



STUDENTS GUIDE

*CREATED BY*  
*Kimberly Sorgius Jones*

AND THE  
NOT CONSUMED TEAM

CONTRIBUTORS:  
JESSICA SCHAAL

CREATIVE DIRECTOR:  
EMILY SHEEDER

DESIGNER:  
SARAH SHEEDER

ILLUSTRATORS:  
RAMONA KURTEN  
SARA SALAMAT

EDITORS:  
CRYSTAL MARCUM  
SOPHIA STOUFFER  
KRISTIANN KASHUBA  
KIMRA BELL  
RACHEL SHEEDER  
CAMERON POLLOCK

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# GIFTS <sup>AT</sup> THE MANGER

A Christmas Bible Study

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NAME



# WHAT'S IN THIS *Study?*

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## The Gift in the Manger

Have you ever received a gift that seemed to come with strings attached? Maybe a sibling gave you some candy but then later asked you to clean the bathroom for them. You may have attached some strings yourself when you hoped that giving your friend a really cool present for their birthday would mean they would return the favor!

In this study, we'll learn about the Christmas story by focusing on the true gifts that were given and why those gifts matter for us! Let's start in the book of Luke.

Read *Luke 2:1-7*. What event do these verses tell about?

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A true **gift** is something given freely and willingly with no expectation of payment or reciprocation. Most of us really don't look at gifts this way, though!

Often, the expectations or guilt we feel connected to giving or receiving gifts comes from our own selfishness. We want people to recognize our sacrifice and give back to us with equal effort or care. Maybe we expect certain gifts because we want to feel special on our birthdays or finally get that top item on our wishlist.

The birth of Jesus is the whole reason we celebrate Christmas! Maybe you have been told that "Jesus is the reason for the season," and this is the truth! But it can be easy to forget that Jesus was actually the first and greatest Christmas gift ever given. John 3:16 tells us that God sent Jesus to this world willingly because He loves us!

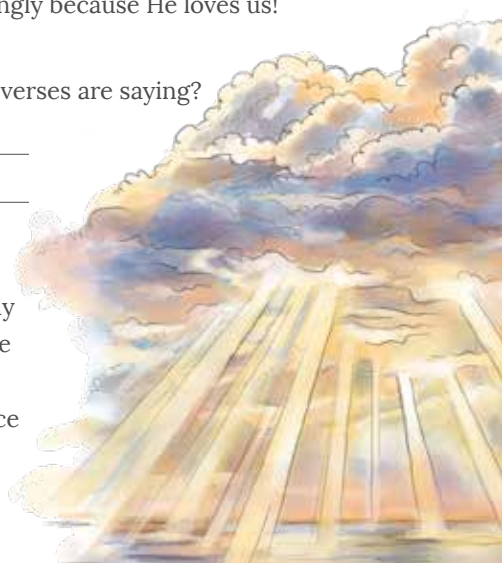
Read KEY VERSES *John 1:14-17*. What do you think these verses are saying?

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God's Word explains to us that Jesus (the Word) became flesh by coming to earth in a physical body as a little baby. Jesus is the Word of God who came to earth, showing us what God is like. Jesus, God's greatest gift to us, shined the brilliant light of grace and truth into the dark sinfulness of our world.



God showed us His grace  
and His goodness by giving us *Jesus*.

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"Don't move!" my dad called to me across the creek. I froze. I didn't understand why he had said this, but his voice had that sound it got when something was wrong or dangerous.

"Okay, now slowly move to your right and get out of the water as quickly as possible."

As I followed my dad's instructions, I realized why he had suddenly become so serious. In a shallow little pool, about six inches away from where my feet had been a moment before, was a momma copperhead with three little babies around her. I was so glad I had listened to my dad even before I had been able to see these extremely venomous snakes. My obedience had saved me from a trip to the emergency room.

Have you ever been asked to do something that was unknown or seemed difficult? What was it?

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Today we'll get to see how one young girl's unquestioning obedience was a gift God used to bless the whole world!

Read *Luke 1:26-28*. What words in this passage describe Mary and tell you who she is?

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It's important to notice here that Mary was betrothed, or promised in marriage, to a man named Joseph. Joseph was a descendant of David, making him part of the royal family in Israel.

Read *Luke 1:29*. How did Mary feel about the angel's greeting?

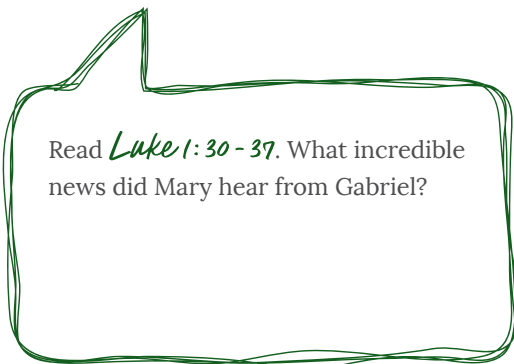



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How would you feel if an angel showed up with a message for you?





Read *Luke 1:30-39*. What incredible news did Mary hear from Gabriel?

Woah! Mary's life was about to change dramatically. Through a miracle of God's Holy Spirit, she would conceive a child. This son, who they would name Jesus, would not be Joseph's biological child, but he would be Joseph's legal son and heir. He would be both God AND man.

As you can see, Mary was being asked to do something that probably seemed crazy. Her next steps were unknown and surely very difficult. She also learned that her much older cousin, Elizabeth, had also recently conceived through a miracle from God. The Lord was making things happen that no one could have imagined!

Read <sup>KEY VERSE</sup> *Luke 1:38*. What did Mary tell the angel?



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Mary's response is mind-blowing to me. I'm sure she had questions, fears, and uncertainties in her mind. Yet she obediently accepted God's plan for her life. She believed His will for her was best and right, and she would obey!

Mary probably didn't understand all that God was doing through her obedience, but that didn't stop her from willingly giving it! We know that Jesus, whose name literally means, "The Lord is salvation," was the One God had promised to send in order to save His people from their sin. God used Mary's gift of **obedience** to Him in His plan to bring our Savior into the world!

God was able to use Mary in His plan to  
bring us salvation because she gave Him her *obedience*.

Would you obey God like Mary did if He asked something difficult or scary of you? Explain your answer.

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Today, praise God for using the gift of obedience in order to accomplish His perfect plan. Ask Him to help you understand the value and importance of this gift.

\*Find today's OBEDIENCE gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

*Joseph's Gift*

In our last lesson, we saw how Mary's gift of obedience to God is a huge part of the Christmas story. Today, we get to talk about another gift in the Christmas story that you may not have noticed or thought of before. So let's take a look!

Read *Matthew 1:18-19*. What difficult decision had Joseph decided to make?

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When Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant, I imagine he was shocked. He was no doubt excited to marry this woman he had committed to. Then he heard news that made it seem as though Mary had been unfaithful to him. How sad Joseph must have felt at this seeming betrayal and dishonesty on Mary's part!

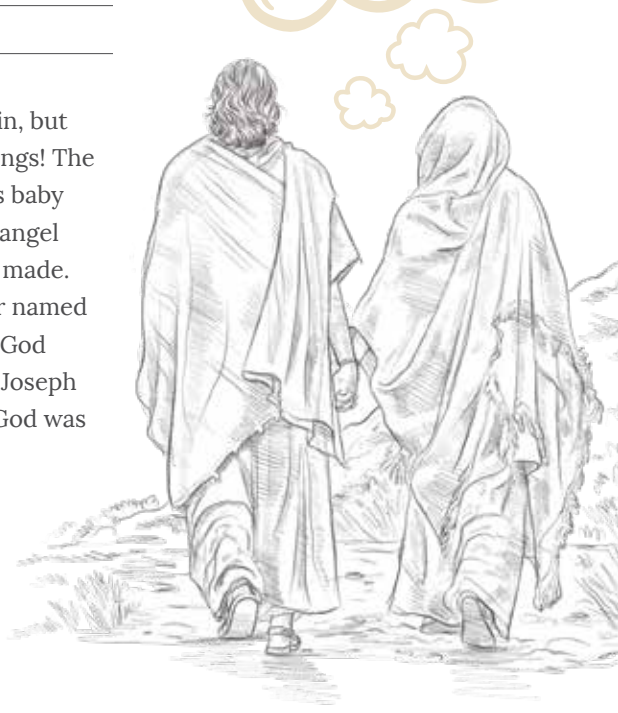
Read *Matthew 1:20-23*. What happened next?


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I'm sure Joseph may have been uncertain, but he had also been told some amazing things! The angel of the Lord made it clear who this baby would be. As verses 22-23 show us, the angel reminded Joseph of a promise God had made. The Lord had promised to send a Savior named Immanuel, which means "God with us." God Himself would come to save Israel, and Joseph had the opportunity to be part of how God was going to do this.

What *fears* or questions do you think might have been going through Joseph's mind?



Read  *Matthew 1: 24 - 25*. What did Joseph do?

