



*Prepare Him Room*  
*Spiritual Practices for Advent*

**Week Four: Love**  
December 20th-26th, 2020



# LOVE

So the Word became human and made his home among us.  
He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness.  
And we have seen his glory,  
the glory of the Father's one and only Son.  
-John 1:14

Love is a powerful thing. The way we have experienced love and the way we understand it are foundational to the way we think, live, and interact with other people every single day.

Our obsession with love has been showing up in pop culture throughout history. We sing songs about it, we write books and poems about it, and we paint canvases in attempt to depict it. Love has such a strong impact on us that at times we are willing to rearrange our entire lives to chase after it.

And yet, at the same time, love is a terribly complicated thing. As we grow up in this broken world, we all develop skewed ideas about what love is, whether or not we can trust it, and who deserves it.

Most of us are cautious - even stingy - with our love. We offer it only to people who love us in return, or who have something to offer us in exchange. When we are wronged or offended, we quickly retract our love and withhold it until circumstances change and we are able to make amends.

Many of us struggle to receive love ourselves. We worry that we aren't worthy of it, and we spend all kinds of time and energy trying to earn it or prove that we deserve it.

Scripture tells us that "God is love (1 John 4:8)." Pause for a moment to reflect on the weight of that statement. God *is* love. It doesn't just say that God is *loving*, although he certainly is. This isn't just one quality amongst many that describe what God is like. John tells us that God, in his very essence, *is* love.

So when Jesus came into the world, fully God and fully human at the exact same time, He revealed once and for all what love really is - what it looks like when it's wrapped up in flesh, living and breathing and walking amongst us.

Not only did he provide us with the perfect example of love, He died on the cross and rose again so that we could be reconciled with God and live in His perfect love forever.

God loves **you**. Perfectly. Unconditionally. Exactly as you are. Exactly where you are. Each and every minute of each and every day, you "live and move and have your being" in the presence of His love.

It's amazing what a difference love can make in our lives. Love can give us hope in even the darkest situations. It can give us courage in the face of our fears. It can fill us with a deep sense of peace in the midst of unbelievable chaos. It can transform us from the inside out and help us to see the world in a whole new way.

On Christmas, we celebrate the world-changing reality that love came for us in Jesus Christ. He is with us now. And one day He will come again to renew and restore all things to the way they should be.

May you experience a deep sense of His perfect love for you as you prepare to celebrate Christmas this week.

# Sunday, December 20th

## READ AND MEDITATE

As human beings, we have a difficult time wrapping our heads around God's love. The love that we experience in our world is so fickle. It's easy for us to assume that God's love for us is wearing thin when we fail (again), when we go through hard times, or when we are dealing with loneliness and rejection.

But Scripture tells us, again and again and in so many ways, that God's love for us is unconditional. There is nothing we can do that will make God love us any more than He already does, and there is nothing we can do that could make God love us any less. No challenges we may face or loneliness we may feel reflect God's absence or disapproval - not at all.

Jesus revealed God's incredible love for us by coming to rescue us when we were at our worst, by going to the cross and defeating the power of sin and evil, and by sending the Spirit to comfort us, guide us, and be with us in every circumstance.

***Spend some time meditating on this passage from Romans 8:31-39. Use your imagination. Make it personal - try inserting your name where the passage says "us". What feelings does this passage evoke in you? Consider writing down a phrase from the passage and meditating on it throughout the day.***

## **Meditative Reading: Romans 8:31-39**

<sup>31</sup> What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?

<sup>32</sup> Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?

<sup>33</sup> Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. <sup>34</sup> Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.

<sup>35</sup> Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? <sup>36</sup> (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") <sup>37</sup> No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

<sup>38</sup> And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. <sup>39</sup> No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## PRAY

Take a moment to rest in God's presence. Is there anything that has been getting in the way of your ability to receive God's love? Allow yourself to be reminded of the truth that Paul declares in this passage - no matter what it is, nothing can separate us from the love of God. We just need to turn to him and open ourselves up to receive it. Ask God to flood your heart with His love and to empower you to extend it to others today.

