

4.1 Love Devotion

Love

SAY Jesus is the demonstration of God's love, and at Advent, we light candles to remind ourselves of the light of hope, promise of peace, joy of salvation, and overwhelming love he brought to us.

ASK What is love?

EXPLAIN Love is when you care more about others than yourself. It's sacrifice. The Bible tells us that God is love.

LIGHT the first, second, third, and fourth candles of your wreath.

SAY These candles represent hope, peace, joy, and love. When Jesus came, he showed us how much God loves us.

READ & DISCUSS John 3:16-17 and Romans 5:8

PRAY O Lord, our God, thank you for your unfailing, steadfast love. Thank you for loving us enough to die for us. Help us to love you with our whole hearts. Enable us to love our neighbors with your great love. Help us to be yours as we wait for you to come again. We love you. Amen.

FURTHER DISCUSSION Do you love anyone enough to die for them? What are some ways we can show God's love to one another? To our neighbors? To our friends?

4.2 Advent Conspiracy

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Galatians 4:4-7

When I was growing up, we had school meals where we sat down at tables together and we ate the food that was presented to us. We had no choice in what food was served that day. We might like it, we might not like it; it might be well cooked, it might be badly cooked. We had no choice in the matter. My least liked day was sauerkraut day. If you’ve never had sauerkraut – it’s a bitter form of cabbage. Some people love it. I find it hard to even put it in my mouth. But, if it was sauerkraut day at school, it was sauerkraut day.

Turning to today’s passage: the book of Galatians challenges its readers, including you and me, to live a life that is rooted solely in faith in Jesus Christ. A life in which other forms of “living right” are given up in favor of one great approach: trusting in Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the reality of a life apart from grace and faith is compared to living like a child with a guardian – limited. The inheritance may, in theory, be yours, but you can’t get to it. It’s a grey, constrained, world.

But now, bursting forth in glorious color, is one of the most amazing consequences of faith in Jesus Christ. We aren’t simply forgiven – after all, Jesus’ death on the cross could have changed us from unforgiven slaves to forgiven slaves. No! Jesus was sent so that, by faith in him, we might become the chosen children of heavenly Dad.

The passage is really very bold here – we were constrained and unable to actually live right but now we are God’s children. And not just his children, but his adopted children.

Compare my school dining experience – you get what you’re served – with going to a restaurant. You’ve chosen the restaurant. You’re given the menu. You select food, maybe even multiple courses, from the menu. And, being wise, you choose exactly what you want. The tastes, the flavors – everything that you love and want to eat. You know how good that perfectly cooked dream meal is, and you choose it.

This word adoption is one of the most profound points in this passage: knowing exactly who we were, and exactly who we are today, God chooses to adopt us. In other terms, you weren’t just a no-option meal plonked in front of God. No! God had an option, and he willingly chose to adopt you. Yes – you. He looked at the whole of humanity and chose you, to welcome home as a child. Not a forgiven slave, a wanted, chosen, delighted in, loved child.

Wow! Let that truth sink into you for a moment.

Reflect

Consider the significance that, as a Christian, you haven't 'just' been forgiven by Jesus' death on the cross, amazing as that is. You are a chosen, child of the living God. How does this impact your gratitude to God? How might this transform how you worship, and how you love others this Christmas?

Pray

Heavenly Father,

Thank you that when I chose to trust Jesus for forgiveness you chose to adopt me as your child. Help me to know more how deeply loved I am and help me to live in that reality and the security that it brings. Give me the courage and awareness to love everyone I meet as someone who you value as a child, even if they haven't turned to you yet, just as Jesus did in coming to earth.

Amen.

4.3 Wycliff (Angels)

ANGELS

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others — the armies of heaven — praising God and saying, “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”

— Luke 2:13-14 (NLT)

Angels are terrifying.

It’s not hard to imagine since the first words angels say to humans are usually: “Don’t be afraid” (Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10, etc.). Clearly, they’re startling enough to warrant a physical response from humans.

We know little for sure about angels apart from the fact that they’re spiritual beings. They seem to serve a variety of roles, from warriors to guardians to heralds used by God to deliver his messages. They’re messengers in the Christmas story. An angel appeared to Zechariah. And then a named angel, Gabriel, appeared to Mary to tell her that she would give birth to God’s son. An angel then appeared to Joseph in a dream to let him know about this news too.

