

This week of Advent we look forward to the coming Christ and the love he brings with him. This time of year, people often go the extra mile to extend love to the people around them, even strangers. Unless that stranger happens to want the last Star Wars Lego set on Christmas Eve...or they take too long ordering their peppermint mocha. But generally people smile more, hold doors open, snap less. The anticipation of Christmas puts love in the air. Love is even expressed in the popular stories we tell around Christmas. The story "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry tells of a young couple who only had two possessions between them: Della's long, beautiful hair and Jim's heirloom watch. Too poor to buy each other gifts, Della, unknown to Jim, sold her beautiful hair to buy her husband a chain for his watch, and Jim sold his watch to buy ornate combs for his wife's hair. Upon their realization, the reader discovers a picturesque model of true, sacrificial love. And true, sacrificial love did come at Christmas. Christ loved everyone perfectly, unconditionally, impartially, and constantly. He came to establish God's kingdom on earth and he gave his life for our justification. Jesus himself tells us in Scripture that this is the greatest love. He says, "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends." And someday when Jesus comes again, love will fill in the cracks where evil used to reign, and relationships will be unhindered by selfishness. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians that faith, hope and love remain, but the greatest of these is love. When Christ returns, faith and hope will be realized, but love will continue for the remainder of eternity. Come, Lord Jesus, embodiment of love.

Sunday:

Prayer: Pray this prayer throughout the day. Every time you sit down at a meal or sit at a red light, breathe this prayer and allow God to use you as an instrument of his love on earth. This week, pray this before you go to bed and when you wake up. Let love be the way you live your life. "Father, fill me with your love, and use me to bring your love to others."

Readings: • Zephaniah 3:14-20 • Isaiah 12:2-6 • Philippians 4:4-7 • Luke 3:7-18

Discussion Question: Describe love in your own words. How does Christ love in the way you described?

Monday:

Prayer: "Father, fill me with your love, and use me to bring your love to others."

Scripture Readings: • Psalms 41, 44, 52 • Zechariah 1:7-17 • Matthew 24:15-31 • Revelation 3:7-13

Discussion Question: How would the world be different if Christ hadn't come to bring love?

Tuesday:

Prayer: "Father, fill me with your love, and use me to bring your love to others."

Scripture Readings: • Psalms 45, 47, 48 • Zechariah 2:1-13 • Matthew 24:32-44 • Revelation 3:14-22

Discussion Question: What is the way you feel the most loved? How does God love you that way?

Wednesday:

Prayer: "Father, fill me with your love, and use me to bring your love to others."

Scripture Readings: • Psalms 49, 53, 119:49-72 • Zechariah 3:1-10 • Matthew 24:45-51 • Revelation 4:1-8

Discussion Question: How do you show love?

Thursday:

Prayer: "Father, fill me with your love, and use me to bring your love to others."

Scripture Readings: • Psalms 50, 59, 60 • Zechariah 4:1-14 • Matthew 25:1-13 • Revelation 4:9-5:5

Discussion Question: Who is a person or group of people that is difficult for you to love? How can you work on loving them better?

Friday:

Prayer: "Father, fill me with your love, and use me to bring your love to others."

Scripture Readings: • Psalms 40, 51, 54 • Zechariah 7:8-8:8 • Matthew 25:14-30 • Revelation 5:6-14

Discussion Question: Where do you see the love of God in your life?

Saturday:

Prayer: "Father, fill me with your love, and use me to bring your love to others."

Scripture Readings: • Psalms 55, 138, 139 • Zechariah 8:9-17 • Matthew 25:31-46 • Revelation 6:1-17

Discussion Question: How can you abundantly spread the love of Christ this next year?

Weekly Application: Jesus once said to his disciples, "By this they will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Love is certainly an important part of the Advent season, but it is an imperative part of the life of a Christ-follower. Sometime this week, make Christmas cookies and take them to your neighbors. Let them know you're thinking about them and that you care for them! If you have a relationship with any of your neighbors and you know they don't have a church home, invite them to come with you to a Christmas weekend service.

Children's Corner: Love = Choosing to serve others and value them above myself! Make an ornament in the shape of a heart! It can be made out of anything you can think of—construction paper, newspaper, spaghetti noodles, your favorite pair of red socks (just kidding, please don't cut up your socks!). Then put it close to the top of the tree to remind you of the love of Jesus. How does Jesus love you? How can you love other people?