

# 2025 Advent 4 Small Group Guide

## Christmas: A Love Story

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### Opening Prayer

Begin your time together by thanking God for His incredible love demonstrated through Jesus Christ, and ask the Holy Spirit to open hearts and minds to understand God's love more deeply.

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### Icebreaker Question

What is your earliest or most meaningful memory of feeling truly loved by someone? What made that moment special?

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### Key Scripture

**1 John 4:7-12** *"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God... God is love."*

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### Sermon Summary

This message explored how Christmas is fundamentally a love story—God's love story with humanity. The sermon examined biblical words for love (Hebrew: *hesed* and *ahavah*; Greek: *philia* and *agape*) and revealed that God's defining characteristic is love expressed through giving. Christmas represents God's ultimate gift: sending Jesus to demonstrate sacrificial, steadfast, covenant love for us.

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### Key Takeaways

**God's defining characteristic is love**—steadfast, covenant, self-giving love (*hesed* and *ahavah*)

**Love is action, not just feeling**—it requires giving of ourselves for others' well-being

**Christmas is God's ultimate love story**—demonstrated through Jesus' incarnation and sacrifice

**We are called to be signs of God's love**—the world sees God through our loving actions

**We can only love freely when we know we are deeply loved**—drawing from God's abundant love enables us to give it away

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### Discussion Questions

#### Understanding God's Love

##### 1. Exploring Perceptions of God

- The sermon mentioned that people view God differently—as policeman, judge, distant father, etc. How did you view God before becoming a Christian? How has that view changed?
- Which of the Hebrew/Greek words for love (*hesed*, *ahavah*, *philia*, *agape*) resonates most with you right now? Why?

##### 2. The Nature of Biblical Love

- The pastor emphasized that biblical love is not primarily a feeling but an action—a willingness to give. How does this challenge our culture's understanding of love?

- Discuss the statement: "To love is to give." What does this mean practically in your relationships?
  - 3. **Covenant Love (*Hesed*)**
    - *Hesed* includes loyalty, faithfulness, mercy, and grace in an "uneven covenant" where we receive more than we deserve. When have you experienced this kind of undeserved love from God or others?
    - How does knowing God's love is steadfast and won't abandon you change how you approach difficult seasons?
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## Personal Reflection

- 4. **Receiving Love**
    - The sermon stated: "When you operate your life with a deficit of love and you're not really sure if you are loved, you're not free to give love away." Do you relate to this? How might unhealed wounds or love deficits affect your ability to love others?
  - 5. **Signs of Love**
    - The pastor shared examples of unconditional love (children greeting their father, a faithful dog). What everyday experiences remind you of God's love for you?
    - Brennan Manning changed his name to honor the friend who died for him. What tangible ways do you honor Christ's sacrifice in your daily life?
  - 6. **The Cross as Love's Symbol**
    - For Christians, the cross symbolizes "I love you this much." Spend a moment in silence reflecting on Jesus' sacrifice. What emotions or thoughts arise?
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## Living Out God's Love

- 7. **Being Signs of Love**
    - The sermon asked: "How will others see signs of love today?" and answered: "The only way people see God is when they see the love of God shining through us." How does this challenge or encourage you?
  - 8. **Practical Love in Action**
    - The message highlighted various ministries (Tree of Blessing, Hope Rescue, Helping Harvest, etc.). Which form of practical love is God calling you to participate in this season?
    - Who in your life needs to experience love through your presence, listening, or service rather than a material gift?
  - 9. **Love's Abundance**
    - The pastor said when we draw from God's "bottomless" love, we're free to give it away without fear. What would change in your relationships if you truly believed God's love for you would never run out?
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## Additional Resources

- Book: *The Ragamuffin Gospel* by Brennan Manning
- Book: *Your God is Too Small* by J.B. Phillips
- Video: "I Look Up and I See God" (available on YouTube)
- Study the biblical words for love: *hesed*, *ahavah*, *philia*, *agape*