# Monday, December 21st

## READ AND RECEIVE

Read the following verse over several times slowly. Spend some time reflecting on each of the characteristics that Paul uses to describe love.

If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud <sup>5</sup>or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. <sup>6</sup>It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. <sup>7</sup>Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

**-1 Corinthians 13:1-7**

## REFLECT AND JOURNAL

*Prayerfully reflect on the following questions. Consider writing your responses to one or more of these questions in a journal.*

Paul essentially says that if we don't have love, nothing we do or say, regardless of how spiritual or important, has any value. Do you believe this is true? Why?

What happens when we focus on doing great things, but don't do them in a way that is motivated by and characterized by love?

Reflect on the words Paul uses to describe love. How does Jesus embody each of these characteristics?

Substitute your name for the word "love" and read this passage. Which of the words/phrases that Paul uses to describe love do you find the most difficult to live out? Which comes the most naturally for you?

Who in your life has provided you with the best example of loving others well? What was it about them that made them so loving?

What difference does God's love make in your life? How does your ability to receive God's love relate to your ability to extend it to others?

## PRAY

Spend a few moments reflecting on God's love, opening yourself up to receive it, and expressing your love back to God. Ask God to show you how you can let love define your words and actions today.

# Tuesday, December 22nd

## READ AND REFLECT

*Read through the following passage slowly and prayerfully. Allow yourself to be reminded of the simplicity of the kind of life Jesus calls us to - a life that is characterized by love.*

<sup>25</sup> One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: "Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?"

<sup>26</sup> Jesus replied, "What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?"

<sup>27</sup> The man answered, "'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

<sup>28</sup> "Right!" Jesus told him. "Do this and you will live!"

**-Luke 10:25-28**

## PALMS DOWN/PALMS UP

Palms Down/Palms Up is a posture prayer that can help us surrender our concerns and challenges to God, and open us up to receive the blessings that He wants to pour into our lives.

Take a few moments right now to go through this prayer twice, following the prompts below. The first time through the prayer, you will focus on receiving God's love for yourself. The second time through the prayer, you will focus on extending it to others. Continue to practice this prayer throughout the day.

### **Turn your palms down, and release anything that is getting in the way of receiving God's love**

Start by resting your hands on your knees and turning your palms down as a symbol of releasing your cares to God. What has been getting in the way of your ability to receive God's love? Have you been dealing with guilt or a sense of inadequacy? Have you been busy or distracted? Take a few moments to hold your hands in this posture, and surrender this area of your life to God.

### **Turn your palms up, and receive God's love**

Now turn your palms upwards and posture your heart to receive from God. Ask God to open your heart to receive his love. Spend a few moments resting in His love and allowing your heart to connect with it.

### **Turn your palms down, and release any bitterness or resentment towards others**

Are you dealing with any bitterness, resentment, or negative feelings towards another person? Turn your hands down once again and surrender these negative feelings over to God. Let him work in your heart in this area.

### **Turn your palms up, and receive God's love for others**

Now turn your hands up and ask God to fill you with love for this person. Ask him to help you sense His love for them. Then, ask God to fill you with love for everyone you encounter as you carry on with the rest of your day.

# Wednesday, December 23rd

## LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio Divina is an approach to reading the Bible that opens us up to hear God speak to us in the present moment. Central to the practice of Lectio Divina is the belief that the Holy Spirit actively uses the Scriptures to lead us and change us. Lectio Divina places us in a position to be transformed by the Scriptures as we immerse ourselves in them and surrender to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

**Throughout the gospels, we read many stories of people encountering Jesus and being transformed by His love. Luke tells us about a woman who was outcast within her community, but was loved by Jesus. Her radical display of affection towards Jesus shows us just how great of an impact His love had on her.**

**Try practicing Lectio Divina using this passage. On the following page, you will find the steps that will walk you through Lectio Divina.**

## PASSAGE - LUKE 7:36-50

<sup>36</sup> One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat. <sup>37</sup> When a certain immoral woman from that city heard he was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. <sup>38</sup> Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them.

<sup>39</sup> When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!"

