



Advent 2022
Lapeer Free Methodist Church
Week 2

Week 2: Love

Day 1: Fruit and Gifts

Galatians 5:22-23. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Before I was married, I helped at a Wednesday night program for children at church. We learned and sang about the Fruit of the Spirit. We used a train to describe the Fruit. The train has many cars, but they are all part of one train. This may be sacrilegious, but sometimes I think that it would be easier if the Fruit of the Spirit were the FRUITS of the Spirit, like the Gifts of the Spirit.

I can truthfully say I don't believe I was given the gift of prophesy. But I can't say I wasn't given the fruit of patience or self-control. It just doesn't work that way. During Advent, we focus on Love, Hope, Peace, and Faith as we prepare for the birth of Christ. Like the Fruit, they are not separate. They are all part of the fruit that is planted within us when we accept the wonderful gift of Christmas.

We are expected to reflect, grow, tend and produce ALL the fruit of the spirit. During this Advent time, look to this passage to check yourself. Are you exhibiting love? Sharing joy? Practicing peace? Today, look at each section of the fruit of the spirit.

—Sally Eilersen

Below, writing down something you can DO to show how God is developing this fruit in you:

Day 2:

Love and Giving

I encourage you to open your Bible to Philippians 2:1-11, take a breath, and read with an openness to what the Spirit of God might want you to hear.

To me, this passage was a reminder that it is not all about me. In my relationships with those around me, I am meant to “take the very nature of a servant” as my Jesus did. By being in the community and family of Christ, we are called to have humility, “valuing others above yourselves.” As a mother, I am constantly thinking of my children above myself. But in my adult relationships- am I thinking of the other person or myself as I prepare for the holidays?

This is definitely a difficult mindset to manage in a world that is constantly saying to put yourself first. I read recently that our current culture of encouraging ‘self-care’ may actually be encouraging ‘self-worship.’ (Kari Kampakis)

Are you so focused on yourself that you are actually finding ways to worship yourself instead of worshipping the Lord our God?

As we encounter this holiday season, which is a season meant for giving, think about your motivations as you give (gifts, time, etc). Consider where you are putting the most value, yourself or others. There is a balance to be sure, as we are each someone of worth who deserves to be loved. Are you doing things out of “selfish ambition or vain conceit”? Are you choosing to love others with “the same mindset as Christ Jesus”? As you consider, think of your interests and the interests of those around you and see if there is a balance between ‘self-love’ and ‘love of others.’

Action: Evaluate your holiday choices through the lens of humility. When you choose a gift or set a time with someone, take a moment and determine your intention and where your value is- for yourself, or for them?

— Sarah Grant

Day 3:

The gift of love

When my sister and I were still pretty young, our parents let us know that (spoiler alert) Santa Clause didn't bring the gifts, moms and dads did. But because we still young and had no money, we still had nothing to buy any Christmas presents.

To help solve that problem, our parents pulled us aside the first of December and gave us each plenty of dough to purchase some pretty nice gifts for each member of the family. I mean... how cool was that? I could buy Christmas presents for my parents and sister, and I didn't even have to supply the cash.

As I look back on those earlier days of childhood, I feel deeply blessed to have and the opportunity to express my love for my family, through the giving of gifts with the money that was provided for me. In the same way, our Heavenly Father has spared no express to bless us with so many resources to express His love to others in lots of different way, each and every day.

What a privilege we have to offer the priceless gift of salvation with everyone we know, all because God was willing to give us His only Son to share with the entire world. Let's make the choice to do everything we can to share this free gift of love that we never wear out, but last for all of eternity.
—Pastor Bruce

Action: Take a moment and think of all the "gifts" you receive to which you cannot attach a monetary value. Now, list them below, and thank the Greatest Gift giver for his love for you.

Day 4 - Emet

Exodus 34:6 *The LORD passed in front of Moses, calling out, "Yahweh! The LORD! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness."*

In our Sunday School class we learned about the Hebrew word "Emet". It is found throughout the Bible describing the character of God. It is translated as Faithful, Steadfast, Trustworthy, Upright, Reliable, Just. A Rock. Emet is related to the word Amen, meaning it is the truth.

Emet can be a noun – who we are. Or it can be a verb – what we do. People who are described as having emet include Abraham. Moses. David. Jesus. I want to be part of that company.

Why is it important that God is faithful? Trustworthy? Unfailing in Love? In our world, people will let us down. We will let others down. We fail. We fall. But God never fails. He fulfills every promise He gives. Advent is a time where we wait for the coming of Christ. For the fulfillment of God's promise to us. His Emet shows us that this promise, like the many that came before it, will not fail. God is faithful.