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Joseph didn't wait around, second-guess, or throw a fit. He obeyed God like Mary had and took her to be his wife so he could love her and care for her throughout her pregnancy. Even though family, friends, and even strangers would have the opportunity to judge them or gossip, Joseph knew what was most important. He willingly surrendered his reputation and plans to God, giving the Lord his **trust** as he moved forward.

Joseph gave his *trust*  
to God by accepting His plan.

Throughout your life, you will also be faced with choices similar to the one Joseph had to make. Maybe it's choosing to obey God even if your friends don't understand or make fun of you. You may have to trust God with an unexpected or difficult situation where you don't see how any good could come from it. You might even wonder at times if trusting the Lord is worth the trouble—He expects obedience, and sometimes obedience is hard!

Is there anything you are struggling to trust God about right now? What is it?

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Though Joseph didn't know the end of the story, we do! We get to see how God used the trust Joseph gave to the Lord to continue working out His good plan. We can entrust our lives to the very same God Joseph trusted. How amazing is that?

What is one way you can give the Lord your trust today?

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As you pray today, tell God what you want to trust Him with. Thank Him for being a good God who we CAN trust with our whole lives.

\*Find today's TRUST gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

## From Angels to Shepherds

Have the gifts given in the Christmas story that we've discussed so far surprised you? Today we'll get to talk about two more gifts you might not have noticed before! First, let's refresh our memories on the events that took place leading up to Jesus' birth in Bethlehem.

Read *Luke 2:1-7*. What details about Jesus' birth are different from what might be common in present-day births?

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From the beginning of Jesus' life, we see how He was humbled in coming to this earth. Jesus was the Messiah! Yet He was born where the animals were kept and fed.

*Messiah:*  
anointed One—  
set apart by God

Read *Luke 2:8-12*. What was happening on the hillsides outside of Bethlehem?

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The shepherds out in those fields had an exciting night at work! One minute they were watching their sheep quietly graze and settle down to sleep, and the next, they were surrounded by God's glory and given the **good news** that the Savior was born! This is the first gift we see in our passage for today.

Read KEY VERSES *Luke 2:13-20*.

What did the shepherds do next?

What do you think the shepherds were thinking as they looked into the face of the tiny baby who was Christ the Lord?

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Every time I meet a brand new baby, I love to think about who they'll be when they grow up, what their personality will be like, and even what they will enjoy doing. But the shepherds were looking at baby Jesus and realizing that God had sent them their Savior—the Messiah who they, their parents, and all their ancestors had prayed and longed for their whole lives. Now He was HERE!

The shepherds left Mary, Joseph, and the baby to begin spreading the news of what they had heard and seen that night in Bethlehem. As they went, they gave the second gift we see in this passage: ***praise and worship*** to God for what He had done.

After receiving the angel's gift of good news, the shepherds gave the gift of *praise and worship* to God.

How was the shepherds' worship a gift?

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These shepherds were not commanded to spread the news of His birth. Yet, they excitedly responded to the angel's news with willing hearts that desired to see, praise, and worship! They just couldn't keep this gift of good news all to themselves.

Do you think you would've had the same response as the shepherds? Why or why not?

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It seems pretty clear that the shepherds' priorities were right. They dropped everything to respond to the truth that had been presented to them about God and what He was doing. But how often do we ignore God or what He's trying to do in our hearts because it's uncomfortable or we simply don't want to take action? Maybe you're tempted to ignore the godly instruction of your parents or to give in to distraction while at church instead of listening to God's Word being preached and taught.

What is one thing you can worship God for today?



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Today, thank God for revealing His truth to us and giving us the opportunity to respond in worship. Ask Him to make your heart tender like the shepherds' hearts.

\*Find today's WORSHIP gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

Have you ever put a lot of thought and effort into choosing just the right present for a friend or a family member? Tell about it below.

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Usually, giving gifts to our close friends or family members is easier than giving gifts to strangers, because we KNOW our friends and family! We know what colors they like, which books, games, or shows are their favorite, and what activities or hobbies they're exploring. Because we have this knowledge, we can give them gifts that will delight them and reflect the truth about who they are.

Today, let's look at three gifts that help us understand the truth about who Jesus is. As it turns out, the shepherds weren't the only ones who recognized the truth about Jesus and came to worship Him! Although this account happened some time after Jesus was born (perhaps even 2 years later), we still consider it to be a part of the Christmas story.

Read *Matthew 2:3-8*. Who did Herod call in to explain what the wise men were talking about? What did they say?

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Read *Matthew 2:1-2*.  
What happened after  
Jesus was born?

The priests and scribes knew this because the prophet Micah had given God's people a message hundreds of years earlier, explaining that the ruler of Israel God was sending them would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)!

Read *Matthew 2:9-11*. What did the wise men do next?

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What gifts did they present to Jesus?



Just as Micah’s prophecy had said, the wise men found Jesus in Bethlehem! They were so excited that they fell down in front of Jesus and worshiped Him. Then they opened the gifts they had brought for this King—**gold, frankincense, and myrrh**.

While these seem like pretty strange gifts to give a child, they make perfect sense for Jesus! We don’t know how much the wise men understood about who Jesus was and what He had been born to do. Yet these gifts symbolize the truth perfectly. Gold is a precious metal associated with kings and royalty. Frankincense is an incense that the priests would burn in the temple as a sign of God’s presence, and myrrh is a perfume that was used in embalming and burying those who had died.

According to the descriptions of each gift you just read, match them to the truth about Jesus they symbolize.

Frankincense •	• Jesus is the King of kings.
Myrrh •	• Jesus came to earth to die for our sin.
Gold •	• Jesus is God with us.

The wise men gave gifts that symbolized the *truth* about who Jesus is.

Read *Matthew 2:12-18*. What was Herod’s reaction to the truth about Jesus?

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While the wise men wanted to worship and honor who Jesus was, Herod wanted to destroy Jesus because of who He was. He didn’t want another king challenging his authority, so he wickedly commanded that all male children in Bethlehem two years and younger be killed.

Who had the right response to the truth about Jesus? ☒ *Wise men* ☐ *King Herod*

Pray for God to help you love the truth about Jesus. Thank Him for giving you His Word so you can understand and know the truth for yourself.

\*Find today’s TRUTH gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

So far, we have studied the events in Matthew and Luke that usually come to our minds when we think of the Christmas story. But the Christmas story began long before the angel told Mary she would have a baby and continued many years after the wise men presented their gifts to Jesus. So now, let's investigate how God has been giving us good gifts and teaching us the Christmas story since the beginning of time!

When God created this world, He made it absolutely perfect and good. Sadly, it didn't stay that way. Adam and Eve rebelled against God, plunging not just themselves but also the entire world into the darkness and slavery of sin. Despite this, God had a good plan that He was working out perfectly. In fact, God told the serpent in the garden, Satan, what the future would hold.

Read *Genesis 3:15*. What did God say to the serpent?

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This verse is God's first recorded promise to send Jesus to be our Savior!

The book of Genesis was actually written for the nation of Israel—God's chosen people—just before they entered the land God had promised to give them as a place to live and raise their families. God wanted His people to know He was caring for them from the beginning of the world and would always keep His promises. Yet there were times when Israel forgot God or started to doubt His promises to them. In these times, God would use prophets to remind His people again of what He had already promised to do.

Read <sup>KEY VERSE</sup> *Isaiah 7:14*. What important details are in this promise that were not in God's first promise in Genesis?



God was making His promise even clearer and easier to recognize! God continued to speak to His people through prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah, promising them the Messiah would come. Then God fell silent. For about 400 years, there were no prophets reminding the people of the promises God had made.

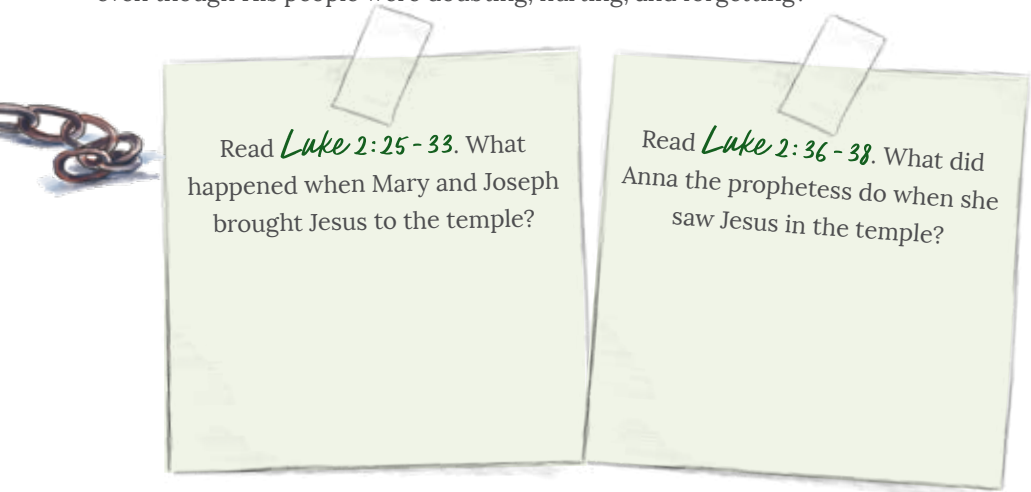


If you lived during this time of God’s “silence,” how would you feel? Do you think you would forget God’s promises or start to lose hope?

