

The Wonder Of Love

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GROUP ICE BREAKER

Finish the sentence: "It's not Christmas without..."

REVIEW LAST WEEK'S NEXT STEPS

What, if any, next step did you commit to last week, how did it go?

- I will say yes to the reality that the good news brings great joy.
- I will say no to the barriers of joy — pride, selfishness, indifference.
- I will structure my life to make space for God.
- I will say no to some things in my life to make space for joy.
- I will be attentive to what God is doing in the world and make joy my response.
- I will make it my goal to bring joy to those around me.

MESSAGE SUMMARY

The Christmas story, at its core, is a love story. In 1 John 4 we're told that God demonstrated his love for us by sending His Son into the world, who would become the Savior of the world. "This is love," a divine love that's pure, underserved, unearned, unexpected, and unending, and it was initiated by God. He loved us first.

Jesus was born so that he could die as our atoning sacrifice, or our propitiation, taking on the penalty of sin, becoming our substitute, and assuming the debt of our sin. Self-sacrifice is the foundation of real love, and "God is love." It's not just something he does; it's what he is. It's his very nature.

This love story is meant to be lived thru you. The greatest proof of God's love in you is God's love displayed thru you. This is at the heart of what Jesus said to the religious teacher who asked him what the greatest command is. Jesus replied to love God and love your neighbor as yourself. They're not two separate commands but a continuation of one into the other.

How do you show that same love? First, open your heart. When you have a closed heart, you can't give love. God loved you so that you could give love away, and it begins with an open heart. Second, open your hands. Closed hands are a position of selfishness and fear. It's hard to love another when you're holding on to what is "yours." Saint Augustine was asked what loving your neighbor looks like and answered, "(Love) has the hands to help others."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe love in your own words. How do you know it? How do you give it?
2. Read 1 John 4:9-19. What are the defining qualities of love found in your reading?
3. How would you explain Jesus as our “atoning sacrifice” to a non-believer and their need for that sacrifice?
4. What are the differences between “God is loving,” and “God is love” (1John 4:16)? Why is the second more meaningful than the first?
5. What happens to our efforts to love each other if those efforts aren’t connected to God’s love for us?
6. Do you find yourself more loving or more critical of others right now? If the latter, how can you reconnect with the love of God this week?
7. Who is a person or group of people that is difficult for you to love? What is one thing you can do this week to open your heart and/or open your hands to them?

NEXT STEPS FOR THIS WEEK (COMMIT TO GROW)

Use these as a guide to take your next step and commit to what you learned this week:

- I will embrace the love God has for me.
- I will place my faith in the person and work of Jesus.
- I will open my heart in love to others.
- I will open my hands in love to others.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

- 1 John 4:9-16, 19
- John 3:19
- John 3:16

SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

- "Our God who cradles whole galaxies in the palm of His hand, whom highest heavens cannot contain-He folds Himself into our skin, and He uncurls His newborn fingers in the cradle of a barn feeding trough...and we are saved from ourselves. We are saved from our loneliness because God is love, and He can't stand to leave us by ourselves, to ourselves.

"That is the message of Christmas. We need a Messiah. For unto us a Child is born. God can't stay away. This is the love story that has been coming for you since the beginning. Love had to come back for you. Love had to get to you. The Love that has been coming for you since the beginning.

"This is the truest love story of history, and it's His-Story, and it's for you."
Ann Voskamp, [The Greatest Gift](#)

PRAYER REQUESTS

Take time to share how you can be praying for each other over the next week:

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