

Advent: The Coming of Love

December 19, 2021

PREPARATION

▶ STUDY

Spend the week studying Deuteronomy 10:17-19 and John 13:34-35. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

▶ PRAY

Pray for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members and their openness to God's Word.

▶ LANDING POINT

God calls me to love others as He has loved me.

GROUP DISCUSSION

▶ **CONFIDENTIALITY** | What's said in the group stays in the group.

▶ **NO CROSS-TALK** | Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.

▶ **NO FIXING** | We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.

▶ **SHARING** | Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.

INTRODUCTION

A COMMON THREAD OF LOVE

There is a special place in God's heart for the downtrodden and the helpless. Throughout the Bible's story, we see God caring for the fatherless and for widows, for the poor and the homeless. The Israelites were commanded by God in the Old Testament to model Him in loving the less fortunate; and in the New Testament, Jesus also called His disciples to be a living example of His love in the world.

The common thread we see between the Old and New Testament is love. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is a love story—one that shows us that God went to great lengths to rescue us from death and give us all the things we have been celebrating this advent such as new life, hope, peace, joy, and love. The coming of love in the coming of Christ reminds us that we are to love others the way God loves us. When we model His love in our lives, we show others how big God's heart is for the world.

Where have you seen an example of God's love lived out recently?

DEEPER DIVE

INFINITE AND IMMEASURABLE

Have you ever stopped to dwell on the fact that God is both infinite and immeasurable? God has no beginning and no end and who He is by nature isn't measured in degrees. You see, we can vary in degrees of being loving, just, compassionate, righteous, etc. But God has been and always will be perfectly loving, just, compassionate, righteous, etc. He never ceases to be all-wise, all-knowing, all-powerful and all-loving toward us.

Let's take a look at two passages, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament, and discuss how they help us to love others as God loves us.

Q: *Have volunteers read Deuteronomy 10:17-19 and John 13:34-35. What do both of these passages teach us about the character of God?*

Q: *What are the characteristics of the love Jesus showed toward others?*

Q: *How would others see believers differently if they saw more love for one another in our relationships?*

REFLECTION AND NEXT STEPS

GOOD NEWS THIS CHRISTMAS

It seems like it's harder and harder to find good news these days. Whether it's in the news outlets, on social media, or everyday chatter, many are choosing the path of negativity and cynicism. This Christmas Jesus has good news of hope for you and for all humanity. No matter who you are or where you've come from or what you've experienced, Jesus loves you more than you can imagine and has good news for you.

Jesus has good news for...

- ...the outsider (John 4:1-24).
- ...the successful (Matthew 19:16-30; John 10:10).
- ...the overwhelmed and anxious (Matthew 6:25-34; 11:28-30; Luke 10:38-42).
- ...the ashamed (John 8:1-11).
- ...the confused (John 3:1-21).
- ...the fatherless (Luke 15: John 5:19-24; 17:1-26).
- ...the broken-hearted and disappointed (John 11:1-44).
- ...the community (John 13:34-35).
- ...the difference-makers (Matthew 5:1-16).
- ...the present and the future (Isaiah 65:17-25; 1 Peter 1:3-25; Revelation 21:1-4).

This Christmas, let's choose to activate joy through contentment, thankfulness and celebrating. Jesus came to bring you joy and it is ours for the taking. When we activate that joy, others will see evidence of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) in our lives.

Q: *What are some practical ways to avoid the negativity and cynicism of our culture these days?*

Q: *In what area, relationship or circumstance do you need to hear good news from Jesus this Christmas?*

Q: *Name one person who needs to hear the good news of Jesus this Christmas. Who is it and how could you share that good news with them?*

Q: *How can the group be praying for you this week?*

COMMENTARY

Understanding God's Character in His Law "The fatherless, the widow, and the sojourner are the main categories of landless people (in addition to the Levites). Deuteronomy commands special care for such people (e.g., 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:17, 19–21; 27:19). you were sojourners. Israel's own experience in Egypt is a motivation for several laws in Deuteronomy (e.g., 15:15; 24:18, 22)."

Two Testament Gods Many have the mistaken belief that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are two different kinds of Gods. The God of the Old Testament is angry and vengeful, a God who revels in punishing sinners. Then in the New Testament we find a very different kind of God in Jesus. Now God is all about love and forgiveness, a God who wouldn't dare punish sinners. Many who hold this belief likely haven't read the scripture closely enough to see that God's love and justice are seen both in the Old and New Testaments or they prefer simplistic caricatures of God found in popular culture.

God Gets Glory through Our Love "Jesus told his disciples not only that God would be glorified through his work on the cross, but also that he would be seen and glorified through the actions of his people (vv. 34–35). If there is anything in this lonely and fractured world that speaks of the radical difference that Christ makes, it is to be found in a loving and united community of believers. The standard that should mark out the way Christians relate to one another is none other than that set by Christ himself: 'As I have loved you, so you must love one another.'"

