. Stop keeping God at arm's length, afraid of losing His love. You cannot lose what He freely gives.

Reflection: What past experiences make it hard to receive God's unconditional love? How can you surrender those wounds to Him today?

Day 4: Abiding in Love

Reading: 1 Peter 1:22 and 1 John 4:11-12

Devotional: God never pours His love into us just so it can stay there. Because He loves us, we must love others. But here's the key: love isn't something we manufacture through willpower. It's something God produces in us as we remain connected to Him. Like branches drawing life from the vine, we draw love from the Source. This Christmas, as family gathers and tensions rise, remember that loving difficult people isn't about trying harder—it's about experiencing God's love more deeply so it overflows naturally. When we abide in His love, His love flows through us. The unlovable become lovable when we see

them through God's eyes. Today, dwell in His love so deeply that it transforms how you love others.

Reflection: Who in your life is difficult to love? How can you remain connected to God's love so it overflows to them?

Day 5: Love in Action

Reading: 1 John 3:16-18

Devotional: Love is not merely words or feelings—it's action. Jesus didn't just tell us He loved us; He laid down His life. This Christmas, as we celebrate what God did by sending His Son, let His love call us to similar action. Look around at your family, neighbors, coworkers, and strangers. Who needs to experience God's love through you? Perhaps it's an invitation to Christmas Eve service, a conversation about Jesus, or a simple act of kindness. God's love transformed your life; now let it pour out into others. Because He loves, we love. This is the overflow of Advent—receiving His immeasurable love and giving it away lavishly. Don't keep God's love to yourself. Share the greatest gift you've ever received.

Reflection: What is one specific action you can take this week to demonstrate God's love to someone who needs it?

Christmas Eve Invitation: As you complete this devotional journey, consider inviting someone to celebrate Christmas with you at church. Pray for them, extend the invitation, and be ready to share your Jesus story. Let God's love overflow.