

# LOOKING FORWARD TO LOVE

Leader pages on pp. 116-119

**THE POINT:**  
WE CAN KNOW THE LOVE OF GOD BECAUSE OF JESUS'S SACRIFICE.

## JOHN 1:14-18; 3:14-18

<sup>1:14</sup> The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

<sup>15</sup> (John testified concerning him and exclaimed, "This was the one of whom I said, 'The one coming after me ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.' ")

.....  
<sup>16</sup> Indeed, we have all received grace upon grace from his fullness,  
<sup>17</sup> for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

<sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father's side —he has revealed him.

.....  
<sup>3:14</sup> "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,

<sup>15</sup> so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

<sup>16</sup> For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

<sup>17</sup> **For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.**

<sup>18</sup> Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.

+  
+  
+

### MEMORY VERSE

### KEYWORDS

**Became flesh (v. 14)**—The Son of God became fully human but at the same time remained fully God. God entered into His created order in Jesus Christ.

**John (v. 15)**—This is a reference to John the Baptist, who was the forerunner to Jesus, "the one coming after me."

**No one . . . seen God (v. 18)**—As emphasized in the Old Testament, no one can see God in all His glory and live.

**Grace and truth . . . (v. 17)**—the same words used in verse 14. Jesus embodies both grace and truth in that He is the perfect revelation of God.

# HOW SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND GOD'S LOVE DURING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON?

In 1997, Boyz II Men recorded A Song for Mama. The song is a tribute to mothers and the sacrifices they make for their children. If you have ever been to a wedding and witnessed a mother and son dance to this song, you know that by the time the song gets to these lyrics, there is not a dry eye in the room.

"You were there for me to love and care for me  
 When skies were gray  
 Whenever I was down  
 You were always there to comfort me  
 And no one else can be  
 What you have been to me . . ."<sup>8</sup>

As the groom prepares to begin life with his new bride, he takes a moment to thank the most important woman in his life for her love demonstrated through her sacrifice.

As great as a mother's sacrifice is for her son, remember that Jesus came to Earth to make the perfect sacrifice for all mankind. May we be even more moved to tears and feel a deep

sense of gratitude as we read and reflect on the love God demonstrated towards us through Jesus's sacrifice.

## God's Love Sent Jesus to Us // John 1:14-15

It was the same every year. Greek theatrical performances consisted of choral hymns and story chants. The chorus would sing, dance, and interact with the director. That's it. Year after year, season after season, festival after festival, the choruses would do the same thing over and over and over. Stories would be told. It was all narrative. That all changed when a guy named Thespis (from whom we get the word thespian) stepped out of the chorus during a performance and took on a role as an actor. It changed everything.

The story of God follows a similar arc. God was in the heavens and people remained on Earth in a broken world, but one day God's Son stepped out of the realm of glory and took on the role of a servant. Other than it being the one, true story of the universe, this is what distinguishes Christianity from all other religions.



## THE POINT: WE CAN KNOW THE LOVE OF GOD BECAUSE OF JESUS'S SACRIFICE.

Christianity is the only religion that claims God took on a human body. Eugene Peterson paraphrased it like this: "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood" (John 1:14, MSG). No longer did we have to imagine God as being light years away from us. He was right there with us. This concept was so radical it was hard for people to grasp the concept. The invisible became visible. The eternal became immediate. The darkness became broad daylight. The impossible became possible.

For three years people were constantly wrestling with the idea of Immanuel, God with us. The Pharisees and others murmured when Jesus forgave sins, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7). They doubted Him in His hometown. "Isn't this the carpenter's son?" (Matt. 13:55). They challenged His divine status to the very end as He suffered on the cross, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" (Matt. 27:40). Even after the resurrection, Matthew recorded that some still doubted (Matt. 28:17). This concept seems incomprehensible even when Jesus walked the ancient roads of the Middle East.

You don't have to fully understand the gospel in all its glory and mystery. One only needs to taste it. But once you taste it, the gospel is beautifully undeniable. We have a Savior who can relate to every struggle we face. He is a friend of sinners who know pain, despair, grief, loneliness, joy, desertion, celebration, and loss. Hebrews 4:15 reminds us, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin."

The Christmas season offers us another opportunity to reflect on the fact that Jesus stepped into flesh. In the song "O Holy Night" we sing about this truth, "Truly He taught us to love one another."<sup>9</sup> When He came, He showed us what it means to live out godly love in every relationship. The way to God was no longer a set of detailed rules and precepts. The way to God was through Jesus. He was the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). It was no longer a self-improvement program. Jesus came, and with Him, we get real grace, real truth, and real love. We understand that grace and truth hold hands.

- Truth tells us we are sinners.
- Grace tells us that while we were sinners Christ died for us.
- Truth tells us that apart from Jesus we can do nothing.
- Grace tells us that with Christ all things are possible.
- Truth tells us that we all die and then face judgment.
- Grace tells us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.



