

A bokeh light effect consisting of numerous out-of-focus circular lights in shades of gold, yellow, and white, scattered across the top of the dark blue background.

2 0 2 1

 **Family Ministries**

ADVENT  
SUPPLEMENT

A small gold star at the top of the text.  
*Love  
Came  
Down*

AT CHRISTMAS

STONEBRIAR COMMUNITY CHURCH



**SO NOW  
FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE ABIDE,  
THESE THREE: BUT THE  
GREATEST  
OF THESE IS  
LOVE.**

*1 Corinthians 13:13* **ESV**

# Welcome to the Season of Advent!

Let's celebrate with anticipation the arrival of the Christ Child this Christmas. Advent means the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event. It comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which translates to *arrival* or to *come*. How exciting to look forward and celebrate the birth of our Savior this month.

This year, our family Advent guide is written as a supplement to Sinclair B. Ferguson's devotional book, *Love Came Down at Christmas*. This book is a beautiful look at the love story of Christmas, and it digs into what love is and is not, according to 1 Corinthians 13. This is not your typical Scripture passage for Christmas devotionals, but it helps us reframe the Christmas story to fully see God's love for us. Love did come down at Christmas, and this season, your family is invited to focus on love more than ever before.

## How to Use This Guide



**To begin the Advent season, we've included two family activities you can do as you're decorating for Christmas.** These hands-on activities will help you and your family visualize the Christmas story and be reminded of God's love all throughout the season.



**To go with the devotionals in this family guide, we recommend setting up an Advent wreath or any arrangement of five candles.** Each week, a new candle is lit in anticipation of Christmas, and each candle represents a quality that Christ brought when He came to earth: Christ came to bring us Joy, Peace, Hope, and Love. The last candle, called the Christ Candle, is lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day to represent Jesus' first arrival.