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Many of God’s people did start to lose hope that God would keep His promise to send a Savior. Many Israelites even forgot why they needed a Savior! They began to look around them, wishing for a king who would deliver them from the oppression of the nations who had captured them and taken away their homes. Would God be faithful even though His people were doubting, hurting, and forgetting?



These two faithful people, Simeon and Anna, held on to the promises of God their entire lives without losing hope that He would keep His word. Finally, their faith became sight, and they rejoiced in God’s goodness!

God gives us *hope* because He ALWAYS keeps His promises.

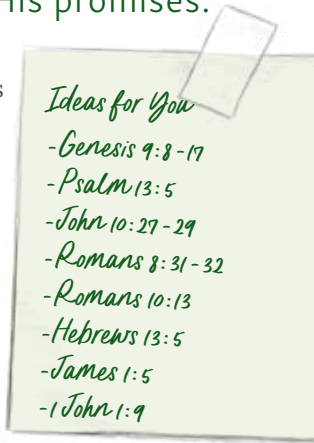
God kept His promise to Israel, and He is still keeping His promises today. This is how God gives the gift of **hope** to our hearts!

What promises of God give you a reason to hope today?

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Today, take time to thank God for always keeping His promises. Ask Him to help you remember the hope you have in Him.

\*Find today’s HOPE gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.



Mary and Joseph welcomed Jesus into the world as a baby. The shepherds marveled at and the wise men worshiped Him. But Jesus didn't stay a baby! Jesus grew and learned—becoming a man who had favor with both God and man (Luke 2:52). Before Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sin, He spent about three years teaching the truth, healing sick and disabled people, and showing the Israelites what God had meant by His promises to them. Today, we'll learn about one of God's gifts that Jesus taught about!

Read *Matthew 9:10*. What was Jesus doing?

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Read *Matthew 9:11*. What happened while Jesus was having dinner with these tax collectors and sinners?

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The Pharisees were known in Israel for carefully keeping the Law of God. In fact, they took it so seriously that they even made up extra rules to keep so that they would never get close to disobeying the Law.

Imagine your parents gave you a lights out time of 10 p.m., but you turned off your light at 9:30 p.m. and made your sibling or friend follow your rule of 9:30 p.m. as well. In a way, this is what the Pharisees did. They didn't just keep the Law—they added to it and tried to make sure everyone else obeyed their rules too. It was these men who could not believe that Jesus would get close to sinners, let alone eat dinner with them!



Read *Matthew 9:12*. What do you think Jesus' response to the Pharisees meant?

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At first, Jesus’ reply doesn’t seem to answer the question the Pharisees asked. But Jesus understood their hearts and got straight to the true issue. Just like sick people are the ones who need a doctor, it was sinful people who needed Jesus to save them.

Read <sup>KEY VERSE</sup> **Matthew 9:13**. What else did Jesus say to the Pharisees?

*I desire \_\_\_\_\_ and not \_\_\_\_\_.*

While the Pharisees thought their careful living and regular sacrifices were making them right with God, these things hadn’t changed their hearts! Jesus explained that their hearts were what He was after. He desired to show mercy to sinners who came to Him for salvation. The sacrifices of the Pharisees meant nothing if they didn’t produce the same merciful attitude toward sinners like Jesus Himself had.

Through Jesus, God gives us *mercy* despite our sin.

Jesus didn’t come into the world just to spend time with the good, clean, obedient, or respectable people. Jesus came to save sinners who would admit their need for Him! The metaphor of doctor and patient can go even deeper here—doctors can’t help sick people who claim to be fine and not need a doctor. Though the Pharisees needed Jesus to save them just as much as the sinners He was sitting with, they wouldn’t admit it.

Have you ever admitted your need for Jesus and accepted God’s gift of *mercy*? If so, describe what happened.

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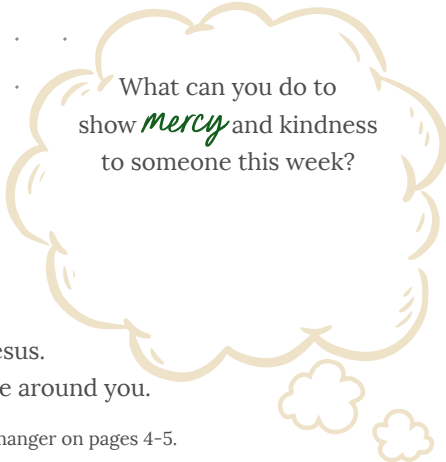
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Sometimes even we who have accepted God’s gift of mercy can forget how much we need it. Maybe we act like the Pharisees, holding impossible standards over the heads of others and refusing to give *mercy* like we’ve been given.



What can you do to show *mercy* and kindness to someone this week?

Today, thank God for the mercy He gives us through Jesus. Ask Him to help you have a merciful heart toward those around you.

\*Find today’s COMPASSIONATE MERCY gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

On Day 4, we read that one thing the angels announced to the shepherds was peace on earth (Luke 2:14). When we look around us though, we don't see much peace, do we? We see squabbles with siblings, friends refusing to speak to each other, church members at odds with each other, political division in our country, and wars across the world. We feel fear in our hearts, uncertainty about the future, and anger towards those who hurt us.

What specific things do you see around you that contradict the idea of peace on earth?

The shepherds weren't living in particularly peaceful times either. The Roman Empire had taken over Israel, compelling them to pay taxes and report to their hometowns for a census like Mary and Joseph had to do. Rome also put their own people in charge of Jewish cities and provinces and took over law-enforcement and punishment. How could they experience peace in times like this?

It would make sense that when Jesus, the Prince of Peace, finally came, people thought He had come to bring political or societal peace. Many Jews believed Jesus would take the throne of David in order to overthrow the Romans and make Israel a powerful, united nation once again.

Read <sup>KEY VERSES</sup> *Romans 5:1-2*. What kind of peace did Jesus bring?

Read *Isaiah 9:6*.

What names of Jesus does this verse tell you about?

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- » \_\_\_\_\_
- » \_\_\_\_\_
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Jesus didn't bring peace to all the conflicts in the world the first time He came to earth. He didn't fix every misunderstanding or demolish every bit of injustice or evil threatening His people. Jesus brought peace that is greater than any peace ever known—peace with God.

Read *Romans 5:8-11*. Why do we need the peace with God that Jesus brought?

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The sin in all of our hearts actually makes us enemies of God who are at war with Him rather than at peace with Him. We needed Jesus to bring us peace because without Him we are slaves to sin! This is why Jesus bringing us peace with God was a better gift than Jesus bringing peace to earthly wars or conflict.

Through the salvation Jesus brought, we can be reconciled—have our relationship restored—to God! Only this reconciliation can bring us peace that lasts. There will always be countries fighting each other, disagreements between family members, and controversy in our communities until Jesus comes back one day. Yet through it all, we can have peace in our hearts.

Jesus reconciles us to God, giving us *lasting peace* that nothing can take away.

Read *Isaiah 26:3*. How can our hearts be at peace even when our lives are not peaceful?

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Once we have been saved and reconciled to God through Jesus, nothing can take away that peace! The key to lasting peace is to keep our minds focused on God, trusting Him and thanking Him for being in control. The TRUTH is that we have peace with God, so we can have peace in our hearts no matter what we face in our lives here on this earth.

What truth can you remember this week in order to trust God and have His peace?

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Today, thank God for sending Jesus to give you the gift of peace with Him. Ask God to help you keep your mind fixed on Him even when things are scary, confusing, or unpeaceful. \*Find today's LASTING PEACE gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

*Bursting Joy*

Have you ever felt so happy that you thought you might burst? Maybe you actually got the Christmas gift at the top of your wishlist, or your grandparents surprised you for your birthday.

When have you felt so much happiness that your heart felt like it might burst?

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Even if you have experienced extreme happiness at some point, those feelings don't stay forever. Nothing we can do will keep that happy feeling in our hearts. Every feeling of "joy" like this eventually fades and ends up forgotten.

Read *Isaiah 55:1-2*. What do you think the prophet, Isaiah, was trying to tell the people of Israel?

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This call to Israel extends to us still today! Just like the Israelites, we often try to find joy in what we can buy or get for ourselves.

What things do you want to have or do that you feel would make you *truly happy?*

Read *Isaiah 55:6-11*. Instead of looking for things to satisfy us, what does Isaiah call us to do?

We must repent of our sins and seek after God! He is wiser than us, and His ways are above our understanding. God’s Word comes into our lives and produces eternal and spiritual fruit in us!