### DIGGING DEEPER WHAT IS GRACE?

Many of us are familiar with the standard Sunday school definition, "Grace is unmerited favor." Let's investigate the word to gain additional insights. The Holman Illustrated Bible defines grace as "undeserved acceptance and love received from another." Most often grace refers to favor coming from someone who is superior to someone inferior.

When we receive God's grace, we acknowledge God's sovereignty in our lives and in our specific situations. God does not owe us anything but chooses to offer us grace as "an expression of His sovereign love. We humbly receive God's gift of salvation knowing that our sin requires condemnation. John's use of "grace upon grace" in verse 16 communicates an ongoing, continual supply of God's grace that is available to followers of Christ.

**How has God extended grace to you? How would you explain your gratitude for God's grace?**

Our minds want to pick one over the other. Which is it, grace or truth? The astounding, slightly obtuse answer to the riddle of the incarnation is, "Yes!"

### WHAT BIBLICAL TRUTH ENCOURAGES YOU IN YOUR CHRISTIAN WALK?

## Love Extended Grace for Us //

John 1:16-18

In verse 16, John writes that we have received "grace upon grace." This connotes that this grace isn't in short supply. It reflects the superabundance of grace that every soul needs and every believer desires. It's irresistible grace that pulls us out of the muck of self-righteous striving and into the restful presence of God.

### IN WHAT AREA OF YOUR LIFE HAVE YOU RECENTLY EXPERIENCED GOD'S GRACE?

John reminds the reader of the law of Moses that demanded holiness. Yes, we consider the Ten Commandments the law, but really the law of Moses has over 600 commandments. That's a whole lot of shalt and shalt-nots! The coming of Jesus allowed mankind to move from precepts to a Person for righteousness. The worldview of most religions is: try harder, stop messing up, look holy, smile more, clean up, straighten up, don't have too much fun, try to be worthy, say the right words, do the right deeds, and stay out of trouble. The worldview of the Christ follower is Jesus alone.

We choose to be in a relationship with the only One who can really change us. The old saying nails it: "Religion is 'do.' Christianity is 'DONE.'" Jesus has done all the saving; we aren't in a self-improvement program. Following Christ is so much better. It's outrageously adventuresome and radical.

What makes it even more glorious is that God was, and always has been, the initiator of love. If Jesus came when we got our act together, He would have never come at all. That takes a lot of pressure off us once we really take it to heart. Yes, Jesus came for the wise and the strong, but He also came for the rest of us. Jesus came for the days that life seems ordered and filled with meaning, but we rejoice because He came for the other days too. He was blessed by old men and shepherds, worshiped by



kings and beggars and the rest in between. The amazing thing is that He loves us, warts, and all. He did not come to receive just our joy and elation. He came for the rest of us. He came for our doubts, our burdens, our sorrows, and grief. He even came for the times when we doubted His presence. He reached down to us when our loneliness seemed unbearable. Along the path of our lives, we've heard of blessed souls who could manage their problems, pick themselves up, and find the reasons for all of life's challenges. But thank God, that He came for the rest of us! Not just for our good but also for the rest of us.

## Love Offers Eternal Life for All

// John 3:14-18

To truly understand the mystery of Jesus's incarnation, we must journey from Bethlehem to the infamous hill they called Calvariae locus, meaning "place of the skull." Jesus not only stepped into our world, but He also stepped in front of our consequence. The connections and contrasts are astounding and dynamic:

- A baby was delivered from Mary, and a Savior was delivered unto Pilate.
- Angels declared the good news to the lowly shepherds, and Jesus declared the good news to a thief on the cross.
- Mary wrapped the Baby in strips of cloth, and the soldiers stripped Him of His robe.

## THE POINT: WE CAN KNOW THE LOVE OF GOD BECAUSE OF JESUS'S SACRIFICE.

- The shepherds worshiped in sincerity, and the soldiers worshiped Him in mockery.
- When Jesus was born, the angels gave glory to God, and when Jesus cried out it is finished, the glory of redemption was fully revealed.

Someone had to be lifted up as a sacrifice, and Jesus willingly went down in agony to be lifted up on our behalf. Second Corinthians 5:21 says it all: "He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

When we think of Scripture verses at Christmas, our minds seem to automatically focus on the narrative of Luke 2. We've seen Linus recite it in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, fragments of the passage have been lifted for countless greeting cards. But perhaps we forget the greatest Christmas verse in the Bible: John 3:16. In one verse we view every dynamic of the story. We realize the greatest gift, the greatest sacrifice, the greatest eternity, and the greatest love.

The following verse underscores that this really is good news: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:17).