<sup>40</sup> Then Jesus answered his thoughts. "Simon," he said to the Pharisee, "I have something to say to you." "Go ahead, Teacher," Simon replied.

<sup>41</sup> Then Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people—500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. <sup>42</sup> But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?"

<sup>43</sup> Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt."

"That's right," Jesus said. <sup>44</sup> Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. <sup>45</sup> You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. <sup>46</sup> You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume.

<sup>47</sup> "I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." <sup>48</sup> Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven."

<sup>49</sup> The men at the table said among themselves, "Who is this man, that he goes around forgiving sins?"

<sup>50</sup> And Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

## LECTIO DIVINA - STEPS

### **1) Prepare: Centre yourself in God's presence**

Start by taking a few minutes to breathe and quiet yourself in God's loving presence. Express your willingness to hear from God and your desire to be led by the Spirit.

### **2) Read: Listen for the word or phrase that God lifts to your attention**

Read the passage all the way through slowly. Savour the words and let them sink into your heart. As you read, listen for a word or phrase that stands out and seems to resonate with your heart. Don't let yourself feel pressured or worried about whether or not God will speak to you. Lean into the Holy Spirit and rest in the knowledge that God is already with you. Take a moment to sit with the words that have been drawn to your attention.

### **3) Reflect: How does this word connect with my life?**

Read the passage through a second time. As you do, reflect on how this word or phrase relates to what is going on in your life at the present moment. How is God revealing himself to you through these words?

### **4) Respond: What is my response to God?**

Read the passage through a third time. Following this reading, take a few moments to pray to God in response to this encounter. Express your feelings about what you have read. Pay attention for any sense that God is calling you to step out in obedience in some way based on what you have heard. This may be a good time to journal your prayers.

### **5) Resolve: Live it out!**

As you continue on with the rest of your activities for the day, carry this word with you. Allow the Holy Spirit to bring it to your attention throughout the day. Live it out and let the Holy Spirit lead you into a deeper understanding of its meaning as it relates to your everyday life.

*This structure follows the approach to Lectio Divina laid out in an article called "Lectio Divina: Engaging the Scriptures for Spiritual Transformation" by Ruth Haley Barton. Read the full article here: [transformingcenter.org/2019/07/lectio-divina-engaging-the-scriptures-for-spiritual-transformation-2](https://transformingcenter.org/2019/07/lectio-divina-engaging-the-scriptures-for-spiritual-transformation-2)*

# Thursday, December 24th

## READ AND RECEIVE

**Read through the following verses slowly. Allow yourself to be reminded of God's perfect love, which expels all fear!**

<sup>16</sup> We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. <sup>17</sup> And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.

<sup>18</sup> Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. <sup>19</sup> We love each other because he loved us first.

**-1 John 4:16-19**

## BREATH PRAYER

Breath prayer is an ancient prayer practice that can help us become mindful and attentive to God's presence and provision in every moment of our day. Breath prayer is simple form of prayer, in which our expressions of worship, declarations of truth, and petitions to the Father, are expressed rhythmically as we inhale and exhale.

Look over the following breath prayers and find one that resonates with you. Inhale deeply as you pray the first half of your breath prayer, and then exhale slowly as you pray the second part of the breath prayer.

***Calm your heart and mind and spend a few minutes breathing through the breath prayer. Allow your entire being to be re-centered in God's loving presence. Then, carry the prayer with you throughout your day.***

**We know how much God loves us,  
and we have put our trust in his love.**

-1 John 4:16

**But I trust in your unfailing love.  
I will rejoice because you have rescued me.**

-Psalm 13:5

**Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me  
all the days of my life.**

-Psalm 23:6

**For the mountains may move and the hills disappear,  
but even then my faithful love for you will remain.**

-Isaiah 54:10

**See how very much our Father loves us,  
for he calls us his children.**

-1 John 3:1



# Friday, December 25th

Merry Christmas!!!