Read <sup>NEW VERSE</sup> *Isaiah 55:12*. What fruit does the Word of God produce in those who seek it?

\_\_\_\_\_ *and* \_\_\_\_\_.

This verse uses the pictures of life bursting into song and rejoicing to help us understand how powerful, deep, and satisfying the joy that comes from God is. When we seek joy in the things around us, we will always be frustrated and disappointed. But when we seek God, HE gives us **joy** that is overflowing and abundant! We will not only be satisfied, but we will burst with joy!

God gives us *joy* that could never come from ourselves.

When have you experienced the emptiness or sadness of something you thought would bring you joy but didn't?

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Especially around the Christmas season, we expect things to fill us with joy. We hope that Christmas music will lift us up with excitement, that seeing friends and loved ones will fill our hearts with satisfaction and love, and that people will give us gifts we really want instead of socks or trinkets that break immediately. But the joy you are searching for only comes from seeking God above all else.

What can you do to seek God today, and how can you continue seeking Him?

TODAY	CONTINUING IN THE FUTURE
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Today, thank God for the joy HE will give to you when you seek Him. Ask Him to help you want to seek Him and know Him better each day.

\*Find today’s BURSTING JOY gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

Especially around the holidays, when many people gather together with family and friends to celebrate, loneliness and sadness fill the hearts of others. Many people—maybe you included—don't have much family or can't travel to visit them. Then there are other times when, even in a huge gathering of people, we can still feel alone, unseen, and unloved. Whether this is a feeling you've never felt before or one you feel almost every day, you need the gift we're looking at today! Just like all the gifts God gives us, this gift is connected to specific truths about who God is.

Read *Micah 7:18-20*. What truths do you learn about God from these verses?

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We've already seen some connections to the Christmas story in the book of Micah. The connections in this passage may not seem quite so clear, but they are there! Micah points us to specific actions of God that reveal His character. There is no other god like our God! Micah used the names Abraham and Jacob to refer to the nation of Israel because they were the fathers of that nation. So now, let's take a closer look at how God truly showed faithfulness and steadfast love to Abraham, Jacob, and the whole nation that came from their family!

Read *Genesis 12:1-3 and 28:10-15*.  
What promises did God make to Abraham  
(Abram) AND his grandson, Jacob?

These men did not have easy lives where God's love and faithfulness were overwhelmingly clear to them all the time. God called Abraham to leave his relatives and home in order to live alone with his wife and servants in the land God would give to his descendants one day. Jacob's life was full of broken situations where deception and pride, including his own, hurt his family over and over again.





Eventually the descendants of these men, the Israelites, were indeed a HUGE nation of people. But they were enslaved in the land of Egypt! When the Israelites finally escaped Egypt, they rebelled against God and had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. They finally made it to the land God had promised Abraham, but the history of their nation shows non-stop conflict with other nations, captivity, and war. From Abraham to today, God's people have been tempted over and over to doubt God's faithfulness and love.

Read  *Lamentations 3:21-25*. What is true no matter what we feel or think?

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No matter how we feel or what is going on in our lives, we have hope because the Lord's steadfast love NEVER ceases or comes to an end. This gift of **steadfast love** is infinite and backed up by God's perfect faithfulness.

Read *John 3:16*. Why did God send Jesus, His one and only Son?

*Because He \_\_\_\_\_ us!*

Did you realize that Jesus was proof of God's faithfulness in His promises to Abraham and Isaac? Jesus came from the family of Abraham, and Jesus' dying for our sins provided the blessing to all nations that God promised would come through Abraham! Though Abraham and Jacob didn't get to see the fulfillment of God's promises in Jesus, we do. We have the privilege of being able to look at God's Word and see God's faithfulness. Because of this, we can have hope just like the author of Lamentations. Our God has given us His eternal, steadfast love in Jesus and continues to prove His love every day of our lives.

God gives us His *steadfast love* to help us  
in times that we feel alone or forgotten.

What have you learned today that can help you when you feel unloved or all alone?

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Today, praise God in prayer for His steadfast love. Ask God to help you remember the truth about His faithfulness and love when you feel alone or unloved.

\*Find today's STEADFAST LOVE gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

Remember the Pharisees from Day 7? The Law was meant to show the Israelites their need for God's mercy, but the Pharisees viewed the Law as a list to follow in order to perfectly please God on their own. Instead of delighting in God's Law as a way of obeying and knowing Him, they had made it a heavy, exhausting burden. They desperately needed the gift we will talk about today, but sadly, many of them were too proud to accept it.

Read *Matthew 12:1-2*. Why were the Pharisees upset with Jesus and His disciples at this time?

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The Pharisees took God's original design for the Sabbath—a day of rest—and twisted it to be a day of following many burdensome rules that did not allow people to truly rest. There were strict limits on gathering food to eat and even on how many steps the people were allowed to take! Since the disciples were hungry and picking heads of grain to eat, the Pharisees told Jesus that they were acting unlawfully by working on the Sabbath.

Read *Matthew 12:6-8*. What did Jesus say about the Sabbath?

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By focusing on the rules of the Law instead of its purpose, the Pharisees were again missing the point. Jesus and those following Him were not guilty of breaking Sabbath laws—they were living according to God's purpose behind the laws He had set up!

Read *Matthew 12:9-14*. What did Jesus say was lawful and right?

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Who could possibly be upset that a man had been healed? Yet because Jesus' healing of this man contradicted their teaching, the Pharisees were so angry they decided to find a way to destroy Jesus. Their priority of strictly following the Law had not brought them rest at all! Instead, it made them angry, wicked men who rejected the Son of God who had given them the Law in the first place.

Read  *Matthew 11:28 - 30*. Where does true rest come from?

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The Pharisees failed to find rest and actually created burdens for themselves by trying to DO all the right things. All they really needed to do was repent of their proud self-righteousness and come to Jesus. Then He would give them what they could never obtain by themselves—**rest**.

In Jesus, God has given us *true rest*.

Though you probably don't try to follow the Old Testament Law, it's possible that you still have burdens that are keeping you from finding rest in Jesus. Maybe you feel responsible to do all the right things so you're a good example. Maybe you feel like in order to be a good Christian, you need to be involved in every service opportunity possible. You could be burdened under the guilt of times when you have "failed" God by disobeying Him.

What burdens or heavy things are keeping you from finding rest?

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Jesus says that all you have to do is come to Him! We don't have to live in fear that our works will never be good enough to please Him. Though we do seek to obey Jesus, He doesn't require perfection from us because He already lived a perfect life and died in our place. He requires you to bring your burdens and lay them down at His feet. Then, you can experience true rest in Him!

Today, tell God about the burdens you feel in your life. Thank Him for giving you true rest when you come to Him.

\*Find today's TRUE REST gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

We've talked a good bit about the Pharisees and how they missed the point when they rejected Jesus. But the Pharisees weren't the only people who had to struggle with who Jesus was and what He had come to do. God's promise to send a Messiah looked very different from what many people in Israel thought their salvation would look like. Let's learn about this today.

Read *Hebrews 10:1-4*. What truth about the Old Testament sacrifices do these verses tell us?

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While they served as a reminder to the people that sin has consequences and requires payment, the sacrifices hadn't solved the problem! This is why God sent Jesus to earth in a physical body to live a perfect, sinless life in our place. Jesus' body would be the sacrifice that COULD pay for sin.

Read *Jeremiah 31:31-34*. What did God say about the old and the new covenants?

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Hundreds of years before Jesus was ever born, God explained His good plan to His people. He knew they could never keep His Law perfectly and that animal sacrifices could not take away their sin. This is why He would one day provide a new covenant, one of grace and forgiveness where God's Law would be written on the hearts of His people. In order to be part of this covenant, though, the people had to accept Jesus and believe His sacrifice paid for their sins.

Read KEY VERSES *Hebrews 10:11-14*. How was Jesus' sacrifice different from all the animal sacrifices that had been offered for hundreds of years?

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While the animal sacrifices for sin were made every year, over and over, Jesus made one sacrifice that put an end to sacrifices forever! After Jesus gave His life as the final sacrifice, no more sacrifices were needed because Jesus completely paid our sin debt in full. Nothing more is owed on our part, and Jesus’ work was accomplished.

Jesus’ sacrifice was the *final sacrifice* given for our sin.

Read *Hebrews 10:15-18*. Why are sacrifices no longer necessary?

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Jesus’ payment for our sin ended the old covenant God made with His people where sacrifices were required to cover sin. Instead, we are now under a new covenant of grace where Jesus’ blood covers our sin when we place our faith in Him for salvation. While the Israelites were required to follow the Law, we as believers in Jesus Christ now have the Holy Spirit who writes God’s Law on our hearts. This work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts helps us honor and obey the God who has saved us!

Hebrews 10:19-25 tells us that there is no debt left and no sacrifices for us to make in order to pay for our sin and secure God’s forgiveness—it is finished! Because this is true, we are called to draw near to God in faith, hold tightly to this hope Jesus has given us, encourage other believers to live for God as well, and share this hope with those who have never heard it.