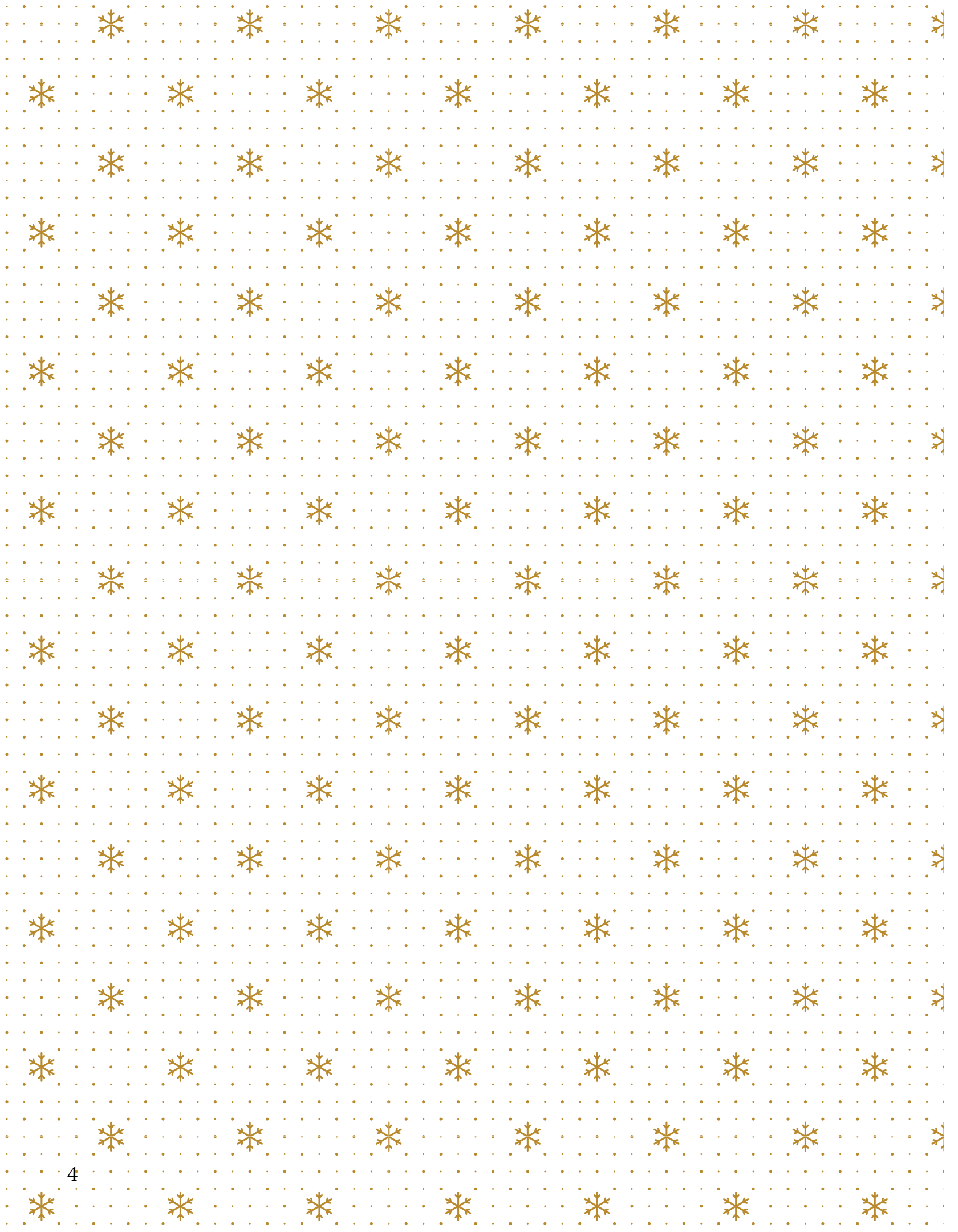


**This guide includes a family devotional for each of the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, as well as a devotional for Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.** On Sunday, November 28 (the start of the traditional Advent season), we encourage you to gather your family to read the first devotional and light the first candle. As you progress through the season, we encourage you to light the weekly candles on Sundays or whenever you and your family spend time together to read the devotional, then light the final candle on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.



**This guide also includes daily Scripture readings and family discussion questions for the four weeks of Advent.** You could read the passages and discuss them at the table over dinner, before bed time, or even on-the-go in the car. And if you want to go deeper into the love story of Christmas, take a few minutes to read the daily devotionals from the book *Love Came Down at Christmas*.



We encourage you to use this guide in whatever way is best for your family. You can do all of the things listed above, or pick and choose whichever will make the season most meaningful for you. There is no perfect approach to Advent and not just one way to celebrate the season. Our desire is simply that you and your family will take time in this busy season to focus on the beautiful story of God's love for all of us.








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# FAMILY ACTIVITY

# Loving the Love Story of Christmas

Most of us are visual learners. When we put out nativity sets each year, the physical stable and figurines can become a tangible representation Christmas. It can be just the thing that is needed to make the true story of Christmas more real to our families. In the haste to get the house “decorated” for Christmas, we can forget to pause and ponder the story of God’s love at Christmas.

We want to encourage you and your family to use this conversation guide as your family sets out your nativity set or other decorations this year. It is adapted from Emily Belle Freeman’s book *Celebrating a Christ Centered Christmas* (Children’s Edition; ©2017 Ensign Peak).

1. Think about Joseph on a dark night long ago, seeking shelter for his family knowing that Mary’s time was near. They needed a place to stay. The inn keeper made room for this little family in a stable.
  - **Read:** Luke 2:1–3
  - **Activity:** Place an empty stable somewhere in your home where you will see it throughout the Christmas season.
  - **Discuss:** How will you make room for Jesus in your life and home this Christmas season? What changes or new traditions do you want to create to make room for the real meaning of Christmas?
2. Joseph was responsible for caring for his wife, Mary. Imagine Joseph going about cleaning and preparing the stable. There was no magic about what he was doing—he was doing what needed to be done. He did his work quietly and without recognition.
  - **Read:** Luke 2:4–6
  - **Activity:** Place Joseph in your empty stable.
  - **Discuss:** How can you and your family show an act of secret Christmas kindness? What can you do for your neighbors, family members, or community that can be done without recognition?
3. On the night of Jesus’ birth, we read how Mary pondered all these things in her heart. We can picture holding her precious Son, marveling at His birth, perfect form, and how special He would be to the world.
  - **Read:** Luke 2:19
  - **Activity:** Place Mary in the stable next to Joseph.
  - **Discuss:** How has the birth of Jesus changed your life? What would life be like if He never came? Take a few minutes to talk about the ways God has worked in your family this year. Ponder these things in your heart.

