

“Love” Advent – Week #4

Matthew 11:28 NLT - 28 Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

We tend to view ourselves and our situation through a lens of what was once true. We are acutely aware of our own failures and shortcomings. From this perspective, handling the challenges of this life can seem an impossible burden. Most of us have carried the burden of 2020 and felt the weight of our inadequacy. But God knows the rest of the story. He sees from an eternal perspective.

Mary embraced God's plan for her future when she said, "let it be done according to your word". God's love overshadowed the fear of the future she was facing. Let's bring to Jesus every burden we've felt in 2020 and allow His love to overcome them and bring us peace.

Pray for each of the things that weigh heavy on you now and bring them to Jesus to lift from your shoulders and receive His love and rest in return. As you name each one, tell Jesus that you trust Him with it because He loves you.

WRAP-UP

God demonstrated His love for us when He was born as a baby in Bethlehem, facing the life of a servant and an agonizing death so that we have access to Him for eternity. He loves us as a father, and as a bridegroom. And all we have to do is receive it and rest in knowing that God loves you with an everlasting love.

Memory Verse

And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.

-Ephesians 3:18 NLT

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life: _____

Pray for your group members' needs: _____

Challenge- Find God's expression of love for you today in warmth of the sun, the song of the birds, and the smiles of your friends and family.

INTRODUCTION

We use the word "love" very broadly in our culture. "I love pizza, I love the Dodgers. I love my husband." Surely, we don't hold all of these with the same degree of affection. And when we say God loves us, it is a love that is beyond our ability to comprehend. In fact, the word for God's love, agape, is uniquely used of God's love alone. But that is the love we celebrate in this final week of Advent. God's perfect transcendent love for us. And that love was given to us that first Christmas when Jesus was born; Emmanuel, God with us.

Ice Breaker

In how many languages can you say "love"?

Key Passage

Luke 1:26-38 NLT - 26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, 27 to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. 28 Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!" 29 Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. 30 "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. 33 And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!" 34 Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin." 35 The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. 36 What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. 37 For nothing is impossible with God." 38 Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. God leads with Love

To gain some perspective on God's love for us we must go back to the beginning of our relationship with Him in the Garden of Eden. God created us in His image, provided everything we needed including someone to be a loving companion and He walked in the Garden with us.

Genesis 2:25 NLT - 25 Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.

Before sin entered the world and destroyed our relationship, Adam and Eve were naked and felt no shame. This means they were exposed and vulnerable but had no fear of judgment or condemnation from God or one another.

What relationship in your life gave you the most confidence to be vulnerable without fear of rejection? Was it a parent, a spouse, a special friend? What causes us to doubt that God will accept us as we are?

God not only looks beyond our shame, but He also takes that shame off of us, and carries it Himself. God's love elevates us, because it demonstrates how precious we are to Him. That is how much God loves each of us. God showed His love to Mary; an insignificant girl from an insignificant town, who was honored to bear His Son.

Mary did nothing to earn God's favor. If you were going to choose the mother of Jesus what attributes would you look for? Why do you think God chose Mary?

2. God's Love opens New Possibilities

Luke 1:36-37 NLT - 36 What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. 37 For nothing is impossible with God."

We all know we have limitations. For Zechariah and Elizabeth, it was their age. Zacharia had given up hope of having a son because he was an old man, and his wife was beyond her child-bearing years. So the prospect of parenthood was impossible from man's perspective. But God had chosen them to be part of His plan of salvation. Elizabeth would give birth to John the Baptist who was both Jesus' cousin, and the herald of His coming. But this miraculous pregnancy pales in comparison to birth of Jesus, who was born to Mary, a virgin. God's love for the world and for each of these women was not hindered by what they thought was impossible, because with God nothing is impossible.

Even if you have suffered from a broken relationship, a shattered dream, or a devastating diagnosis, God can open up new possibilities for you. What is the impossible thing in your life that you have given up on? Let's ask God to open our eyes to the new possibilities He has for us.

Ephesians 3:18 NLT - 18 And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.

Even as God offers us new possibilities, He also extends them to others. Paul wanted the Ephesians to grasp how wide and long and high and deep God's love is. It extends far beyond us.

Think about God's love as it reaches out to the dark corners of the world. Nothing and nobody is beyond the reach of His love. What places or people can you imagine receiving a "new possibility" because of God's love? Do you know of anyone who received such a gift from God?

3. God's Love empowers us to respond

Ultimately Mary responded to the angel's announcement, "let it be done to me according to your word." To get to that point means conquering doubts and fears and unanswered questions.