

Family and Journey Group Resources for the Advent/Christmas Season

For the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas, we're taking a break from the "normal" Journey Group discussion guides. Instead, the Adult Ministries team will provide a variety of ideas to use with your family and/or journey and new community groups. Each week will include three categories with a suggested theme, an idea for a shared experience, and a few discussion questions. Our hope is that this flexibility allows groups and families to focus on relationships and shared experiences that make the holidays more meaningful and joyous. Happiest of holidays to you!

Option 1 – Christmas Story/Biblical Text

The Good Shepherd - Luke 2:8-18

Objectives:

- Discuss how a disciple leads from a deep sense of who they are in Jesus – identity.
- Identify where God is at work and join with connecting lost people to Jesus.

As Luke shares the story of Jesus' birth, he introduces us to the first witnesses of the newborn king.

Read Luke 2:8-18

The shepherds were the first people ever to hear the good news and the first to share the good news of Jesus with others. It doesn't matter if you're one of the first, or someone two thousand years later to hear and share the good news of Jesus; that news is still as powerful and life changing as ever.

Discuss

- Share what opportunities you have had to spread the good news of Jesus to others lately.

Activity Suggestion: *Brainstorm who you can invite to the Christmas Together services on December 23 & 24. Send text invites on the spot and pray for those invitees as a group. Follow up with one of the print postcards provided Sunday.*

Bible Discussion:

Thirty years after being introduced to these shepherds, people are introduced to the Good Shepherd.

Read John 10:7-15. The Good Shepherd provides security through sacrificial love and actions. (Verses 7-13)

When we surrender to the love of the Good Shepherd, we're adopted into the fold and recognize his voice. We're one of the lost sheep that's been found. One out of a hundred. When sheep didn't come in at night, the shepherd would build a small structure. While lying on the ground, his body would serve as a gate to keep threats out.

- ***In what area of your life do you need to experience the protection of the Good Shepherd?***

The Good Shepherd loves and knows his sheep. (Verses 14-15)

Everything changes when we understand that Jesus knows us deeply and completely. Being known by Jesus gives freedom to move beyond the shame we have buried inside and to forget the lies about ourselves.

- ***How does Jesus knowing you in the same way the Heavenly Father knows Him affect your everyday faith?***

Knowing we're loved and cared for (regardless of the value the world assigns to us) allows us to live with more confidence and less fear. The world notices that quiet confidence. Strength of character underpins good decisions and the followers of Jesus who make them. In a lost and fallen world, Jesus followers who are confident about who they are and what they stand for have amazing platforms to impact families, friendships and communities for God's Kingdom.

- ***Is there a decision, stand for truth, or faith risk you sense Jesus calling you to take? How does having confidence in your true identity help you take steps of faith?***

Prayer

Finish the statement "In Christ I am..." using John 15: 1, 15 and 16. As a group, prayerfully offer thanksgiving for who we are in Christ Jesus.

Option 2 – Advent Celebration – Week 4 - LOVE

Advent means “the coming,” and is a time of expectant waiting. Christians have been celebrating the Advent season since the 4th and 5th centuries. We celebrate the coming of Jesus’ birth, which has already occurred, and we wait in expectation for Christ’s return, which is yet to come. This is not a passive waiting, but an active waiting.

Activity (Optional):

- Light the fourth candle of your [advent wreath](#) symbolizing “love”
[History/Tradition of Advent Wreaths](#)
- Use this [Advent calendar](#) during the Advent season.

Open with prayer. *Read Matthew 22:37-40.*

Watch the Bible project video- ["Agape / Love"](#)

The video says that our love for God is expressed by our love for people; they are inseparable. It also says that love is an action, not a feeling. Jesus lived these things out and we are to follow in his example.

Read Romans 5:8 and 1 John 4:7-12.

DISCUSS:

- What examples does the video (or the Bible) give to show Jesus’ love for people?
- How do you experience the love of God on a daily basis?
- What does it mean to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind?
- How is Jesus’ example of love similar or different to the world’s understanding of love?
- Why is it important to love our enemies? What did Jesus gain by loving his enemies?
- What might it look like for us to better love others as Jesus did? How can we love others better this holiday season?

