

# *Advent Home Study:*

## **Love in the Old Testament Writings**

Fourth Sunday in Advent



“All the days of the poor are hard, but a cheerful heart has a continual feast. Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble with it. Better is a dinner of vegetables where love is than a fatted ox and hatred with it.”

-Proverbs 15:15-17

### **Feast**

Our fourth week of Advent focuses on love. It's awfully close to Christmas and so many of us are spending these few remaining days traveling, last minute gift shopping, and making all the preparations for feast with family and friends. This, by itself is overwhelming enough, but when there are people who cannot join us at the table – people who may never return – our hearts can be heavy as we try to celebrate these holy days. But Proverbs speaks to us – “a cheerful heart has a continuous feast.” “Cheerful” might not be the best translation – the word is simply “good.” A good heart, one that lives in love despite the pain of life – that heart can be part of a continual feast! Proverbs goes on to remind us that even if we only have little, if we hold to the Lord, it is better than a great treasure! And even if our food isn't the fanciest, trendiest, most beautiful looking dish on the internet – making it with love, sharing it with love is our great blessing. Let go of perfection and embrace the good grace of these precious moments! Join the feast of love!

Monday

“The mouth of the righteous  
is a fountain of life, but the  
mouth of the wicked  
conceals violence. Hatred  
stirs up strife, but love  
covers all offenses.”

-Proverbs 10:11-12



## Cover

Tonight and tomorrow, our Christmas celebrations will be in full swing! But so often our hard work and earnest expectations unravel into arguments and strife. Here, scripture reminds us that we can learn from our coming savior and let our words be life-giving, patient, and understanding. We can breathe and let go of anger and frustration. In this season of love, we have no room for hate. After all, we're busy making room for the coming Christ child in our hearts! We have had enough strife, we need love that covers all offenses, forgives all wrongs, heals all wounds. We need love that is broad enough and soft enough to enfold us all in unity and harmony.

Tuesday

“It was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the LORD, and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the LORD, “For the LORD is good, for God’s steadfast love endures forever,” the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.”

-2 Chronicles 5:13-14



## Glory

Merry Christmas! You might be wondering why we’re looking at a scripture passage from such a different time and place on Christmas Day. This passage comes from a celebration after the Second Temple was built. These people had been in war and exile, suffering, starving, dying. Finally, not only are they home, but they can fully worship God in their own land! Look at all the words of praise and excitement and joy in this passage! The glory of the Lord fills up that holy place so much that the priests couldn’t keep doing their duties! When God comes into your house, everything else stops. Some can dance, make music, or sing – others just marvel. This word “glory” comes from a root that means “heavy,” “weighty” or “numerous.” We praise God’s ceaseless, unfailing love that catches us up in unimaginable grace. Then the “muchness” of God fills the air, the gravity of the Christ child, the abundance of the Spirit. Amidst all the goings on of the day, look for that weight and that love.

Wednesday

“But now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the LORD our God, who has left us a remnant, and given us a stake in this holy place, in order that God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little sustenance in our slavery. For we are slaves; yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us God’s steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to give us new life to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judea and Jerusalem.”

-Ezra 9:8-9



## Life

Now that we are in Christmastide, our shift focuses to this new, precious life, lying in a manger. We look backwards and forwards in time and see God reviving the holy people, offering life and new life time and again. Because Jesus came into the world, because Jesus comes into the world, because Jesus will come into the world again – our eyes have been brightened by God’s steadfast love. The One who gave us life knows how to give our lives depth, meaning, purpose, and strength. Our lives may be accounted little in this world, but because we are children of God, joined in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our savior, we shine on boldly. May God guide us into the work that gives our life life!



Thursday



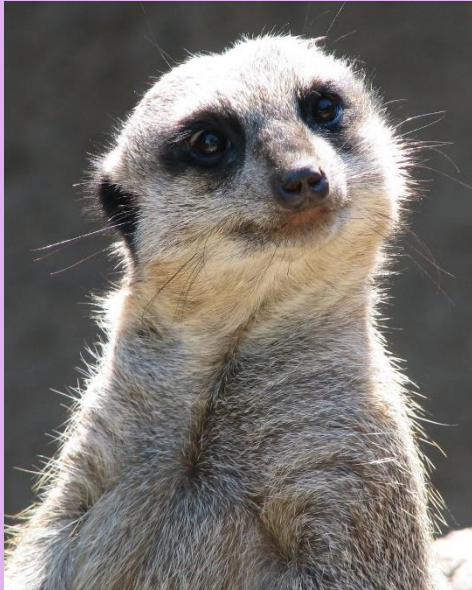
“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.”

-Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

## Season

We would probably all agree that each life has many different seasons. But if you asked us what those seasons are, you might get as many answers as there are people! Some seasons are full of hope, peace, joy, and love, while others seem to bring only loss, failure, and broken-heartedness. This passage from Ecclesiastes doesn't promise us good or ill. It comes alongside our season of life (whatever it is) and says there is a set time for it. There is no judgment or expectation that you should feel this way or that; that your failings have caused this; that God is punishing you. It just says – these things happen, but they are not permanent. Life is changing and changeable so find what you can in your own season. Make the meaning that you can; learn the lessons that offer themselves. Love where you can, heal where you can, embrace while you can. The seasons will change, but the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever. Thank God!

Friday



“I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, ‘Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land. We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen and act and do not delay!’”

-Daniel 9:4-6, 18b-19a

## Listen

Every Sunday we pray a prayer of confession, trusting in God’s steadfast love and mercy to forgive us. But how often do we confess on our own? Does it feel natural or forced? Do we attack ourselves too grievously or do we too easily let ourselves off the hook? Daniel’s prayer of confession is humble, self-aware, and direct. He names what he and his people have done wrong and rests all his hope on God’s mercy rather than his own righteousness. Daniel confesses, “we have not listened to your servants the prophets,” yet, he asks God to hear, to forgive, to listen and act. As we remember so many miracles this Christmastide, let us not forget the power of listening. God listening to and loving humanity has impacted every life that has ever been. Think what a difference we could make if we took more care in listening to those around us!

Saturday



“Set me as a seal upon your heart,  
as a seal upon your arm;  
for love is strong as death,  
passion fierce as the grave.  
Its flashes are flashes of fire,  
a raging flame.

Many waters cannot quench love,  
neither can floods drown it.

If one offered for love  
all the wealth of one’s house,  
it would be utterly scorned.”

-Song of Songs 8:6-7

## **Strong**

“Strong” is probably not the first word that comes to mind when we think of love. Many would tell us that loving makes us weak. But this word for “strong” means powerful, fierce, mighty, even brazen! For love God made the world. For love Christ was born into it to conquer sin and death. For love the Spirit stirs us on to bold acts of righteousness and compassion. The body of Christ is a body of love – seemingly conquered by the anger and hatred of the world, yet unconquerable in grace and glory. The love that we partake in as followers of Christ is unquenchable, unassailable, undeniable. This is our strength and this is our heart.

- Sunday
  - “Free Fruits” by Leandro Girotto
- Monday
  - “Bonnie in Blankets 2” by Bethan Hazell
- Tuesday
  - “Miriam’s Dance,” a miniature from the Bulgarian Tomić Psalter, 1360/63
- Wednesday
  - “Ezra Kneels in Prayer” by Gustav Doré, French, 1866
- Thursday
  - “Trees Season 2013” by J. Hagelüken, at Velbert-Nierenhof, Germany
- Friday
  - “Meerkat” by Trisha Shears
- Saturday
  - “Peace-Love” mosaic by Ang Pagbabago (2008) at Rizal Park (Manila, Philippines).