

WEEK 4: LOVE

DEVOTIONALS FOR ADVENT

FEATURING UNION BAPTIST CHURCH ASSOCIATE MINISTERS





DECEMBER 18

DEVOTIONAL SCRIPTURE: LUKE 2:8-20

Today, the ability to share exciting news with others is quick and easy. With one tweet, post, or group text, we can communicate with the masses. But things were obviously very different in the time Jesus was born. When something important happened, such as the birth of a child, heralds often spread that news. Families welcoming new babies, if they had the means to do so, would hire someone to go throughout the community and announce their happy news.

Mary and Joseph, of humble means, did not have the ability to do this. But God himself provided a company of heavenly heralds to proclaim the birth of his one and only son.

Imagine the scene: shepherds on the midnight watch, ears and eyes open for signs of danger, sheep bleating in the background. And then, out of nowhere, an angel of the Lord, the glory of God and news of a promise perfectly kept. It is amazing that God chose this group of men as the first to hear the good news.

In the time of Jesus' birth, people regarded shepherds as liars and thieves. Because they were nomadic, moving from place to place to graze their flocks, people didn't readily trust them. Yet it was to these men that God announced the Messiah's coming.



LOVE

He told them first! Not royalty, not the religious leaders of the day, but shepherds who were lowly and insignificant. He invited them into his story and then mobilized them as the very first evangelists.

As soon as they heard news of Jesus' birth, the shepherds felt compelled to act. They went with haste, leaving their flocks behind, to find Mary, Joseph, and the savior child lying in a manger. And once they beheld the one through whom salvation would come, they spread the word of all that had taken place.

We are like these men, unlikely recipients of an unbelievable reality. Just as God called the shepherds to witness and testify to Christ's birth, so we are called to herald the saving work of his death and resurrection. As believers, we have been invited into his story and sent out as heralds of both Jesus' first and second coming. As we consider the shepherds, let us respond as they did to this good news of great joy with amazement, belief, and action.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

- How did you first hear the gospel? Who told you, and how did you respond?
- Did sharing the news of Jesus' birth feel like a burden or a joy to the shepherds? Why?
- How do you feel about sharing the gospel?
- What might help you view it as a joyful and loving calling?



**PRAYER FOR TODAY: LORD, THANK YOU FOR THE LOVE YOU HAVE SHOWN US.
PLEASE GIVE ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE YOUR LOVE WITH SOMEONE ELSE.**

DECEMBER 19

DEVOTIONAL SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 3:16-19

"I am incredibly, deeply, and completely in love with you!" How many of us long to hear these words and to know that we can believe them? We long to hear them from those with whom we have a relationship.

This kind of love, however, can only come from God and He plants it in our inner most parts. God wants us to know the depth, breadth, length and height of his love and he wants us to know that his love is unconditional. Further, God does not want any of us to be left wondering about the completeness or fidelity of His love. It is for this reason that his Son and our Savior, laid down his life.

Just think, there is no greater love!

PRAYER FOR TODAY: DEAR JESUS, THANK YOU FOR THE STRENGTH WE HAVE FOUND IN AND THROUGH YOUR LOVE. THANK YOU FOR THE PASSION YOU DEMONSTRATE TO US EACH DAY, AND FOR COUNTING US WORTHY OF YOUR LOVE.

DECEMBER 20

DEVOTIONAL SCRIPTURE: ACTS 16:11-15

written by Rev. Rana Davis

Acts 16 finds us in the throes of Paul's second missionary journey in Gentile lands as the Christian Church is being established. Having been unsuccessful at sharing the Gospel with Jews, Paul enlarges his geographic territory to include Philippi, "a Roman colony and leading district of Macedonia" (verse 12).

Here, he finds a traveling merchant named, Lydia who sells luxurious purple cloth for a living and believes in the God of Israel. But she isn't just Lydia the Businesswoman. She is Lydia the Listener who becomes a conduit for the message of Christ to be bought forth. She, like her predecessor Martha, isn't concerned with the tasks at hand. Her priority is the Kingdom of God at hand. Lydia accepts Christ and shares the gift with her household and inevitably, an entire continent.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

- What may be some challenges that will stop you from sharing God's love with others?
- What ways can you make yourself available for God to use you during this Advent season?

PRAYER FOR TODAY: DEAR GOD, MAY WE FIND TIME DURING THIS HECTIC SEASON TO REFLECT ON YOUR LOVE FOR US, AND PREPARE OUR HEARTS FOR THE GREATEST GIFT, YOUR SON, JESUS. WE REJOICE IN HIS COMING AND CELEBRATE WITH OUR WHOLE BEING. AMEN.