Beside each response to God’s forgiveness, write a practical way you can personally respond in that way. One idea is filled in for you.

DRAW NEAR TO GOD	<i>memorize verses that remind me of God's promises</i>
HOLD ON TO HOPE	
ENCOURAGE BELIEVERS	
SHARE YOUR HOPE WITH OTHERS	

Today, thank God for giving Jesus as the perfect sacrifice to take away our sin. Ask Him to help you encourage others with the hope you have found in Jesus.

\*Find today’s SACRIFICE gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

Have you ever considered how much is possible if you work hard enough? In our world, “hustle” culture is praised as a way of pursuing wealth and comfort. If you work long and hard enough, you can earn just about anything—a car, house, trip around the world, or even a ride to Mars! For the most part, if you’re willing to put the work in, NOTHING is out of your reach.

Because so many of us think this way, it’s hard to accept the truth that our greatest need in this world cannot be bought or earned.

Unlike anything in this world that can be obtained if you have enough money or time, **salvation** can only be obtained through the grace of God. It is a gift far too costly for anyone to buy, too undeserved for anyone to earn, and yet offered freely to those who place their faith in Jesus. So how is this possible? Why would God offer us salvation when we are so undeserving and powerless? Why would God want to give us a gift like this when we have sinned against Him? Let’s answer these questions today!

Read *Romans 3:21-26*. What does the gift of salvation show us about God?

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The fact that God offers us salvation through His grace actually shows us His righteousness! So let’s talk about why this is true. God is holy, which means He is set apart from sin—He cannot sin or allow sin in His presence. If we were able to follow God’s Law perfectly and not sin, we would be able to earn our salvation. In fact, this is what the Pharisees tried to do. But this is impossible! We have all sinned and cannot meet the standard of God’s holiness.

What are some examples of how you have fallen short of God’s standard of holiness?

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The penalty for our sin is death and separation from God, but God doesn't want this to happen to us. Because He is holy, God cannot ignore our sin. Since He is perfectly just, God cannot let our penalty go unpaid. So instead of requiring us to pay for our sin (which we could never do anyway), God sent Jesus to live a perfect life without sin and to die in our place. Since Jesus paid for our sin, God can righteously offer us salvation! The only thing we have to do is accept God's gift by placing our faith in Jesus' work on our behalf.

*Salvation* is the free gift of God to us  
that we accept through faith.

Read *Romans 5:8-10*. Why did God do all of this?

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Though we cannot earn or buy this gift, we DO have to accept it on God's terms! It can be tempting to want to try and come to God on our own terms instead of by faith in Jesus. Maybe we try to make ourselves "better" before coming to God, or we try to prove we deserve God's gift in some way.

Read *Romans 10:9-13*. How do we accept this gift God offers to us?

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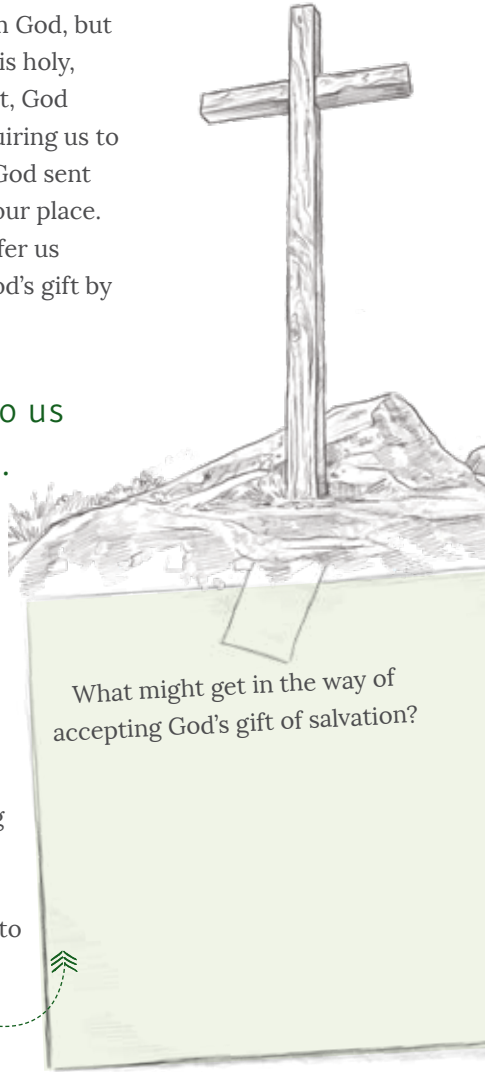
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It's that simple—confess that Jesus is Lord, believe in Him as your Savior from sin, and you will be saved. Nothing else is required. Praise God for His kindness to us!

Today, thank God for offering salvation to you as a gift. Ask Him to help you remember His love for you.

\*Find today's SALVATION gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.



We have talked about so many gifts God has given us through Jesus! Let's review just a bit before we continue looking at more of the many gifts God has given to us.

Fill in the gifts of God from Days 6-13.



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Great work! Now, let's continue learning about the gifts God has graciously showered upon us.

Read *Hebrews 1:1-2*. What has God done according to this passage?

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In this study, we have looked at several passages of Scripture that were messages God gave His people through prophets He sent to them. These prophets served God and the people for a time, but they were pointing God's people to an even better Word to come. Verse 2 tells us that now, God has spoken to us through His Son, Jesus!

While Jesus was on the earth, He preached the truth to all who would listen. He also showed them who God is and what He is like by the miracles and mighty works He performed. Jesus taught His disciples the truth and then sent them out to teach others. But this is not all! After Jesus went back to heaven to be with the Father, He sent the Holy Spirit to be our Helper as we seek to live for Him.

Read KEY VERSE *John 17:17*. What did Jesus pray that God would do?

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Before Jesus went to the cross to die for our sin, He prayed for us. That's right! Jesus prayed that God would preserve and help all believers. But then Jesus also prayed that we would be sanctified through the truth—God's Word.



Do you know what it means to be “sanctified”? Write your best guess below.

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Sanctification is a process that begins in us as soon as we place our faith in Jesus for salvation! We are sanctified as we learn the truth about God and become more like Jesus. This change continues to happen throughout our whole lives as we follow Jesus and seek to do His will. God’s true Word is where we learn how to grow and become more like Him!

God has given us *His Word* to help us grow  
and become more like Jesus.

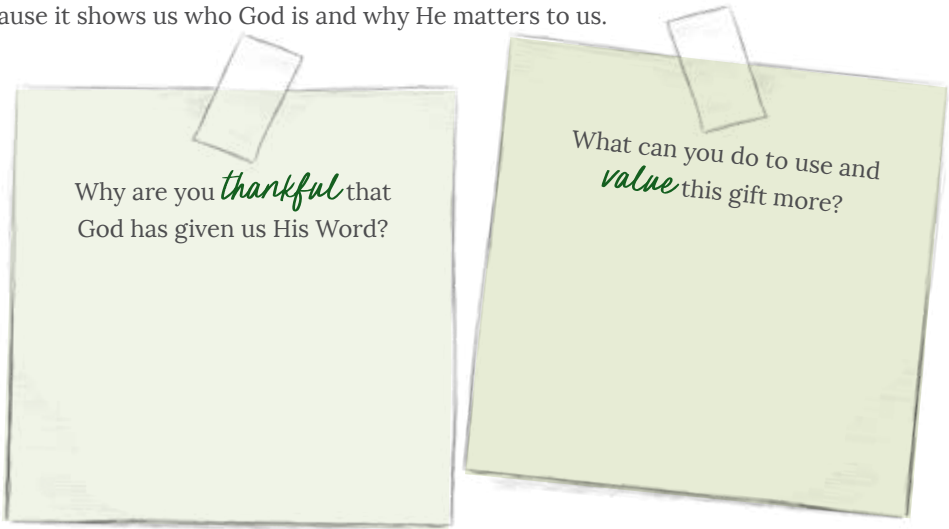


Read *2 Timothy 3:16-17*. What do these verses say about God’s Word?

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ALL Scripture is valuable and important in our growth! There is not one verse in the Bible that is unimportant or unnecessary. **God’s Word** is an extremely valuable gift because it shows us who God is and why He matters to us.



Today, ask God to help you remember that the Bible is one of His gifts to you. Thank Him for revealing Himself to you in this way.

\*Find today’s HIS WORD gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

As you've learned about the gifts God has graciously given to us, maybe you still haven't felt very loved. Yes, we know it's incredibly kind and loving of God to give us so many good gifts, but sometimes we don't remember these gifts. Sometimes we don't feel like they help us in the situations we face in everyday life. We know we're supposed to have hope, joy, peace, and rest, yet sometimes our hearts just can't get on board with the truth we know.

Read *Romans 8:1-4*. What is true of all believers in Christ Jesus?