### HOW WOULD YOU SHARE THIS TRUTH WITH AN UNBELIEVER?

### DID YOU KNOW?

The literal translation of incarnation is "in flesh." The Doctrine of Incarnation is that Jesus is God who took on human flesh and came to earth as "divine God-man." Divinity and humanity are united in Jesus of Nazareth. God does not cease to be God as He reveals Himself to mankind as Savior. While the word "incarnation" is not a biblical term found in the Bible, it is an understanding expressed in the Bible. In John 1:14, John explains that Jesus on earth is the Word that existed since the beginning of time. Believers and unbelievers struggle with the idea that Jesus came to earth as divine God-man. Take time to understand this doctrine as foundational for understanding the Trinity.

**Biblical Truth:** "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

### How would you explain that Jesus is equally God and human?

## LIVE IT

### How does your life demonstrate your love for God and appreciation that He sent His Son?

It's always been a love story. If your life isn't a love letter to God, you're doing it wrong. Love towers over every other gift. As the apostle Paul reminds us, "The greatest of these is love!" (1 Cor. 13:13). When love is our greatest motivation, goal, destination, and creed we begin to look more like Jesus.

+ + +

- **Read:** Set aside a block of time to read 1 John. Read it with fresh eyes. Mark a verse or two that grab your attention. Meditate on this book of love through this busy season.
- **Step into the story:** Make a short list of the people around you who need love the most this Christmas. Select one person from the list and find a way to share the love of Jesus with them in a tangible way.
- **Pray:** Be intentional to take time to take the people who need love the most this Christmas to God. Pray for them. Ask God to reveal His great love with power and clarity.



# DAILY READINGS

## 1. RETHINK LOVE // JOHN 3:16

We've seen John 3:16 on signs at sports games and other places. It's a powerful message of God's love. But perhaps we've seen this verse so much that it's lost its impact. We should stop and think about the sweeping scope of this promise. It promises an extravagant demonstration of God's love which results in the salvation of whomever will believe. That's a lot of love. Therefore, we should rethink John 3:16. Think about the difference it makes between eternal death and eternal life. Think about the high price that God paid for us. There's no greater love than the fulfillment of this promise. It's a promise that God suffered extensively to keep.

**Rethink the promise that God made because of His love. He loved the world so much that He was willing to die for us. That's true love.**

## 2. GOD'S INTIMATE LOVE // SONG OF SOLOMON 8:6-7

The words and music of love songs display the intense longings of the human heart. The book of Song of Solomon has been interpreted as the longings of God's heart for His people, or more specifically, as Jesus's longing for His bride. So, we must be careful not to ascribe the love of the world as God's love. The perverted love of the world does not fall under the category of the true, biblical love of God. Song of Solomon gives us remarkable pictures of God's love. It is like a raging fire that cannot be quenched. That is a deep, intimate love. Because this love is directed toward us, we should not be afraid to approach God at the same deep level of intimacy.

**Let us appreciate the intimate love that flows from the heart of God. Let us not leave it unanswered.**

## 3. LOVE LIFESTYLE // EPHESIANS 5:1-2

Does a church split demonstrate a lack of love? Probably so. Members refuse to give in to opposing views and desires. There is no respect shown toward fellow believers, yet they say they love God. But there is no such thing as a love that honors God while showing disrespect to His children. Every follower of Christ should relate to others just as God does.

This means we are to avoid hatred and anger toward one another. It means we should pursue love and compassion. It means that love is to be worn on our sleeves to show that our love beats with God's love. He loves with a kind of sacrifice that does not divide but that holds churches together as one.

**To love like God is to live a lifestyle of love that honors God and others.**

## 4. WORSHIP AT ALL TIMES // PSALM 34:1

Many Christians believe that the only activity in heaven will be worship. This is based on a verse like Revelation 5:13, which says every creature in heaven will say, "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to the one seated on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" Our Father and Jesus who sits on the throne should be worshiped because of who they are (Rev. 3:21). But in heaven our worship will take other forms. Consider that there will be roads, houses, trees and many other objects. We will not only worship God in the traditional sense, but we will honor God through worship in the way we live. As it will be in heaven so it should be on earth. Everything we do on earth should be an act of worship.

**Worship not only includes singing and praising God, but it also includes the way we live for God.**

## 5. THE WORTH OF WORSHIP // MATTHEW 4:9

That crafty old devil, Satan, did everything he could to trip up Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11). Satan tried to get Jesus to turn stones to bread, to put God to a test, and to get Jesus to bow before him. It was that last one that Satan uses against us on a daily basis. Satan waves the kingdoms of this corrupted world in front of us and entices us to include them in our lives. Some of us find ourselves accepting a little greed here and a little ambition there, until we find that we're caught up in worshiping the unworthy. Our response in temptation should always automatically be: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him (v. 10)."

**All that Satan offers is not worth the rewards of living for, serving, and worshiping God.**