DECEMBER 21

DEVOTIONAL SCRIPTURE: JOHN 14:15-21

In John 14. Jesus' farewell speech to his disciples, he clearly had one primary message: love. Jesus calls us to live in love. The often-quoted verse in John says that God demonstrated love for the world (humanity) by sending Jesus. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son..."(John 3:16)

The point of John 14 is to say that if we love Jesus, we will keep his commandments. The only commandment Jesus gives in John is to love one another.

How will you love someone today? What will you do? What will you say? At the end of this day, reflect on the ways you have and have not loved. Jesus wanted his first disciples to know that they could not love him while not being loving to others. Neither can we.

PRAYER FOR TODAY: LIVING LORD, LET YOUR LOVE LIVE IN ME AND THROUGH ME SO THAT SOMEONE ELSE CAN SEE THE GREATEST LOVE OF ALL: JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.

DECEMBER 22

DEVOTIONAL SCRIPTURE: 2 CORINTHIANS 5:14; PSALM 100

What if all you had today was what you thanked God for yesterday? Would you have the essentials — food, water, clothing, shelter? How about your family and friends? When asked, “How are you doing today?” there is a popular radio show host who always responds, “Better than I deserve!” The truth is, we are all doing better than we deserve. Because of our sin, we deserve total separation from our perfect and holy God — but He loves us so much that He offers us forgiveness and heart transformation.

Worship is our response to God's love. When we worship, we remember that Jesus took care of our greatest need on the cross. And even amid trying times, we can still celebrate that He has given us breath in our lungs, food to eat, and a purpose in life. There is always something to praise God for!

When was the last time you really demonstrated your love for God? Have you taken time to thank Him for the things He provides for you every day? When we understand that, apart from God, we have nothing, we can thank Him that, with Him, we have everything we'll ever need. His love compels us to worship Him in all we say and do — in our words, in our actions, and in our attitude.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Let's spend a few moments today during this Advent Season to write out ten things you are thankful for. Try to get as specific as possible. Use this list as a catalyst to praise God specifically for how much He cares for and loves you!

PRAYER FOR TODAY: FATHER, THANK YOU FOR LOVING US. YOU HAVE GIVEN ME SO MANY THINGS TO BE GRATFUL FOR. HELP ME TO RECOGNIZE THOSE BLESSINGS DAILY AND TO WORSHIP YOU WITH AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE. IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.

DECEMBER 23

DEVOTIONAL SCRIPTURE: COLOSSIANS 3:12-14

In this season of Advent, we have reflected on the hope, peace, and love that are available to us through Jesus. We have confidence that we can have glorious hope in a dark world. We trust that the Lord gives us peace that passes our earthly understanding. We rely on love that flows to us like a river without end. For these truths, we are grateful. But let's not stop at gratitude during this season.

Let's allow our gratitude to impact our actions. Our passage today reminds us, as God's chosen people to dress ourselves daily in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and forgiveness. These are not self-focused virtues. They are all focused on how we interact with others. As we head into a new year let us be determined to virtuously dress ourselves daily and bind all our actions in the unity that comes with love.

PRAYER FOR TODAY: DEAR JESUS, THANK YOU FOR THE STRENGTH WE HAVE FOUND IN AND THROUGH YOUR LOVE. THANK YOU FOR THE PASSION YOU DEMONSTRATE TO US EACH DAY, AND FOR COUNTING US WORTHY OF YOUR LOVE.

DECEMBER 24

DEVOTIONAL SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 22:36-40

Advent is a time to remember that God sent Jesus to restore our loving fellowship with the God. God wants our obedience to flow from our love and reverence of him. We do this by allowing ourselves to experience this vulnerable and humble space of alignment with the Lord to cultivate a deeper, more meaningful connection with our Father in Heaven.

Learning to love God sometimes presents a difficult challenge in our strength. It requires us to strike the right balance between possessing unshakable faith and yielding our will and intellect to the Almighty God, which requires supernatural humility and vulnerability. The problem is our logic. At times, intellect competes with our love.

As we wrestle like Jacob with our desire to receive God's blessings, the journey toward understanding which choices are best for our lives starts and ends with the Word of God. There we find God's guidance and instruction for our lives. Instead of loving obedience, we often test Jesus by our need to have our questions acknowledged, addressed, and answered, just like the Pharisees did in Matthew 22:36-40.

Is our curiosity and probing a reflection of our heart's desire for understanding? Or might it be a disguise for our effort to measure our brilliance against the omniscience of God?

Today let's replace our logic with love and restore loving fellowship as we embrace this greatest commandment.

PRAYER FOR TODAY: GOD, LORD DURING THIS ADVENT SEASON, TEACH ME HOW TO LOVE YOU WITH ALL MY HEART, MIND AND SOUL. TEACH ME HOW TO LOVE OTHERS AS I LEARN HOW TO LOVE MYSELF. IN JESUS NAME, AMEN.