Today, let me hold on to emet. Help me to be faithful, steadfast, unfailing in my love. May I reflect the "Emet" of God in all things - in this season and beyond
—Sally Eilersen

Action: Below write some ideas of how you can be "Emet" in the lives of those around you. Make them specific. Make them creative. Make them measurable. Now, choose one or two, and DO them this week!

Day 5: How Love Transforms Us

The church's understanding of Advent stands in opposition to our culture's run-up to Christmas. Instead of parties, Advent invites reflection on injustice. Instead of wreaths and greenery, it invites us to cry out to God because of the pain in our lives and in our communities. Instead of pop tunes about Santa Claus, it includes hymns with words that talk about us mourning "in somber exile" and needing release from our "sins and fears."

The Bible has a lot to say about love and how love transforms, but three things especially stand out to me: Love waits, Love hates, and Love costs.

Love waits. Love is patient, writes the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13. God doesn't rush in to change our circumstances when He is inviting a change of heart. God will wait and wait and wait for us to turn to Him, to turn away from the things in our lives that keep us from Him. This doesn't mean God's love isn't active. Rather, God's love is patient in that He will offer it to us again and again, no matter how much we refuse it.

Love hates. I know it sounds contradictory, but God hates injustice. God hates the suffering experienced as a result of corruption and self-centeredness. God hates the deceptions that keep us from understanding His love for us. In Advent, we are invited to cry out against injustice, to use whatever power we have—time, money, words, relationships—to protest the oppression of the most vulnerable among us. In Advent, we are called to remember that this is how God has loved us.

Love costs. Every act of love is an act of self-sacrifice. I sacrifice my sleep for my kids when I get up in the night to soothe them after a bad dream. My husband sacrifices personal ambition when he comes home from work to eat dinner with the family instead of crossing off a few more items on the to do list. Women and men in the armed services sacrifice their bodies to defend our nation. In Advent, we are invited to recognize God's sacrificial love for us even as we are called to love others with that same kind of sacrifice.

The promise of Christmas is that when we take the time to recognize the ugly parts of our souls and of the world around us, when we take the time to engage in the pain and respond to it, when we pay attention to the depth and width and breadth of God's loving response to that ugliness and pain, it will transform us.

Love will make us into people who don't need to ignore pain and suffering but instead can respond to it with healing and grace. Like the baby who came into the world over 2,000 years ago.

-excerpts from Amy Julia Becker's "Advent Reflections: How Love Transforms Us"
<https://amyjuliabecker.com/advent-reflections-how-love-transforms-us/>

Days 6 and 7: Selah

Seems we have a lot of information about “love” in our culture. Love serves as the most basic theme in our entertainment. We loves lots of things. We say we love lots of people. It seems to be both “all we need,” while simultaneously “stinking,” “hurting,” and a language we intrinsically speak without learning it.

But really, how do you define love in a few words or a catchy lyric? How can we distill such a thing down to a food we enjoy, a place we visit, or a fleeting feeling we have?

The simple definition of love is “an intense feeling of affection.” I don’t know. That leaves me feeling flat. Whether it’s used in its noun form (I love that book!) or its verb form (showing affection for someone), to equate it with common affection seems to make it all ... less.

Historically, love is given to four different types: eros (passionate), philia (for friends and equals), storge (love of parents for children), and agape (a love for mankind). That helps me know I can feel love for different things and people differently. But the “word” definition of love is still so difficult for me. I am a person of words - I think words are very important, and our use of them critical in being understood.

But love ... love is by it’s definition a feeling. And I know when I feel love. And I know when I express love how someone else is feeling about it (sometimes). So the idea of love being one of the weeks of Advent is quite tricky. And yet ..

We know that what God did for us is love. I use to think it was only “agape” love, but the older I get, I see this selfless act really reflects all the tenets of love - he is passionate for us, he numbers us as “joint heirs” with Jesus, he is a father to the fatherless and yes, his death made it possible for all mankind to approach the throne of a king who bestows grace and mercy we simply cannot understand.

So during this weekend, reflect on the different ways God has shown you love both this week, this year, and throughout your life. Understand that because of his “storge” love, nothing can separate us from him. Know that he has made a way for you in his “philia” love to truly know him. Remember he is passionate about you and those around you. And know that this love isn’t stingy nor restricted - that everyone has an equal opportunity - all of mankind - to know Him.

And live accordingly - remembering that every single person you encounter is loved by God... just like you are.

John 3:16, 17 - “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

1 Corinthians 16:14 - “Let all that you do be done in love.”