These verses reaffirm truths that we have been learning all throughout our study. Then verse 4 points out something we haven't talked about yet. On Day 12 we learned that God gave us a new covenant through Jesus that involves God's Law being written on our hearts. This means we know the truth and what is right and wrong, because we now have the **Spirit of God** in our hearts.



This is what changes everything for us as Christians. We aren't like we were before Jesus saved us because we now have the Holy Spirit to help us walk with God and learn His truth. We no longer have to live according to the "flesh" or our sinful nature.

What have you seen change in your life because you have the Holy Spirit in your heart?



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The Holy Spirit helps us in so many ways! Some of these ways are pointing out when we are sinning against God, giving us wisdom to make right choices, and helping us understand the truth we read in God's Word!

Read *Key Verses Romans 8:15-17*. What else do we receive from the Spirit?

Just like loving parents who sometimes choose to welcome and adopt a child into their home, God has lovingly brought us into His family and made us His children. We aren't just brought into God's family to be ignored the rest of our lives. It's the exact opposite! From the moment we are saved, the Holy Spirit begins working in our hearts to assure us that we are loved and valued children of God.

Read *John 14:15-17 and 25-26*. What did Jesus say about the Holy Spirit?

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The Holy Spirit is our Helper! When we aren't sure what is true, the Spirit helps us know. If we need wisdom, we can pray for help, and the Spirit will guide us. At times when obeying God is hard, the Spirit gives us strength to do right. When our hearts are afraid, worried, unsure, or overwhelmed, the Spirit is there to remind us how much God loves us.

What do you need the Holy Spirit to help you with today?

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As we discussed at the beginning of this lesson, we have received many good gifts from God! Still we fall into fear, guilt, uncertainty, or even sadness at not feeling loved, accepted, or seen. It is in these times that we should pray and ask God to convince our hearts through His Spirit of what is true. The Spirit helps convince our minds and hearts of the truth we know but don't always feel to be true.

The *Holy Spirit* is God's gift to us to assure us of His love  
and strengthen us to live for Christ.

What truths do you know about God and your relationship to Him that don't always feel true? (Hint: Think back through what you have learned in this study!)

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Today, thank God for the gift of His Holy Spirit. Ask Him to help your heart believe what you know to be true.

\*Find today's HIS SPIRIT gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

Imagine it's Christmas morning, and you're finally opening gifts you've been staring at for days and weeks. There's one particular present you're confused about because it's not the shape of anything you asked for. When you rip off the wrapping paper, you are surprised to find a vacuum cleaner!

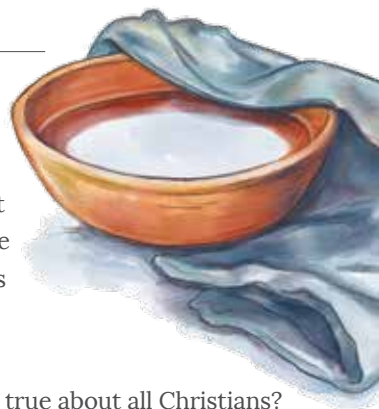
How would you feel if you were given a vacuum cleaner for Christmas?

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Maybe you would feel confused or disappointed. A vacuum isn't for you—it's really for the people around you who benefit when you keep the floors clean. A gift like this assumes you're not only using it just for yourself but also serving others. This is not usually the kind of gift we're hoping to get.



Read <sup>KEY VERSES</sup> *Romans 12:3-8*. What does this passage tell us is true about all Christians?

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We aren't saved and given gifts of grace by God so we can hoard them for ourselves! When we become Christians, we become part of God's family, the church.

Just like a body has many different parts that serve a specific purpose—eyes for seeing, noses for smelling, feet for walking, and so on—God's family is made up of many different people with different purposes, or gifts. We often refer to these gifts as **spiritual gifts** because they are given to us by God and look a little different than other gifts we've been given.

Looking back at the passage, how do you think the purpose of these spiritual gifts is different from the purpose of gifts we often ask for?

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These gifts have been given to us, not for our own uses or desires, but to **SERVE** the rest of the body that we are a part of! Your legs can't just decide to take the day off—then your body wouldn't be able to function well. In the same way, we have to use the gifts we're given because the body of Christ works and functions correctly when we're all using what God has given us.

God has given us *spiritual gifts* which we get to use  
to bless others and encourage them to grow.

Often, if we have an ability or talent, it can be tempting to show off or seek attention for that thing we are able to do. This is not the right attitude to have about spiritual gifts! Because the purpose of these gifts is serving others, our minds should be focused on others and not on ourselves.

Read *John 13: 3 - 5 and 12 - 15*. What lesson did Jesus want to teach His disciples?

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Jesus is our Master and Lord, and He served. Because of this, part of following Jesus and being a Christian is having this attitude of love and service towards others.

It might be difficult at first to know how to serve or what serving others looks like, and that's okay! It's all part of the process. It is only by learning to serve in many different ways that we can learn the specific ways God has gifted us to serve and show love to others.

What ways can you serve others in your home or at your church? (If you're not sure, talk to a parent, teacher, or pastor about service opportunities that would be open to you!)


AT HOME	AT CHURCH
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Today, thank God for giving you spiritual gifts to serve and love others with. Ask Him to give you a servant's heart like Jesus.

\*Find today's SPIRITUAL GIFTS gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

One of my favorite Christmas carols is “In the Bleak Midwinter.” Take a look at the lyrics of this beautiful song.

All these beautiful words create a picture in our minds that can help us understand our spiritual state before Jesus came and made so many good gifts from God available to us.



In the bleak midwinter  
Frosty wind made moan,  
Earth stood hard as iron,  
Water like a stone:  
Snow had fallen,  
Snow on snow, snow on snow,  
In the bleak midwinter,  
Long ago.

We saw on Day 6 that the sin of Adam and Eve plunged the entire world into sin. We no longer live in the perfect paradise God created. Instead, we live with brokenness all around us and even inside us. The Christmas hymn, “In the Bleak Midwinter,” can help us see this!

Read *Romans 5:12*. What came into this world as a result of sin?

*Sin brought* \_\_\_\_\_.

Christmas is not usually the time when we want to think about death. But, as the song at the beginning of this lesson reminds us, there are many symbols of death surrounding us during the Christmas season. In winter, many plants freeze and wither away, the darkness lasts longer than the light, and even our Christmas trees dry out and drop browned needles all over the floor. Still, all of these things point us to the hope we have despite death and darkness.

Read *Romans 5:17-21*. What good news brings us hope even when we’re surrounded by reminders of death?

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Christmas is a time when believers get to remember the freedom from death that Jesus won for us! In fact, this righteousness we have in Jesus leads to **eternal LIFE!**

Read *1 Corinthians 15:1-6*. What happened when Jesus died for us?

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Our Savior did not stay dead! On the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead, showing His power and victory over the sin and death that Adam had brought into the world.

Read <sup>KEY VERSES</sup> *1 Corinthians 15:20-22*. Why is Jesus Christ's resurrection good news for us?

If Jesus had not risen from the dead, we would be stuck in an eternal winter of darkness, sin, and death. The good news is that, just like Adam brought death to all mankind through his sin, Jesus brought life for all who believe in Him for salvation! Jesus was raised from the dead, and one day, we will be too.



Through Jesus, God gives us  
*Life* with Him that will never end.

What do you think victory over death and eternal life with Christ mean for you? Look up the verses listed below and record what you learn! An example is already done for you.

VERSE	WHAT IT SAYS	WHAT THAT MEANS FOR ME
<i>1 Corinthians 15:50-57</i>	<i>Death has no power over believers.</i>	<i>I don't need to fear death.</i>
<i>John 14:1-4</i>		
<i>Romans 8:10-14</i>		
<i>Colossians 3:1-4</i>		
<i>Revelation 21:1-7</i>		

Today, thank God for the gift of eternal life through Jesus. Ask Him to keep you from living in fear or dread of death, but to be joyful and encouraged because He has given you victory.

\*Find today's ETERNAL LIFE gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

Does your family get crafty at Christmas? I've made so many Christmas crafts, from coffee filter angels to toilet paper tube snowmen. The problem I always run into with crafts is not having a good example to follow. I can read instructions about how to put together a craft, but if I don't have an example to look at and follow, I'm almost certain to fail.

Do you usually find examples helpful when you're trying to make or do something new? Why or why not?

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Read <sup>KEY VERSE</sup> *Philippians 4:9*. What did the Apostle Paul want the Christians in Philippi to do?

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Paul was writing to these believers to encourage them in their faith. Paul had been following Jesus faithfully, and because of this, he was a great example for them to follow!

Did you realize that God gives us examples in Scripture to follow too? It's true! Let's check out a passage that tells us about some.

Read *Hebrews 11:4-7*. Who do these verses tell us about, and what did they do that's an example for us?