4. On the night Jesus was born, the angels rejoiced, and we can imagine how the heavens overflowed with excitement and anticipation of things to come.
  - **Read:** Luke 2:8–10 and 13–14
  - **Activity:** Set an angel figurine in your stable.
  - **Discuss:** Listening to Christmas carols and looking at the lights on your Christmas tree are great ways to feel the anticipation of the season. How can you fill your heart and home with rejoicing like the angels did?
5. The shepherds were the first to witness the joyous celebration from the Angels, then immediately went to find the baby the Angels had sung about. After meeting the Christ child, they didn't just return to their sheep in the hills, they went throughout the community sharing all that they had seen.
  - **Read:** Luke 2:15–18
  - **Activity:** Place the shepherds and sheep near the awaiting stable.
  - **Discuss:** If you were one of those shepherds, would you have gone back to work in the hills or run through the community sharing what you had seen? How can you share the good news of Christ's birth with a friend this month?
6. The wise men set out on the journey of a lifetime, following a star in the sky and seeking the Child who was promised. They were on a mission to draw near to Jesus.
  - **Read:** Matthew 2:1–2 and 11–12
  - **Activity:** Place the wise men figurines in your stable.
  - **Discuss:** Think back on your family's most recent vacation or trip—what are some your favorite memories? Were you on a mission to discover something new you had never seen before? What could you do this month to discover Christ as a family?
7. The very first Christmas gift was a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. God gave us the most precious gift of all—His Son. He did this to show His love for us. It was the greatest gift of love ever given.
  - **Read:** Luke 2:11–12
  - **Activity:** Place the baby Jesus figure in your stable with the others.
  - **Discuss:** There is no gift we could give that would measure up or be equal to the gift of Jesus at Christmas. To whom could you show the love of Christ this season? What could you give that person that points to the true gift of Jesus?



# Learning the Language of Love

In this activity, you will need a package of blank Christmas ornaments, such as clear or colored ball-shaped ornaments. You will need at least 14 ornaments.

Plan a special family night where you will have dinner together, play Christmas music, and decorate your ornaments together as a family. On each ornament, write "Love Is . . ." followed by one of the qualities listed below.

As you and your family study about love this Christmas season, hang the ornaments on your family Christmas tree or a special tree you have set aside for this purpose.

## Love is . . .

Patient

Kind

Generous (the opposite of envious)

Meek (the opposite of boastful)

Humble (the opposite of prideful)

Respectful (the opposite of rude)

Self-Giving (the opposite of self-seeking)

Empathetic (the opposite of irritable)

Forgiving (the opposite of resentful)

Truth-Filled

Gracious

Faithful

Hopeful

Enduring



**WEEK 1:**  
**LOVE**  
**CAME**  
**HUMBLY**

## **Week 1 Devotional,**

### **Based on *Love Came Down at Christmas* Chapters 1–3**

Light the first candle and read the following Scripture passage:

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” 1 Corinthians 13:1–3 (ESV)

When we read the Christmas story as written in Luke 2, we see a baby being born into humble beginnings. When the time came for Jesus to be born, his mother Mary gave birth to Him, wrapped Him in cloths she had on hand, and placed Him in a manger—a feeding trough for animals. He did not arrive on earth like a king to great fanfare—Jesus humbled Himself and came as an infant.

Although Jesus was God’s Son with all His heavenly qualities, He was also human. He would be hungry, He would be thirsty, He would be tired, and He would be tempted just like us. But why would Jesus come to earth in human form if He didn’t have to?

“We see this humble love in its perfect form at the first Christmas. The incarnation means that through Him in the form of God . . . {Christ} made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man. That is what Love is.” *Love Came Down at Christmas*, page 23

But why would Jesus need to come to earth and live as a man among humans? We see the answer in the familiar verse John 3:16:

“**For God so loved the world** that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 (NIV)

Even with the best intentions, it is easy for us to lose sight that the meaning of Christmas is first and foremost about the love of God for each one of us. Christ’s coming shows us what love is. God sent His only Son, and Jesus gave up everything because He first loved us.

