



LOVE

week 4

SCRIPTURE: Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. — *1 John 4:7-10*

QUOTE: "He loves us not because there is something in us that attracts Him to us; He loves us because He determined to love us in spite of our unattractiveness. ... It's a love we don't deserve, a love that will never end. It's a love that perseveres even when we fail Him."
— *John MacArthur, Brave Dad*⁶

DAY 19

Love Beautifully Defined

*Read together at home, around the table or at bedtime.***1 JOHN 4:9-10**

We can describe love in many ways. We love our pets. We love our moms and dads. We love ice cream. We love Christmas. We could go on and on because we love many things. However, how would God describe the word "love"?

God shows us the real meaning of love through His Son's birth in Bethlehem and His death on the cross. The Lord beautifully defines love by what He gave at Christmas more than 2,000 years ago. God gave His Son, Jesus. God trusted Mary and Joseph to raise His Son. Jesus' parents taught Him to love and serve the Lord.

Throughout His earthly life, Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life. However, sin caused a big problem with having a relationship with God. God is perfect and holy — without sin.

We, on the other hand, have sin in our lives. Therefore, to have a relationship with God, we need someone perfect and holy to stand in our place. We need a substitute who loves us the same way God loves us. As we discussed on days one and two, that substitute was Jesus. It was a sacrifice for God to send Jesus to Earth and allow Him to be crucified for our sins. God lovingly placed our sins on His innocent Son at the cross.

Instead of making us pay for our own sins, Jesus took our punishment and died the death we deserved. Because of God's great love for us, He sent Jesus in our place.

Charles Spurgeon once said, "If there was to be reconciliation between God and man, man ought to have sent to God; the offender ought to be the first to apply for forgiveness; the weaker should apply to the greater for help; the poor man should ask of him who distributes alms; but 'Herein is love' that God 'sent.' He was first to send an embassy of peace."⁷

God wants a relationship with you and your family. He sent Jesus to demonstrate to the world the unfathomable depth of His love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Who do we celebrate on Christmas? Why is it important?

OLDER CHILD: Who is one person you can commit to sharing Jesus with before next Christmas? Come up with a plan on how to get to know them better and to share the gospel with them.

TEENAGER: The greatest present we could ever receive is Jesus. Spend time today as a family thanking God for His great gift.

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who shows us what true love is all about.

DAY 20

True Light

Read together at home, around the table or at bedtime.

JOHN 1:4-5, 8:12

When driving through a neighborhood or walking in a mall during the Christmas season, children love to point out all the beautiful Christmas lights and decorations. They are always excited and thrilled to see the many colors and ornaments.

In truth, many adults would say the same thing. There is just something about all the lights during this time of year that brings much-needed light to our dark world. There are many places the Bible describes Jesus as being light in the darkness.

- Matthew 4:16 says, “The people who live in darkness have seen a great light, and for those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.”
- As you recall from day 15, Luke describes Simeon’s first reaction as he looks at the newborn Christ child for the first time. In Luke 2:32, Simeon says, “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel.”
- John 1:9 describes Jesus as, “The true light that gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.”

All throughout Scripture, we see Jesus as the beautiful picture and symbol of light. The Bible is clear that those who put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior will not walk in darkness.

As His followers, we can rest in knowing that Jesus brings His light into the lives of those who have surrendered to Him. When we give our lives to Christ, we walk in His light and not in the darkness of the world. While the Lord gives us this light for many reasons, one of the most important reasons we have this light is to share it with those walking in the darkness — those who are far from Christ.

Ask the Lord to give you the opportunity to share the light of Jesus with your family, your neighbors and others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Sing "This Little Light of Mine" together.

OLDER CHILD: As a family, consider who you can share Jesus with in your neighborhood. Purchase a Christmas candle and gift the candle to this neighbor. Pray that God provides you the opportunity to share the light of Christ through this gift.

TEENAGER: What are some ways you can be a light to those around you? As a family, choose one way and put it into action this week.

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who gives us a reason to share the gospel with our family, extended family, our neighbors and those all around us.

DAY 21

God's Great Love

Read together at home, around the table or at bedtime.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-8A, 13

What would happen if you mistakenly tried to put a fresh set of contact lenses in your eyes while still wearing your old ones? Most likely, your eyes would quickly become irritated and everything around you would be distorted and blurry. However, if you took the old contact lenses out and put the new ones in, everything would become clear and focused.