The next time an angel appeared in this story, it was to shepherds in a field. We spent time talking about shepherds and how we can learn from their example, but what about the angels? What do they have to teach us about joy in the midst of uncertainty?

The angels were joyful because they had an advantage: they knew the king arriving that night and the hope he would bring mankind. They knew what the weary world did not yet know: hope was coming.

This was a pivotal moment in human history, and this group of angels came together to declare the best news the shepherds would ever hear.

The “vast host” was a vast number of the Lord’s spiritual servants. You might even call it a heavenly community reflective of the community of believers who will one day be praising God before his throne together (Revelation 7:9).

We know the rest of the story because we have the Bible. We know that Jesus Christ was the true Messiah (Acts 4:10-12) and that he died for our sins and rose again (1 Corinthians 15:4). We know he’s sitting at God’s right hand (Romans 8:34) and will return for us again (John 14:3). We can rejoice in this truth!

The vast host of angels rejoiced together. The shepherds received that joy and spread it to others. Light was spreading, illuminating the darkness. In the midst of your own dark times, you might think that you can’t find words of joy and hope within yourself to lift to God. In those times, you can reach out to others in God’s community so they can encourage you by declaring his promises over you

Questions

- » What were you taught about angels growing up? How has your understanding of angels changed as you’ve studied the Bible more?
- » Who are people you’ve reached out to in dark or uncertain times in your life? What was their response?
- » Who is someone you can “sing God’s promises over” this week?

4.4 Frontier Fellowship

TOUCH

“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 Corinthians 15:56-57

God’s covenant of grace means the victory is won and grace abounds—all the more reason to celebrate! We are no longer bound by sin or the law. Life’s circumstances do not always make our freedom apparent, and at times, neither does our own behavior, but such circumstances and behaviors do make clear our need for a Savior. We need his touch, forgiveness and embrace, love and peace.

The peace once hoped for in Sudan and South Sudan has not been realized. Turmoil and fighting continue, but two of Frontier Fellowship’s partners are among those seeking to bring the hope of Christ to the people of the Sudans.

Christ-followers working with Darfur Outreach are making God’s love evident to those longing for hope, peace, and a more stable future in Darfur—a region of western Sudan that has experienced much turmoil. This ministry encompasses two Bible schools providing education and leadership development programs that help train and equip women and men to share the Good News of Jesus among Sudan’s least-reached people groups.

The Sudanese / South Sudanese Refugee Ministry is meeting the needs of refugees fleeing famine and crisis who need care, shelter, supplies and love. New pastors are trained and sent out to refugee camps, and the Gospel is going with them—often into places previously unreached.

Pray for Sudanese believers who have found victory in Jesus. Pray for their well-being and ministry as they train and care for others. May the people of Sudan and South Sudan feel the touch of God’s love and know peace through Him.

4.5 Advent Conspiracy Family (Love All)

LOVE ALL

JESUS CAME FOR ALL PEOPLE, INCLUDING US. WE SHOULD LOVE AND SERVE OTHERS AS A REMINDER OF HOW MUCH GOD LOVES US.

We can show God's love by the way we treat others and the way we celebrate and worship during Christmas. Jesus loves all and wants us to treat our neighbors with love and kindness. We can love others by serving, donating money, lending a helping hand, and praying for them.

SCRIPTURE:

"Jesus replied, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" — Matthew 22:37-39

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, you love all the people in the world, including me. Help me to love and be kind to other people. Amen

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- *What is one way you can show kindness to someone this week?
- *What's the best part about making new friends?
- *What are 3 ways you can help out a friend?
- *Name someone you can pray for this week.
- *What should we do with the money in the collection jar?

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Family Meeting. What has your family learned this Advent season? What are some of the things you want to do again next year?

Make a Donation. As a family, decide how to use your Christmas donation jar to help others. You can go through your local church and give to the Christmas offering, find a local organization you love, or research organizations that help kids around the world. Whatever you choose to donate to, remind your kids that all of their hard work is going to help someone and it is a way to show love, just like Jesus.

Love All Cards. Create some special Christmas cards for people like teachers, mailmen, police officers, healthcare workers, etc. Write them an encouraging note and draw a picture. Thank them for all of the ways they help your community and wish them a Merry Christmas.