*May you experience God's presence in a special way today as you celebrate the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ!*

## READ AND REFLECT

**Read through the following passage a few times slowly. Allow yourself to be reminded of the extravagance of God's love. Today we celebrate this powerful truth - that God sent Jesus to rescue us from the power of sin and evil, and to bring us salvation - new life that starts now and extends into eternity!**

<sup>16</sup> "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him..

**-John 3:16**

## EXPERIENCE LOVE: PRAY

Most of us know cognitively that God loves us. And yet, often we struggle to really feel His love and let it shape the way we live each and every day. What is getting in the way of your ability to fully receive God's love and live with an awareness of that love? Whatever the barrier may be, spend a few moments in prayer about it. Then, ask God to fill you with a renewed sense of His love.

## SPREAD LOVE: PRAY

Now spend a few moments praying for others to experience God's love.

You can pray using your own words, or pray using a simple blessing like this one:

***"May their hearts overflow with your love."***

**Pray love over somebody you care deeply about and have a close relationship with.**

**Pray love over somebody you look up to.**

**Pray love over the last person you spoke to that was struggling in some way.**

**Pray love over somebody you don't know very well - the first person who comes to mind.**

**Pray love over somebody you find difficult to love.**

**Pray love over our church family.**

**Pray love over our community.**

## LIVE LOVE: ACT

Christmas is challenging in different ways for everyone this year. How can you brighten somebody's day by extending love to them in a special way? Ask God how he is inviting you to surprise somebody with his love today - maybe through an encouraging word, some extra quality time, or by dropping off a surprise on somebody's doorstep. Then - go do it!

# Saturday, December 26th

## READ AND REFLECT

**Read through Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church slowly. Let your heart connect with the words. Imagine these words being prayed over you.**

<sup>14</sup> When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father,<sup>15</sup> the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. <sup>16</sup> I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. <sup>17</sup> Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

**-Ephesians 3:14-19**

## THE EXAMEN

The Examen is spiritual practice that helps us become more aware of and engaged in God's activity in our lives – both in the big things and the small things. The prayer involves reflecting back on everything that happened over the course of the day, paying special attention to how God was moving and how you were responding. As we open ourselves up to the Spirit in this reflective practice, God will be able to speak to us about the gifts he has given us, the way we have been responding to Him and to others, and how He may be calling us to move forward.

While the Examen is often done at the end of each day, today we will use this practice to reflect back over the past week. We will pay attention to the ways we experienced God's love, the ways we allowed Him to use us to spread love to others, and how He is calling us to move forward in love as we look ahead to a new week.

## PRACTICE THE EXAMEN

**1) Ask the Holy Spirit to lead this time of prayer.** Start by centering yourself in God's loving presence. Take a minute to remind yourself that God is all around you, He is closer than the air that is filling your lungs. Try sitting up straight with your feet flat on the floor and your palms up. Take some deep breaths. Breathe in God's hope. His peace. His joy. His love. Breathe out everything that is not of him – your anxieties, your fears, your anger.

**2) Give thanks.** Take a few moments to express your gratitude for the gifts that he has given you over the course of the week – both big and small. Don't rush to create the longest list that you can come up with. Instead, take the time to really savour these blessings.

**3) Reflect: Did I receive and experience God's love this week?** Take a few moments to reflect back on your week, walking through the significant experiences of each day. Did you go through your week with a deep sense and awareness of God's love for you? What gets in the way of accepting that love? How did God's love impact the way you felt and thought about yourself? How did it impact the way you thought about taking risks?

**4) Reflect: Did I love others well this week?** Think about the interactions you had with others. Did love characterize the way you treated other people? Use 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 as a guide for determining whether your interactions with others were loving. Were there any opportunities to love others well that you missed? What interactions were characterized by love?

**5) Choose a feeling or situation from your reflection to pray through.** Where in your life do you need to experience God's transforming love the most? How could you better reflect his love to the people you interacted with this week? Speak to God about your thoughts and feelings. Then open yourself up to listening to what he might have to say.

**6) Look ahead to tomorrow.** Scripture tells us that God's mercies are new every morning. What will it look like to experience and spread love tomorrow? Receive God's grace and ask the Spirit to empower you as you look forward to the week ahead.