*Person*

*What They Did*

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Maybe you are familiar with some of the stories in Hebrews 11. We already talked about Abraham and Jacob on Day 10. Did you realize that God not only used the stories of these men in His plan but also continues using their lives and their families' lives to teach us the truth about Himself?



Now, these people were not perfect by any means—they lied, cheated, stole, forgot God’s faithfulness, and rebelled against His plan at times. Yet they are **examples** to us because they repented of their sin, believing God would forgive as He promised and still use them.

Read *Hebrews 11: 32 - 38*. What hard things did some of these believers experience because of their faith in God and His promises?

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There are more examples than we can count of people who God used because—though they were imperfect people—they trusted in God’s promises and plans. Many of them died before ever seeing God’s promise to send Jesus come to pass. But that didn’t keep them from believing God and trusting Him to be faithful in their lives. These believers were certain of God’s faithfulness, and the way they lived their lives showed their faith was real.

God has given us examples of *godliness*  
to encourage us as we live for Him.

Read *Hebrews 12:1 - 2*. Who is the ultimate example we look to and follow? Why?

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The greatest example of faithfulness and obedience God ever gave to us was Jesus Himself! Jesus obeyed God the Father in coming to earth to die for our sins. He reached out to sinners, healed the diseased, and washed His disciples’ feet. He humbled Himself and endured the pain, humiliation, and terror of dying on the cross and experiencing separation from God. Jesus obeyed His Father perfectly—submitting to His plan and trusting that His way was right and best. This is why we look to JESUS as we seek to live this life for God’s glory.

In what ways does the example of Jesus encourage you to obey and submit to God?

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Today, thank God for the godly examples He has gifted us with. Ask Him to help you be faithful to Him in your life.

\*Find today’s GODLY EXAMPLES gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

As we have already learned, true gifts are undeserved and unpaid for, which makes them extremely valuable and worthy of appreciation. When we receive gifts, it is right and appropriate to thank the person who has shown us kindness in this way. Maybe your parents have taught you that after opening a gift, you should look the giver in the eyes and thank them.

We have learned so much about the gracious gifts God has given us! So what should our response be to these wonderful things? How do we show our gratitude and thanks to God for the wonderful, kind gifts He has given to us?

Read *Colossians 3:12-14*. What should our lives as God's chosen children look like?

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Just like how we put on clothes that are appropriate for our activities for the day, we should "put on" characteristics and attitudes that are appropriate for our lives as children of God. We have been given the gifts of salvation, love, forgiveness, rest, joy, and peace! So, we should interact with other people with compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, and love.

Read KEY VERSES *Colossians 3:15-17*.

What should our attitude toward God be?

What do you think it means for the peace of Christ to *rule* in our hearts?



In order for the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts, the truth that we are at peace with God (Day 8) should impact all our thoughts, feelings, and desires. When a king rules a country, he has the right to lead it and the duty to defend it. For Christ to

rule in our hearts, we must give Him the leadership of our **hearts** and trust that He will lead and defend us. In allowing Christ to rule our hearts with His peace, we are surrendering the deepest part of ourselves to Him. This is not only a gift we can give back to God in thankfulness, but it is also a comfort to us!

One gift we can give to God is our *hearts*—  
the center of who we are.

So why should we surrender our hearts to Christ's leadership and protection? Let's consider the words of Samuel, an Old Testament prophet, to God's people when they repented of their sin against God and asked him to pray for them.

Read *1 Samuel 12: 24*. Why did Samuel tell the people to serve God with their hearts?

Samuel assured them that God would not forget or leave them because He had made them His people and promised to love them. Then, Samuel tells them to simply turn from following their sin TO following God with all their hearts because of the great things God had done for them. Now think about that for a minute. Has God done anything great for you? I don't know anything about you, yet I KNOW God has done great things for you. That's just who He is!

What great things has God done for you? (*Think through the gifts He has given you!*)





1 Peter 3:14-16 tells us that when Jesus Christ is the One ruling our hearts, it will show! With His peace guiding us, we can be confident and unafraid when people criticize or persecute us for following Jesus. We will also be able to answer the questions of people who ask us why we have hope in hard or hurtful situations. Our kindness, confidence, and love in all these situations will show unbelievers the truth about who Jesus Christ is and what He has done in our lives.

Today, thank God for all the great things He has done for you. Ask Him to help you show gratitude through your commitment to Him in your heart and life.

\*Find today's OUR HEARTS gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

Have you ever tried to train an animal to obey commands? Maybe you've tried to teach your dog to come when you call or walk next to you off-leash. The training that goes into teaching this obedience takes a lot of time and patience because you're not just teaching the animal to obey—you're gaining their trust and loyalty. Once you have established trust, it's much easier to train an animal in other aspects of obedience as well. Their obedience naturally follows their loyalty to you.

This is similar to the way our hearts work. What we give our hearts to receives our loyalty, trust, and devotion. When our hearts are devoted to something, our actions and desires will go after that thing as well. Let's see what God's Word teaches us about this!

Read *Matthew 7: 24 - 27*. What was Jesus teaching about?

In these verses, Jesus tells a parable—an earthly story that teaches heavenly truth—to help us understand what it looks like to accept or reject His true teaching.



Who does the *wise* man represent in this parable?

Who does the *foolish* man represent?

We have two options when we learn the truth about Jesus. We can accept the truth, give our hearts to God, and build our lives on the foundation of what He says, or we can reject the truth and build our lives on the unstable, shifting sand of our own ideas and desires.

People build their lives on many other things instead of the truth of God's Word. Money, sports, acceptance, selfishness, hobbies, achievements, experiences, and even the love or acceptance of others can all be things we build our lives on instead of truth. If we have chosen to pursue or love anything more than God in our lives, that could be the shifting sand we're building on.

What problems come from building your life on anything other than God's truth?

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If we're building our lives on anything other than God, we haven't truly given our hearts to Him like we discussed in the last lesson! This is because when we give our hearts to God, everything else goes with it—our loves, desires, goals, plans, loyalty, and our **obedience**.

When we give our hearts to God,  
our *obedience* naturally follows.

Read <sup>KEY VERSE</sup> » *James 1:22*. What command does this verse give us?

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We can read our Bibles every day, go to church whenever the doors are open, sing in worship, and tell everyone that Jesus is the reason for the season without ever truly obeying God! This happens when we are “hearers” and not “doers.” We can know that honoring God in our hearts and following His truth for our lives is right, yet we're not obedient until we start building our lives on this truth. The good news is, if Christ truly rules our hearts, we will WANT to obey Him and build our lives on His Word.

What does obeying God's Word look like for you today?

What steps can you take to build your life on God's truth and obey Him in what you know He asks of you?

Today, thank God for offering you a firm foundation for your life in His Word. Ask Him to help you be an obedient doer and not just a hearer.

\*Find today's OUR OBEDIENCE gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

In your own words, how would you explain what “worship” is to someone who has never heard that word or idea?

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The Christmas story involves a lot of worshiping! The shepherds, wise men, Simeon and Anna, and even other stories we haven’t looked at in this study describe people worshiping Jesus or worshiping God the Father because of Jesus. We hear about worship in church, hold worship services at church, and maybe even have family worship time at home. With all these examples of worship and opportunities to participate in it, sometimes we still don’t quite know what worship is or why we do it. So today, let’s find out!

Read *Mark 7:1-7*. What did Jesus point out as vain or worthless worship?

While following the Law was not a problem, Jesus was pointing out that this was not enough. The Jews were following the commands of the Law and seemed like they were honoring Jesus in their actions, yet their hearts were far from Him. They were honoring and serving their own man-made rules. This, Jesus said, was worthless and meaningless worship.

Read <sup>VERSES</sup> *John 4:23-24*. What did Jesus describe as true worship?

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True **worship** is directed to God in spirit and truth. All of us have a soul which the Bible also refers to as our spirit. This idea of worshiping God “in spirit” involves our hearts and souls! It’s not just our outward actions, words, or singing that are worship—it’s honoring and respecting God in our attitude, loves, desires, and thoughts as well.

How do you think truth is involved in our worship of God?

Like the religious rulers who made up their own extra laws to worship God, there are many people who “worship” versions of God they have made up in their own minds or heard others talk about. They believe that being kind to everyone is what will secure them God’s favor and a place in heaven. Maybe they believe that God just wants them to do all the right things like the Jews of Jesus’ time believed. This can happen when we rely on our own ideas of who God is instead of believing the truth about who God is based on the Bible.

Can you think of any ways that people (or maybe even you) have worshiped their own idea of who God is?

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In order to worship God in truth, we have to agree with God’s true revelation of Himself in His Word. If we’re worshiping a version of God that disagrees with Scripture, we’re not worshiping God in truth.

Read *Hebrews 12:28-29*. Why is it important to worship God correctly?

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We must give acceptable worship—worship that comes from our hearts and is informed by truth—to God because of who He is! This is true worship that honors God.

Giving our *worship* to God means honoring Him  
in our hearts as well as our lives.

What truth about God can you worship Him for in your heart and actions today?  
What will you do to worship Him?

