

Open Table Community Church
Advent Devotional

2019



Week 4: Love

Introduction

Each week of Advent has a theme. Week one is HOPE. Week two is PEACE. Week three is JOY. Week four is LOVE. In this Devotional, you will be offered 1-4 scripture readings if you wish to read the lectionary passages for this year. There will also be a short devotional reading followed by a meditation for the week. As we use Advent as a contemplative discipline to quiet our hearts and wait for the arrival of Jesus, I suggest using the meditations to aid you. Whenever you get caught up in the crazy pace of the holiday season, return to the meditations to resist being swept up in the chaos.

After the meditations, there will be a devotional for the whole family, especially the kiddos. It will include a review of what the kids are learning in The Kids' Table so you can refresh your kids on the content from Sunday. It will also come with challenges you can complete with your children during the Advent season.

We pray that this Devotional will help your family to slow down this season and prepare yourselves for God's Big Gift, the Advent of Jesus.

Scripture Reading

Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19

Isaiah 7:10-16

Devotional Reading

This week, my youngest son, Asher, got sick. It was nothing severe, but he had a fever and his chest was rattly as he coughed. Of course since it's the week before Christmas, we have parties planned and since my family often volunteers in so many areas of church, a sick baby means shuffling jobs and schedules. Once we announced that Asher had a fever and we'd need to quarantine him so we didn't pass on his cooties, the volunteering commenced. Almost everyone volunteered to stay home with Asher. We were all willing to miss parties and skip church for the opportunity to curl up in bed with a sick baby and watch Disney cartoons. I recently texted with a good friend who was snuggling her sick granddaughter and we both confessed to secretly liking it when our babies are a little sick because it makes them so calm and snuggly. Don't judge me.

As we all debated the merits of us getting to take "sick baby duty", Esther shouted above everyone else, "Can I please be Mom!" She went on to explain that snuggling sick babies is her job and way too many of her jobs are co-opted in our full and busy house. She refused to give up the job of staying home from the party to love on her baby.

I think we can learn a great deal about God from a mother's love. We tend to often make the Scriptures so complex and so burdensome. We work to understand the rules and how strictly we should impose them. We search for definitions so we can decide who's in and who's out. We want to help but we also want to make sure we do it just right. All of this is understandable and if we're honest, many of us had relationships with our mothers that included many of these elements. But I think Esther and Asher give us the real picture of God's heart for us.

We tend to forget that at the root of it all, we're sick. We aren't functioning the way we were designed. We aren't bearing the image that we were made to bear very well. We have sin and because of that we aren't healthy. We often think of sin as a behavior that is punished and that may be the case, but that misses the heart of God. The heart of God sees sin as a sickness and us as His poor sick child. He comforts us, and snuggles us, and does everything in His power to heal us. This is why Jesus came. This is why He went to the cross. This is why Jesus wrapped in His mother's love is the best picture of Advent Love. Hear God's voice over you today saying, "Can I please show Love on my sick child today?"

This Week's Meditation

Imagine areas of your life where you don't sense the love of God.

What might it FEEL like if you felt the love of God in those areas?

If you could FEEL completely loved by God, how might that change the way you show love to others?

Go out and SHINE that love because you are completely loved by God!

From The Kid's Table

This week in The Kids' Table we covered these stories:

- **Bethlehem**
- **The angels and the shepherds**
- **Jesus' birth**

Allow your child/ren to tell as much or as little of the story as they remember. Help them to recognize and learn that each of our voices are important in our church.

Bethlehem-

Bethlehem was a small town in Israel. Jesus was born in that town. It might seem kind of funny that a town could give love, and usually I would say you're right. But, God chose the city as the very special place where Jesus would be born. Bethlehem was kind of just a little town like Wellsville or Edgerton, but God knew that in that tiny town he would bring his Big Gift into the world. That town, its people, and its creatures would become the first to see his Big Gift. God thought that a tiny town was the very best place for Jesus to be born. That sounds like a pretty cool way to give love.

The Angels and the shepherds-

Angels are like God's helpers in heaven and even sometimes here on earth. On the night Jesus was born, God sent a whole choir of angels to sing a song and announce to some shepherds who were taking care of the sheep from the town of Bethlehem. They told these boys and young men where to go and how to find God's Big Gift. The angels told the shepherds that this gift everyone had been waiting for was actually a baby wrapped in strips of cloth lying in a box that animals were fed from. How much love those shepherds must have felt that God chose them to hear about His Big Gift first.