“We love because He first loved us.” 1 John 4:19 (NIV)

"The Creator became part of His creation" *Love Came Down at Christmas*, page 29

If Jesus could enter the world in such a humble manner, we should use that as our example to live humble lives. We could live our lives making grand gestures, giving generously with our time and abilities, but if we do it all without humility and a Christ-like heart, we are nothing more than a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal—we have nothing, and we have gained nothing. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13, encourages us to rethink the use of our gifts for God's purposes, so that others might see Christ's loving nature through us.







## Blessing & Prayer

(read aloud with your family):

"Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever." Psalm 136:1 (NIV)

As we enter this first week of Advent, may we remember that God's love for us is loyal, true, and unchanging. May we give thanks because He loved us before we knew Him, and His love lasts forever. Amen.



# Week 1 Daily Scripture Readings & Family Discussion Questions

**Monday** Read Matthew 1:21

Questions: Why was Jesus born? How does His coming show God's love for us?

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**Tuesday** Read Luke 2:1–6

Questions: Why did Jesus come to earth in such a humble beginning? Why did He have to take on the form of a human? How can you make room for Jesus this Christmas season?

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**Wednesday** Read Philippians 2:5–8

Questions: What does it mean to be humble? What does this passage describe when it says, "He humbled Himself to the point of even death?"

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**Thursday** Read Jeremiah 23:5–6

Questions: What is the promise God made in this passage? What does it mean for God's people to keep this promise?

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**Friday** Read Exodus 34:6–7a

Questions: Is there a limit to God's love for us? What does the word *abounding* mean? As followers of Christ, why is that word important to us?

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**Saturday** Read Psalm 139

Questions: What does this Psalm teach us about God's love for us and how He made us? How did God uniquely make you for loving Him?



**WEEK 2:**  
**LOVE**  
**CAME TO**  
**SHOW US**  
**LOVE**

## **Week 2 Devotional,**

### **Based on *Love Came Down at Christmas* Chapters 4–12**

Light the second candle and read the following Scripture:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.” 1 Corinthians 13:4–6 (NIV)

Do a simple internet search of 1 Corinthians 13 and Christmas, and you will find about 100 versions of a Christmas poem by Sharon Jaynes, *Celebrating a Christ-Centered Christmas*. It is a perfect modern-day depiction of how we can lose sight of the love of Christ each Christmas season. Here is an example:

“Love stops the cooking to hug the child. Love sets aside the decorating to kiss the husband. Love is kind, though harried and tired. Love doesn’t envy another’s home that has coordinated Christmas china and table linens.” Sharon Jaynes

In the hustle of the season leading up to Christmas—all the decorating, attending Christmas programs and parties, baking perfect Christmas cookies and cakes, and seeking the perfect gift for each person on our list—we can lose sight of what we are celebrating. In truth, in our hurry and haste, we can lack patience, show little kindness, and become spiteful of those who do not recognize our sacrifice to make this the “most perfect Christmas ever.”

On the holy night of Jesus’ birth, we can look to Joseph for an example of love at Christmas. Joseph’s heartfelt desire was to make sure everything was ready for the miracle that was about to take place. He and Mary were tired from their journey. They were strangers in a city far from home. They had no family anxiously awaiting their arrival for a Christmas celebration. But we can imagine that Joseph, even though he was tired, did his best to make the humble dark stable as comfortable as possible for Mary. On this night, Joseph acted with kindness. He reminds us of the value of Christmas kindness given with sacrifice and love.

While Joseph may be an early example of love, Jesus’ birth and life were the ultimate examples of God’s love for us. Jesus was kind to the poor and needy, and He was kind to the rich and successful. He was patient with the crowds that followed Him, as well as His disciples, who seemed slow to learn the lessons He desired them to learn. Throughout the gospels, we see where Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, and showed compassion to the outcasts of society. He was consistent in reminding people that by their faith they are forgiven of their sin and they are loved.

"Love does not calculate, make a tally of or reckon up grudge . . . Instead, His generous love led to the sacrifice that covers all our sins and has the power to dissolve our resentment."  
*Love Came Down at Christmas*, page 8

Our communities, our schools, our homes, our lives, and our families would be happier and we would shine like bright stars in a dark world if we used the example of love modeled in the story of Jesus from the very beginning.