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Today, thank God for telling us the truth about Himself in His Word. Ask Him to help you worship Him by honoring Him in your heart and believing the truth about Him.

\*Find today’s OUR WORSHIP gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.



Have you ever felt like you couldn't trust someone? Maybe you've overheard someone talking about information you had asked them to keep private or someone told you a story you later found out was not entirely true. It doesn't feel good to realize someone is unworthy of our trust.

While there are times that we learn someone is untrustworthy, there are also times when we see that our trust in someone is well placed.

Read <sup>KEY VERSES</sup> *Proverbs 3:5-6*. What do these verses say about our trust?

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We should give our **trust** unreservedly to God. There is no need to withhold any trust or keep back any part of ourselves. Instead of relying on our own understanding or wisdom, we should look to God. When we do this, we can be sure that He will guide and direct us.

What kinds of things do you think we need to trust God with?

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Read *Hebrews 13:8*. What is one more reason to give all our trust to God?

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Jesus never changes. He is faithful when others fail, true when people are false, and steadfast when others waver or falter. He has saved us and given us certain hope, and this is why we can trust Him in every part of our lives.

There will be times when you're tempted to doubt God instead of trusting Him. Whether it's losing someone you love, the betrayal of a friend, or some other circumstance you would never choose for your life, we all go through times of doubt when we don't know if we believe in God's goodness or control in our lives.



Have you ever experienced a time like this? If so, what was going on?

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Read *Romans 8:28-39*. List the truths you find about God in these verses that can strengthen your trust in Him even in hard situations or unthinkable circumstances.



When we give our *trust* to God,  
we acknowledge His goodness  
and control in our lives.



What God is doing in our lives is always good because He is making us more like Jesus! This is why we can be joyful through hard times or in circumstances we don't understand. When we trust Him in these things, our faith grows, and we become more like Christ.

What can you trust God with today?

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Today, thank God for His goodness and love. Ask Him to help you trust in these truths and depend on Him in every part of your life.

\*Find today's OUR TRUST gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

Who are the people you love? Who are the people that love you? Maybe those two groups overlap a bit and the same names would appear on both lists. It probably doesn't surprise you to know that love is a gift we can give and receive.

Read *Matthew 22:37-40*. What are the two greatest commandments?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

**Love** is not an option, it's a matter of obedience!

Read *1 John 4:7-8*.

Where does love come from in the first place?

Love is not something we produce in ourselves or just feel randomly. Love comes from God because God IS love. This means that all God does is loving, and when we go against God in any way, whether it's acting or thinking sinfully, we are automatically being unloving.

Read *1 John 4:9-10*. What did God do that showed just how loving He is?

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God sent Jesus to people who did not love Him in order to save them. Jesus was the proof of God's great love for this world, yet He was betrayed and condemned to death. When these people saw Jesus, they ignored the love of God and instead focused on all the things they didn't like about Jesus' message. But there were some who recognized the truth about Jesus and accepted God's love into their lives, gaining the ability to love Him and others!

Read *1 John 4:11-16*. Why should we love others?

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We give our *love* to God and others  
as a grateful response to the love He showed us.

Read <sup>KEY VERSES</sup> *John 4:19-21*. What must be true if we love God?

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If we claim to love God, our lives should also show that we love Christians specifically. In fact, these verses tell us that if we don't love them, there's no way we love God. When we love God, we will love other people. It's just the way it works.

This love is not warm and fuzzy feelings for people, although there is nothing wrong with those feelings. The love God shows to us and then puts in our hearts through His Spirit is deeper and stronger than warm feelings.

Read *John 15:12-13*. What kind of love does God want us to give to others?

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The love God has shown to us through Jesus is love that sacrifices everything—even if it means giving up our lives. Of course, you may not ever be in a situation where you have to actually give up your life for someone else, but the idea here is sacrificial, serving love. Instead of warm, fuzzy feelings or even infatuation with someone, real love looks for needs to meet and then serves selflessly.

What are some ways that you, with God's help, can selflessly love others this week?

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When we decide to obey God and love people, it's amazing what He does in our hearts! Just wait—when you begin selflessly serving others, you'll see that the feelings of love will follow. This is not our own doing, but the work and grace of God in our hearts.

Today, ask God to forgive you for the ways you have been unloving to specific people. Thank Him for His gift of love to you and for helping you give that gift of love to Him and others in return.

\*Find today's OUR LOVE gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

We talked in our last lesson about how selfless love means sacrifice. While we discussed what that might look like when we're loving the people around us, it's harder to imagine what sacrifices God could possibly desire from us. He doesn't need anything!

Read <sup>VERSE</sup> *Romans 12:1*. What does this verse say about the sacrifice we should make?

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The author of Romans, the Apostle Paul, appeals to believers—strongly urging us to give our bodies, and therefore, our **lives**, to God as a living sacrifice! What does this mean?

Unlike the sacrifice that Jesus offered for us in giving up His life to pay for our sin, the sacrifice we should make as believers is one of gratitude! Since Jesus died for us, we are called to LIVE for Him. This sacrifice is one of action, growth, and determination. We are motivated and strengthened by gratitude for our salvation so that there is no other option for our lives than to use them in service of our God. As Paul says, this is part of our worship of God!

The gift of our *physical bodies* in service to God is an appropriate and right sacrifice for us.

Read *Romans 12:2*. What needs to happen in our minds so that our bodies are acceptable sacrifices to God?

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The idea of being conformed to the world is like pressing soft clay into a mold. The clay takes on the shape of whatever you press it into! In the same way, if we allow our minds to be pressed into the world's way of thinking, our minds become conformed to the sin, lies, and selfishness of the world. This is a warning to us!



What are some ways the world might shape our minds and thoughts to go against God?

The world tells us things like “follow your heart” which makes us believe our feelings matter more than God’s truth. Maybe you’ve heard the lie that you can “live your truth” even if it clearly goes against the truth we read in God’s Word. The world will even try to teach you that your happiness is most important, even if you have to be selfish, unkind, or untruthful to get it. Instead of being squished and molded into the shape of the world, our minds need to be transformed and renewed by God’s Word. When our minds are shaped and formed by the Bible, the ways we use our bodies and lives will follow the good will of God for us.

Read *1 Corinthians 6:19-20*. Why does what we do with our bodies matter?



Our bodies are not ours to do with as we please! Jesus saved our souls, but He has also redeemed and paid for our physical bodies. The Holy Spirit lives within all believers, and therefore, our bodies are temples—places of worship and reverence. God values our bodies highly and declares that we are His precious possessions. This is why what we do with our lives and bodies matters!

Read the actions below and come up with a God-honoring way to use your body instead!

WORLDLY ACTIONS	ACTIONS THAT GLORIFY GOD
-unkind texts or direct messages	
-slapping or hitting	
-punching walls	
-speaking in a crude way	
-singing immoral song lyrics	
-acting immorally	
-taking God's name in vain	

Today, thank God for redeeming your soul AND body through Jesus’ sacrifice. Ask Him to help you live for and honor Him in your body.

\*Find today’s OUR LIVES gift sticker and add it to the manger on pages 4-5.

Merry Christmas! You have faithfully worked through this study, and now it's time to celebrate all the knowledge you have gained and truth you have learned. Before you finish this study, though, let's review the gifts we discovered in the Christmas story!

Explain in your own words what a gift is. (Check out Day 1 if you need a reminder!)



What is the best example we have of a true gift? Explain your answer.

What gift did *Mary* give to God?

What gift did *Joseph* give to God? (Review Days 2 and 3 if you can't remember.)

Why did the *shepherds* give their worship and praise to God? (Check out Day 4 if you need a reminder!)

What about the wise men's gifts showed the truth about who Jesus was and what He came to do? (Look back at Day 5 if you need to!)

Choose two gifts God has given to us through Jesus and explain why they are good gifts. (Hint: Review Days 6–18.)

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

What is one gift you can give to God that you hadn't thought of or understood before?  
(Review Days 19–24 if you need to!)

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Let's look at one more truth you can take with you as you live your life for God's glory, not only at Christmas but also throughout the year.

Read <sup>KEY VERSES</sup> *Romans 11: 33 - 36*. What truths about God do these verses teach us?

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There is no gift great enough to repay God's overwhelmingly kind and *good gifts* to us.

All we see and know have come from God, the Creator, who made everything and keeps it all going. He gives us the breath in our lungs and the salvation of our souls. We are indebted to this gracious Lord of all. Instead of trying to “pay God back” in some way, which isn't possible anyway, we get to live our lives in gratitude and thankfulness to Him. We can serve Him with our lives and share the good news of the free gift of salvation with others!

What can you do to spread this good news right now and in the coming year?

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As you celebrate Christmas, I hope you find glory and rejoice in the Christmas story—the proof of God's infinite love for us.

Today, thank God for His kindness and grace to you. Ask Him to help you serve Him with your life and always be thankful for the gifts He has given you.



