



Christmas in Our Lives God's Love Reaching To Us and Through Us

A. God's Love Reaching *to* Us

We are preparing to celebrate Christmas, the festival of Christ's birth. If you think about it, Christmas is really all about God's love, reaching out to us in the person of the God-Man, Jesus Christ. When we were separated from God by sin, He sought us out in love and desired to make us His children. Because we could not reach up to God, He reached down to us. God has been reaching out to people in love throughout history. Let's hear again just a few references:

(Hand out slips of paper with verses; have group members read.)

The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Exodus 34:6-7

But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore, you did not desert them. Nehemiah 9:17

Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies...How precious is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. Psalm 36:5, 7

Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. Lamentations 3:22

When God sent His Son to take on human flesh and blood, live in the world, and become obedient to death – even death on a cross, (Philippians 2:8) God's love reached to us in a real and personal way. What a wonder – in Jesus Christ, God comes to be with us and make us His own! As the Scriptures say:

(Hand out slips of paper with verses; have group members read.)

You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" – which means, "God with us." Matthew 1:21b-23

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14) But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman,

born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Galatians 4: 4-5

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! 1 John 3: 1

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 4:9-10

How great is God's love reaching to us—He *did not spare his own Son* ,but gave him up for us all. Romans 8:32 Pause for a moment to think of the magnitude of God's love reaching to us in Christ Jesus. (Silence for reflection.)

Take time to marvel at the miracle of the eternal God taking on human flesh and becoming a part of our world, to redeem us and make us His own. (Silence for reflection.)

Now, take your hymnals (option: provide song sheets) and turn to the Christmas hymn, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," As we sing this song together, think about the wonderful gift of God's love reaching to you and me.

(Sing hymn: LW 60 or TLH 647, vv. 1-4)

God's Love Reaching *through* Us

Yes, truly Christmas is about God's love reaching to us in the person of Jesus Christ. But, as we become God's children and experience His love, we also become conduits for His love to reach those around us. In St. John's first epistle, just after he writes about God's great love shown to us in sending His one and only Son into the world as a atoning sacrifice for our sins that we might live through Him (see 1 John 4:9-10), St. John continues:

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 1 John 4:11

Jesus also spoke of the way that we, as His sheep, live and act in love to those around us:

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me....I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me. Matthew 25:35-36, 40

Many other Scriptures also talk of the way God's love is to be shown by and through us, His children. Let us take time to hear a few examples:

(Hand out slips of paper with verses; have group members read.)

[Jesus said]: *As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.* John 13:34-35

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. ...Serve one another in love. Galatians 5:6n, 13b

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. Galatians 6:10

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10

Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. ...And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. Hebrews 13:1-3, 16

Above all, love each other deeply... Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:8-10

This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ...Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. 1 John 3:11, 18

So now that Christ has come to live within us, Christmas is also about God's love reaching through us to those around us. Take a moment to think about how God's love might reach through you this Advent and Christmas season...

- A card, note, visit, or invitation to a lonely person to share the joy of God's love made known in Christ
- Food or drink to those who are hungry and thirsty (maybe through donations, maybe by bringing a meal, maybe by taking time to serve in a soup kitchen)
- Visits to or gifts for prisoners; prayers and support for chaplains
- Sharing the compassion of Christ by caring for or visiting one who is sick
- A word, note, or gesture of Christian comfort to one who is sad or grieving
- A word of encouragement that God is *the* refuge and strength to someone who is frustrated or weary
- A word of peace—the peace that Christ gives—to one who is hurried and rushed
- An understanding comment to a frazzled clerk (or family member)
- Helping hands to assist someone carry packages, open doors, etc.
- A smile while waiting in the inevitable long line or traffic jams

- A word, note or gesture of loving encouragement to someone who is searching or hurting and needs to feel God's love and presence
- Etc.

Think about it...Who would God touch through you?

(Silence for reflection. If desired, have group add suggestions or break into small groups for discussion.)

Christmas time...God's love reaching *to* us in Christ, and then, by the power of His Spirit, *through* us to others. As we close by singing the stanza together, ponder again the wonderful gift of God's love reaching *to* you in Christ Jesus, and ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to opportunities to let God's love reach out to others *through* you.

(Conclude by singing the stanza printed below)

Open my eyes, dear Lord, to see, those You would touch through me,
 Those who are hurting, tired or poor, who need Your love to see.
 Oh, take my hands and heart, Lord, and use them as Your own
 This Christmas and throughout the year, that *Your* love may be known.

Words: Author
 Tune: LW 60 or TLH647

(All Scripture quotations from the New International Version.)