"They will know we are Christians by our love." Peter Scholtes, inspired by John 13:35

## **Blessing & Prayer**

(read aloud with your family):

"Now may the God of endurance and comfort give you unity with one another in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Receive one another, then, just as Christ also received you, to God's glory."

Romans 15:5–7 (NET)

Lord, as we enter this second week of Advent, may we show Your love in all we do, to everyone we interact with and all we encounter, both expected and unexpected. May we take time to slow the pace and encourage others to see Your pure example of love. Amen.



## Week 2 Daily Scripture Readings & Family Discussion Questions

**Monday** Read Matthew 1:18–24

**Questions:** Imagine being Joseph and having a visit from an angel. How did Joseph show Mary kindness before Jesus' birth? If you had been there the night Jesus was born, what would you have done to help get the stable ready?

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**Tuesday** Read Matthew 25:34–40

**Questions:** What clues can you take from the passage to show kindness to those around you? What acts of kindness can your family show this Christmas season?

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**Wednesday** Read 1 John 4:9–17

**Questions:** How do we see God's love in this passage? How do we live in God's love? How can we show God's love based on this passage?

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**Thursday** Read Matthew 12:15–21

**Questions:** How would you describe the manners of Jesus? As the chosen servant of God, what did Jesus show us about Love?

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**Friday** Read Isaiah 42:1–4

**Questions:** Do you see the prophecy of Jesus in these verses compared to yesterday's reading in Matthew? Was Jesus fulfilling the prophecy to be a gentle Redeemer?

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**Saturday** Read Psalm 103

**Questions:** Based on all you know about David, what does this Psalm tell us about God's love for us?



**WEEK 3:**  
**LOVE**  
**CAME TO**  
**KNOW &**  
**BE KNOWN**

## **Week 3 Devotional,**

### **Based on *Love Came Down at Christmas* Chapters 13–17**

Light the third candle and read the following passage:

“Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” 1 Corinthians 13:6–7 (NIV)

When you are reading the nativity story in your Bible, do you find the cast of shepherds to be an odd choice to first hear the Good News of Jesus’ birth? Why would angels appear to shepherds first? Though sheep herding was one of the most ancient professions, it was not a particularly desirable one. It was a dirty job. Sheep are not independent animals and are completely dependent on their shepherd for their food, health, and safety. Shepherds were seen as outsiders: looked down upon, resented, made fun of, and despised by the rest of the community.

Shepherding is a prominent theme in Scripture. In fact, sheep are mentioned more than 500 times in the Bible, more than any other animal. The Bible describes close relationships between shepherds and their flocks. The sheep recognize the voice of the shepherd. They follow him. The shepherd protects his flock and would give his life for them. Jesus said:

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” John 10:27 (NIV)

We are very much like the sheep, and Jesus is our Shepherd. We learn to trust our Heavenly Father and know the truth of His Son’s birth and life.

“The one who was cradled in the manger is the Truth. And when we rejoice with the truth then we begin to rejoice in everything that is true.” *Love Came Down at Christmas*, page 89

What does God promise to you this Christmas? He promises to forgive you of all your sins when you accept Him as your Savior. He promises to hear you when you call. He promises to walk beside you when life gets tough. He promises you life after death with Him in Heaven. But how can you know you can trust Him? Because He kept the greatest promise of all: He went from His humble beginnings in a feeding trough in a barn, to death on the cross, and ultimately left behind an empty tomb. Jesus reminds us, His sheep, that He is the Good Shepherd.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep . . . The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again.” John 10:14–15, 17 (NIV)

God’s love is the foundation for our faith, but also our hope.

"[Jesus on the cross] came under the crushing weight of God's wrath against us, and it left Him without any sense of love. He felt there was no room for Him on earth or in Heaven. But His love endured ALL things. Rather than call on twelve legions of angels to deliver Him, His arms remained outstretched like the cosmic weightlifter He was, bearing the sins of the world . . . At that moment His love for His Father was tested to the limit, and it endured." *Love Came Down at Christmas*, pages 112–113

The shepherds are a good human illustration of this type of endurance. They stayed loyal to their flock in good weather and bad, in times of extreme danger and great frustrations. To know the story of Jesus' humanity and endurance is to better understand His love for us at Christmas.