Jesus Birth-

On the night Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph were coming from their home to Bethlehem to pay some money to the king. There were so many people in the tiny town that there weren't enough places for everyone to sleep. Mary and Joseph ended up in a barn with a bunch of animals, and that was where God chose to bring Jesus, his Big Gift, into the world. The shepherds who had been told by the angels where to find Jesus came to find him. They were so excited to see this Big Gift, lying in a feed box. That isn't usually how my gifts are wrapped, but God thought a human baby, wrapped up in strips of cloth lying in a feed box was the perfect way to show His love for his creation. His Big Gift was here!

God sent his biggest gift to us in the form of a helpless baby. A baby who needed to be held, and changed and fed. A little person who didn't know how to walk or talk, who needed to be taught what it meant to be a human being. Instead of having that baby be born into a king's family where he grew up with the very best of everything, Jesus was born in the family of a carpenter. Jesus grew up doing chores and working beside his mom and dad and his siblings. He grew up just like me and just like you. Instead of having Jesus be born in a fancy town with all the coolest things, he was born in a little tiny town, and his first visitors were just a bunch of boys and young men who were out camping under the stars watching some sheep. That was the place God sent his biggest gift of love and the people he chose to share that gift with first. But, here's the deal. Here's what we should learn from that. God spent a lot of years waiting for just the right time to send His big gift to us. Everything had to be perfect, and what was perfect to God probably doesn't look like what we would think of as perfect. You see, God doesn't care if we have all the best stuff, or if we live in the fanciest house, or have all the "cool" friends. God loves to give BIG gifts in small packages, like a baby born in a small town in a barn surrounded by animals to some parents who didn't really have a lot of money and whose first visitors were just a bunch of young men who were watching the sheep. God loves simple things.

This week we're looking for ways we can find and SHINE love. Love seems like such a simple thing for us to define. We love our parents and our kids. We love our pets, but we also love food and toys and movies and lots of other stuff. Our purpose this week is find the small, simple ways in which we can SHINE love. God used the simplest of things, a cute, adorable, cuddly baby to give us the biggest gift that has ever been given. What ways can we find to give love this week. Let's look together in each of the stories we read this week for ways the characters SHINED love to the world.

Bethlehem was just a simple town and the barn into which Jesus was born was simply a place for livestock. There was nothing fancy or extraordinary about that place, except that God considered it the perfect way to stop all of history and change everything.

The shepherds were pretty low on the social chain. They probably didn't get many dinner invitations and most people probably could have cared less what they thought about anything at all, and yet God chose them to send a choir of angels and a personal invitation to be the very first to come and meet Jesus, Emanuel, God with us, in the form of a helpless baby. I cannot

even imagine how that meeting with a chorus of angels might have changed the lives of those shepherds.

And, Jesus...He broke into our mess in the simplest form. He came and changed everything for all of time because of His great LOVE for you and for me and for all of His creation. We are loved, and LOVE's name is Jesus.

Because we are loved with such an extravagant love, a love that stepped into time and subjected itself to the brokenness of our world in order to restore things and make all things right, a love that chooses to come after us and seek us out even when we are lost, what can we do but love? We can all choose love. We can all choose to SHINE love each day. It doesn't have to be big or extravagant. It doesn't even have to be something anyone sees. When we choose love, we SHINE Jesus for all the world to see, and we can start right in our own homes with our people.

Challenge:

- This week, read [1Corinthians 13](#) together. Talk through the list of things that love is. How can you do those things better? What kind of things in that list make each person in your family feel loved? Talk about why God might have called love the greatest. What is it about love that makes it greater than faith and hope?
- This week actively try to find one way each day to SHINE love to each person in your family. Bless them with words, or a small gift that has nothing to do with Christmas. Spend some time with them doing something they enjoy. Give them a hug. Make them breakfast in bed. Allow your toddler to drink from your drink. Let your preschooler tell you their favorite poop joke. Play a game, do a craft with, or build a lego set with your elementary kiddo. Ask your preteen to watch a movie with you. Invite your teenager to come hang out with you at night before bedtime and listen to them. Challenge one another to find surprising and unexpected ways to love one another.