Listen (Optional): “Oh Holy Night”

Pray for one another that you would love God and others as you have been loved by Jesus. Pray for the specific examples brought up in the discussion.

Option 3 – Movie Night - *Elf*

Buddy was a baby in an orphanage who stowed away in Santa's sack and ended up at the North Pole. Later, as an adult human who happened to be raised by elves, Santa allows him to go to New York City to find his birth father, Walter Hobbs. Hobbs, on Santa's naughty list for being a heartless jerk, had no idea that Buddy was even born. Buddy, meanwhile, experiences the delights of New York City (and human culture) as only an elf can. When Walter's relationship with Buddy interferes with his job, Walter is forced to reevaluate his priorities.

This movie doesn't try to be religious – in fact, it's something of a parody for other legendary Christmas movies. However, we noticed a couple of themes that have definite tie-in to Biblical values.

1) *Early in the movie, Buddy goes searching for his true father. Loosely reminiscent of the story of the Prodigal son (Luke 15), we see Buddy taking a long journey and eventually finding (coming home to) his dad. However, the twist in this movie is that the father, Walter Hobbs (and not Buddy) is the one who experiences redemption and reconciliation. While Buddy maintains his Christmas spirit throughout, Hobbs is a mean and selfish executive whose focus on work and money causes him to neglect his family.*

Santa tells Elf about New York and his Dad (the scene ends, but Santa's next line is about how even though his dad's on the naughty list, that "doesn't mean they can't find their way again") (1 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekGILdz0JWw>

Elf meets his Dad (2:25 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNMtHosai08>

Think of your own redemption story, of how we once were lost and now found:

- *Tell us about a "Buddy" in your life – someone whose positive spirit and love for people caused you to seek redemption, a new way of life in Jesus. OR*
- *Tell us about how your own "fruits of the spirit" had a positive impact on someone else's life and redemption story.*

Read Matt 18:1-5

- *Buddy's enthusiasm for life and persistent joy are childlike and compelling. What can we learn from Buddy about how to celebrate this holiday (give thanks for God's gifts!) with a more childlike spirit?*
- *Why is this approach to life so counter-cultural? How does that make it harder to appreciate/adopt in our own lives?*

2) *A secondary theme is one of searching for one's true identity. Buddy realizes he doesn't have any of the same talents as the other elves, and feels like he doesn't fit in. Yet even when he goes to New York, he realizes that his childlike wonder and joy are in stark contrast to the pervasive negativity and selfishness present in his dad's work world. (In other words – he still doesn't fit in).*

Elf is a Human in an Elf's world (special talents) (3:31) – finds out he's a human

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEUkxtdVVPA>

Buddy tries hard to be like the other elves yet he does not have the talents needed in order to make toys quickly. When he learns that he is a human he sets out to live into his human identity. Learning how God has uniquely created each of us can provide a better understanding of how he has called us to use our gifts to benefit the church.

- Do you know your spiritual gifts? If so, share what they are.
- Similar to when Buddy realized he couldn't work with the elves, what can happen if we are in roles that do not align with our gifts? (Burnout, Frustration, etc.)

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12, 15-20, 24-26

- Verse 18 says God has placed the parts in the body just as he wanted them to be. In what ways can knowing and using your spiritual gifts help the church?
- Buddy was gifted in bringing his positivity and cheer to a pessimistic environment.

Buddy decorates the store (0:52) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXIGbJ7pBCs>

Not everyone appreciated Buddy and he eventually left his new family. (0:18)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PjyY7ePg39E>

- What might we learn from the fact that people didn't appreciate Buddy's positivity at first?
- What might have happened if Buddy had chosen to blend in and not bring his cheer to New York City?
- How might the neglect of our own gifts impact the church?

End with singing on streets of New York (3:12) – Buddy's influence saves Christmas, and even Walter Hobbs turns his life around. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Foeeg4Sfwrq>

Ultimately our identity is found in Christ. Select 3-4 of the following verses and read aloud what Scripture says about our identity. [Gen. 1:27, Psalm 139:14, John 15:15-16, 2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 2:20, Eph. 4:24, Phil 3:20, Col 3:3-4, 1 Peter 2:9]

- How do the truths of these passages compare with the worldly identities that we sometimes chase?
- How might these truths change the way we live each day?
- What specific things we can do to remember these truths about ourselves?