## **Blessing & Prayer**



(read aloud with your family):

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God." 1 John 1:4 (ESV)



Jesus, You are the Good Shepherd, and You know us. We hunger to learn more of You and Your love for us. That You kept the greatest promise of all gives us assurance to trust in You, hope in You, and persevere with You by our side. Amen.



## Week 3 Daily Scripture Readings & Family Discussion Questions

**Monday** Read Luke 2:8–20

**Questions:** Why are shepherds important to the Christmas story? Do you think you would have been scared? Would you have followed the angels' instructions to find the baby?

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**Tuesday** Read 1 Peter 4:7–11

**Questions:** Why do people like to hear gossip about the failures of other people? If you love another person, how do you show it when you hear gossip?

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**Wednesday** Read Jeremiah 29:11–14b

**Questions:** What is God's promise in this passage? How do Christians know we can trust God to keep His promises?

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**Thursday** Read Galatians 5:22–26

**Questions:** What is the fruit of the Spirit? How does this fruit relate to the qualities of love written in 1 Corinthians 13?

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**Friday** Read Galatians 5:13–15

**Questions:** How do you serve God in love? How can you show love to your neighbors this Christmas season?

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**Saturday** Read Psalm 63

**Questions:** How does David describe love in this chapter? In what situation do you desire to cling to God's love?



**WEEK 4:**  
**LOVE**  
**CAME TO**  
**BE FACE-TO-FACE**

## Week 4 Devotional,

### Based on *Love Came Down at Christmas* Chapters 18–22

Light the fourth candle and read the following passage:

“Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now, we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” 1 Corinthians 13:8–12 (NIV)

At Christmas time, we look forward to attending Christmas concerts, dance recitals, and school programs, all offering our family and friends a chance to show off their talents. While many are truly talented and even gifted in the arts being performed in these Christmas pageants, they are the exception rather than the rule. We can giggle at the squeaky clarinet, or the missed step of the little ballerina, or even the three-year-old pulling her dress over her head as she sings *Away in a Manger* off-key. In this passage of Scripture, Paul writes a cautionary tale of talent and gifts being fleeting, explaining how we can put so much stock in our ability and often forget its original purpose.

“Gifts are secondary; love is primary. Gifts are tools. What matters is how a person employs them . . . One day all of these gifts—speaking in tongues, prophesying, having special knowledge—will come to an end. Love, in contrast, won’t.” *Love Came Down at Christmas*, page 116

If the things we consider to be our gifts are fleeting, and love is the only thing that lasts, how are we to experience and show love this Christmas season? Paul shared similar thoughts through a prayer in Ephesians 3:

“. . . And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” Ephesians 3:17b–19 (NIV)

Perfect love can only be measured by a standard of Christ’s love for us, not our love for Him. His love is:

- Greater than any love by any person we know.
- Only measured by how He loves us, not our love for Him.
- Shown by what He does for us, not what we are willing to do for Him.
- A love that lasts forever.

Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection are an expression of His perfect love for all His creation. We do not deserve His love, and yet as believers we are face-to-face with the perfect sacrifice of His perfect love.

## Blessing & Prayer

(read aloud with your family):

"Sow righteousness for yourselves, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until He comes and showers His righteousness on you." Hosea 10:12 (NIV)

Father, Your unfailing love sustains us in seasons of trial and triumph. May we seek You in all we do this Christmas season, and may we be reminded of Your perfect gift—that You walked this earth without sin and made the ultimate sacrifice on the cross for us. May we see the love that came down this Christmas. Amen.



## Week 4 Daily Scripture Readings & Family Discussion Questions

**Monday** Read Matthew 5:44–47

**Questions:** How do you love the unlovable? Who are the tax collectors in your life who are hard to love, and how can you show them Christ's love this holiday season?

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**Tuesday** Read John 1:1–5, 14

**Questions:** Imagine what it would have been like to be a disciple of Jesus—to walk with Him daily, to watch Him perform miracles, to know Him and see Him, and yet not understand Him?

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**Wednesday** Read John 13:2–17

**Questions:** Why did the disciples not understand how Jesus humbled Himself to wash their feet? What is He trying to teach them about His love for them?