In all of Paul's letters, he helps us see how to live our lives with clarity and focus. He says in today's devotion, "Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love — but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Why is love the greatest? Why does Paul want us to focus on love so much? Love is one of God's many attributes. In 1 John 4:8, the Bible says that God is love. The word for love used in both of these verses comes from the Greek word "agape". This kind of love is self-giving and expects nothing in return.

Agape is the God-kind of focused love. God shows His focused love in many ways, but none better than when He sent Jesus to be born in a manger. Jesus came to live the life we could not live. Because of God's great love, Jesus died in our place. He died the death we deserved. What an amazing, loving gift God has given!

But if Paul wants us to primarily focus on love, why does he also mention faith and hope? He is not downplaying these two words. While we live on this Earth, we need faith and hope desperately. It is not until we reach heaven that faith and hope will have fulfilled their purpose. In heaven, love will last forever. Until then, we cannot live without faith and hope. No one can. Especially those who are far from God and do not have a relationship with Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: What is one way you can show love to a family member today?

OLDER CHILD: Give each family member a sheet of paper and writing tool. Set the timer for two minutes. Have each member write down everything they think of when they hear the word "hope." Once the time stops, repeat the exercise with the word "faith." Once more, repeat the steps with the word "love." Then, discuss as a family and refer back to what you studied in today's devotion.

TEENAGER: How does godly love differ from worldly love? Is faith and hope possible apart from godly love? Why or why not?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who showed us what agape love looks like.

DAY 22**Humble Worshippers**

Read together at home, around the table or at bedtime.

MATTHEW 2:10-11

One of the greatest parts of this season is giving gifts to our family and friends. Seeing the excitement and joy on the faces of our loved ones opening their presents is priceless. In Matthew 2, the Magi from the East gave several impressive and expensive gifts to Jesus and His family. As wonderful as it was to give Him their gold, frankincense and myrrh, there was a far greater gift given that day.

Of course, Mary and Joseph appreciated receiving the extravagant gifts these men brought. Jesus' parents would use them to help provide food, clothes and other necessities for their home. God also provided these gifts for Jesus and His family for other reasons.

He knew they would soon be making a trip to Egypt to protect His Son from King Herod. Herod was an insecure, power-hungry ruler in Israel at the time. He would not tolerate competition from anyone who wanted to call themselves "king." Therefore, God had everything under control, and the Magi brought gifts at just the right time.

However, the gift that God delighted in most was not the gold, frankincense or myrrh, but their gift of genuine, humble worship. Seeing these dignitaries fall on their knees to worship Jesus must have been a remarkable sight for Mary and Joseph. The weary travelers wasted no time in expressing their love and adoration for the King of Glory. They were captivated by their Creator, overtaken by their Redeemer and in awe of their King — the King of the Jews. They wanted nothing more than to be in His presence.

God was now flesh and living among men. These Magi would not miss out on the opportunity to worship the Christ child. No amount of money or distance would keep these VIPs from the chance to worship the King of kings.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Close your eyes and pretend that you are one of the Magi. Describe what you may have seen and heard.

OLDER CHILD: When was a time you gave your all in worship? What factors helped that happen? What obstacles seem to get in the way of always worshipping that way? Why?

TEENAGER: What is the most precious gift you have ever received? Why was it so special?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who is the best gift the world could ever receive.

DAY 23

Obedient Love

Read together at home, around the table or at bedtime.

MATTHEW 2:13-15

As Christmas Day approaches, many moms and dads try to determine whether their children are deserving of the toys they have requested. Did they obey well? How was their attitude while obeying? When a parent tells their child to do something, it needs to be obeyed — especially in safety situations.

Why? The answer is simple. The parent loves them and wants to keep them safe.

That is why God spoke to Joseph in his dream. The point of today's reading is to bring attention to Joseph's response of obedience to God's command. Indeed, the apostle John communicated this idea well. He wrote, "For this is what love for God is: to keep his commands. And his commands are not a burden" (1 John 5:3).

Similarly John later writes in 2 John 1:6, "This is love: that we walk according to his commands. This is the command as you have heard it from the beginning: that you walk in love."

God calls us to show our love for Him by obeying the commands in His Word. While giving a sermon titled "The Fatherhood of God," Charles Spurgeon said, "It is not for me to rise up and go in rebellion against His wishes. If He be a father, let me note His commands, and let me reverentially obey. If He has said 'Do this,' let me do it, not because I dread Him, but because I love Him. And if He forbids me to do anything, let me avoid it."⁸

Let us love and obey the One who gives great commands, which are only given out of love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Sing "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" together.