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**Thursday** Read Romans 5:1–5

**Questions:** When we cannot see, touch, or feel Christ in our lives, it can be hard to understand His love for us. How have you seen or experienced the love of Christ through the Holy Spirit this year?

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**Friday** Read 1 John 3:16–19

**Questions:** How will people in our schools, community, and other activities know we are Christians? How can we show the love of Christ to our everyday acquaintances?

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**Saturday** Read Psalm 115

**Questions:** Why does David compare the man-made idols to the qualities of God in Heaven? David reminds us that the highest of heavens belong to God as well as the earth under our feet, now and forever.



CHRISTMAS EVE  
OR  
CHRISTMAS DAY:

LOVE CAME  
DOWN TO  
DIE FOR US

# Christmas Eve or Christmas Day Devotional

## Based on *Love Came Down at Christmas* Chapter 23–24

Light the fifth candle, and read the following passage:

“And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

1 Corinthians 13:13 (NIV)

“This is what we should never forget on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day. The Son of God was born for us in order to die for us. When we see that, then we have begun to understand Love.” *Love Came Down at Christmas*, page 155

“Why is love important to Christianity?”

Love is important to Christianity because love defines it. God is love, and Christ Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross was the greatest expression of that love. We are commanded to love others as we have been loved, specifically to forgive as we have been forgiven out of the Father’s great love for us.

Far beyond a feeling, biblical love defines who and Whose we are. The source of Christian love is Christ Himself, love that dwells in us because of the Holy Spirit living in us.

Love isn’t just important to Christianity. Love is Christianity. To love is to follow Christ.”

—Meg Bucher, *7 Powerful Psalms That Teach Us About Love*

Jesus would often ask people, “What do you want?” What a great question. Often, we have not slowed down enough to ponder what we are after. As a result, we can quite easily become confused and find ourselves in a great rush toward something that is attractive but a thing we actually do not want.

Another important question is, “What does God want?” The Christian life only works when these two answers are the same. If I am after something different from what God wants for me, I’ll be wandering off in the weeds of life or, as commonly happens, I could find myself in direct opposition to God. This is a desperately sad state, so let’s get this figured out properly.

The thing God wants most from me and you and all of us is this: God wants us all to be in an intimate relationship with Him. This is a truly amazing epiphany (slap yourself on the forehead if you need to). Sin caused a great separation in this relationship, but the singular purpose of Christianity is to get that chasm bridged, to get us back in God’s arms the way Adam and Eve were before the Fall.

The pivot point of all of human history, therefore, is Jesus. Specifically, His coming to be with us and then dying for us. This is wonderfully encapsulated in the name given to Jesus, “Immanuel” which means “God with us.” What would provoke an omnipotent God to leave Heaven and be “with us”? Why would Jesus come down and live amongst a bunch of human rabble (us) to teach us how to live and then die for us so we would not have to? Nothing explains it other than love. A very great kind of love.

Scripture describes God’s love for us in every possible way: A sacrificial, longing, and parental kind of love. A groom’s love for his bride kind of love. A father’s desperate love for a rebellious son kind of love. A creator for his beloved creation kind of love. This love is so great, we will spend eternity as believers plumbing the depths of it. I think we will forever be slapping our foreheads from yet another new level of understanding and amazement of God’s love for us. This is the story of how and why love came down. It was not just to make things slightly better for us or to help us avoid the discomfort of a broken world. This kind of love changes everything—forever.

We know now what God wants. Christmas Eve is a great day to hear Jesus ask us again, “What do you want?” If it is anything other than intimacy with God, life will end up being a confusing and constant disappointment no matter how “well” you are doing. If, on the other hand, you were to choose to want what God wants for you—intimacy with God—the entire eternal, spiritual realm becomes your ally in your pursuit to live with and for and in the arms of our infinitely loving God. This is, by the way, what we were created for. This is Christianity and what Christmas is about. It’s why Jesus is called Immanuel. It is why God’s Love Came Down at Christmas (slap your forehead). Merry Christmas.




—Pastor Dave Carl



## Blessing



May God draw you toward Himself with good things and bad things. May you be responsive to His call to you. May you have the courage to follow His leading and accept and enjoy His outrageous love.



# Merry Christmas

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