OLDER CHILD: As a family, sing or listen to "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen." Talk through each stanza and the meaning behind it.

TEENAGER: How does having certain rules show us that we are loved?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who loves us and has given us His Word to study and obey.

DAY 24

Love Poured Out

*Read together at home, around the table or at bedtime.***MATTHEW 1:22-23**

When people are sick, they become appreciative of those who are there for them. You've probably heard stories of children in hospitals who were encouraged by visitors. Regardless of whether they are there to help treat the child or lift their spirits, the one factor that remains is that someone was with them.

Similarly, God loves us and wants to be with us. But this desire does not mean that He is in need of us or anything else, for that matter. As we learned in the first week of our study, God desires to have a relationship with us. Why would a holy, all-powerful, all-knowing God even want to have a relationship with anyone from the human race?

People can be sinful, weak and, most of the time, a lot of trouble. Charles Spurgeon beautifully explains God's heart and purpose when He sent His Son to come as a man and be with us. Sending Jesus shows:

1. How low God bent down to save man. He added the nature of one of His own creatures to His own divine nature, accepting the weaknesses, frailties and dependency that the creature experiences.
2. What a great miracle it was that God could add a human nature to His own and still remain God.
3. The compatibility between the unfallen human nature and the divine nature; that the two could be joined shows that we are truly made in the image of God.
4. That we can come to Him; if He has come to us, then we can come to Him.⁹

What an incredible God! He truly wants a relationship with His creation. He wants it so much that He is the one who has made the path possible. That path is called His Son, Jesus.

This Christmas Eve, why not come to Him? You and your entire family. What are you waiting for? God is with us — and you!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: Make a get well soon card for someone in your neighborhood who is sick as a way to tell them about Jesus.

OLDER CHILD: Consider someone in your community who is sick or in need of help. As a family, cook and deliver a meal for this person as a way to share the gospel.

TEENAGER: Oftentimes, nursing homes can be a lonely place, especially during the holidays. If possible, go with your family to a local nursing home and spend time with someone who is lonely there. Afterward, discuss the experience with each other.

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who truly loves us and is always here for us.

DAY 25

Celebrating the Birth

*Read together at home, around the table or at bedtime.***JOHN 3:16-18**

Every parent knows that life changes when their first child is born. They feel the weight and responsibility of parenthood as they bring their first-born home. At the same time, they have irresistible love for the baby in their arms. This baby has not done anything to earn their love. Instead, parents have an unconditional, freely given, endless love for their child. It is through the lens of parents' love for their child(ren) that we can only begin to understand the incredible depth of love that God has for us.

Today, Christmas Day, we celebrate the birth of Jesus and the amazing events that unfolded among the shepherds, angels, and Mary and Joseph. We also celebrate the reason God the Father sent His Son to us in the form of a little baby in Bethlehem.

God sent Jesus to Earth on a mission. Jesus' mission was to restore what sin destroyed. Jesus went to the cross and died a brutal, humiliating death to reconcile us with God.

Could you ever send your child to a place where you knew they would experience pain and suffering? Could you send your child to live among people who would torture and kill him or her? Could you love someone enough to sacrifice your own child for that person's life? Thankfully we do not have to make that choice. But, praise the Lord, God did!

The Lord kept His promises and lovingly sent His Son so that all who make Him the Lord of their lives could experience hope and joy now and for eternity. God's grace changed the fate for all mankind when Jesus was born.

Jesus' birth is worth celebrating. Merry Christmas!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

YOUNGER CHILD: How did you celebrate your last birthday? What was your favorite part? How can we celebrate Jesus' birthday with just as much fun this Christmas?

OLDER CHILD: Can you remember a favorite birthday celebration? What made the celebration so special? How can we incorporate part of that celebration into our Christmas plans?

TEENAGER: What would you be willing to give up in order to help people know Jesus? How would giving that up help others know Him?

PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who gives us today to celebrate His birthday.

Live it out: *God's love shines brightest when we share it. As a family, choose a neighbor or friend to bless this week. Give them a small gift, like a candle or baked treat, and include a note reminding them of the light of Christ. Pray for an opportunity to share how God's love has changed your family.*

