

4-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

LIFEWAY GIRLS

Love Came Down

**AN ADVENT STUDY
FOR TEEN GIRLS**



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FOR TEEN GIRLS**



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We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review Lifeway's doctrinal guideline, please visit www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

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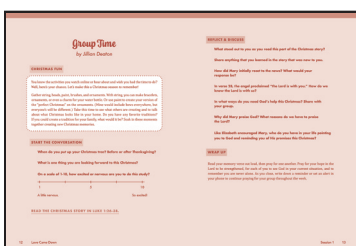
How to Use this Study

WELCOME!

We're so glad you've chosen to do this study! *Love Came Down* is a four-session study in which we see how true love came down to earth through Jesus's birth in Luke 2.

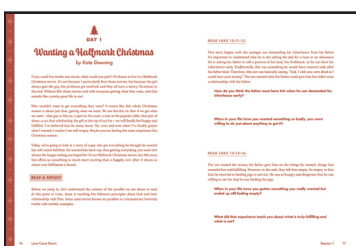
GETTING STARTED

Because we believe discipleship happens best in community, we encourage you to do this study together in a group setting. Or, if you're doing this alone, consider enlisting a friend or two to go through it at the same time. This will give you friends to pray and connect with over coffee or through text so you can chat about what you're learning.



GROUP TIME

Each session begins with a Group Time that allows you to begin your week studying the story of Christ's birth in Luke 2. You can use the questions and prompts provided to help you internalize and apply what you've read. If you're doing this alone, maybe ask a friend or your mom to do this part alongside you!



PERSONAL STUDY

Each week features three days of personal study to help you trace the hope and love of the gospel found throughout the Bible. You'll find questions and activities to help you understand and apply the text. Feel free to highlight or add notes to help your study process.

Is It Christmas Yet?

Or maybe you're thinking, *Can we just skip Christmas?* My feelings toward Christmas have varied from year to year. I've had difficult years when everything felt so uncertain, and I've had years when I set up my Christmas tree in October—I couldn't wait to start the traditions and blast "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas."

Where is your heart this Christmas? Take a minute to honestly evaluate how you're feeling about the season ahead. Circle the gifts below that best describe your true Christmas spirit.

12 GIFTS



Stressed about
Giving Gifts



Feeling Lonely
this Christmas



Christmas Music
Playing Since October



Excited for
Christmas Morning



Wishing for a
Different Christmas



Eager to
Give Gifts



Peppermint Hot
Chocolate Every Day



Hoping for a Simple
Christmas this Year



I Am Buddy the Elf



Dreaming of a
White Christmas



I Am Scrooge



Feeling Grinchy,
Festive Decorations
Make Me Nauseous

Whether you're dreading the season or so ready for Christmas, this Bible study is for you. Why? Because the gospel is for you.

For the longest time, I viewed Christmas as a celebration of Jesus coming to earth (which it is!). Celebrating salvation and remembering the gospel? That felt more like an Easter thing. But what is the gospel? The gospel is the good news that when there was no way for us to earn God's love, He sent love to us through His Son, Jesus. Jesus is the hope of salvation as He sacrificed His perfect life on a cross. We know the story doesn't end there, because He came back to life defeating sin and death forevermore. That is the gospel!

When we couldn't get to God, He came to us.

Call it a Christian cliché, but Jesus is the best gift that we have ever been given or could ever receive. That means if you have experienced the love of Jesus, you have everything you could possibly need to find joy, peace, and hope this Christmas. But if you miss His invitation to know and love Him, you will miss the whole point.

You might not be able to choose the kind of Christmas you will have this year. But you do get to choose how you will walk with Jesus, celebrate what He has done for you, and respond in love to those around you.

Friend, don't miss what Jesus has for you this Christmas! He has all the love you're searching for, and He doesn't want you to just keep it for yourself. Are you ready to jump into this Bible study with open hands and a willing heart? Let's get started!

Merry Christmas!

Amanda Mejias

Brand Specialist, Lifeway Girls



SESSION 1

Where's the Love this Christmas?



Intro

by Jillian Deaton

In our first group time together, we'll look at Luke 1:26-38. In this passage, it seems as if Mary has her life all laid out. She is engaged to Joseph, and in society's eyes, she is doing all the "right" things. I wonder how she will respond when life begins to change in ways she doesn't expect.

When the angel Gabriel enters this passage, he addresses Mary as a favored woman. At this point, Mary has not received her assignment as Jesus's mother or done anything to deserve the title of favored in the eyes of the reader (and possibly in her own view as well), yet the angel proclaims that she is favored.

The angel continues, "The Lord is with you" (v. 28). I want us to pause and read that again: "The Lord is with you." There are times when we may question if the Lord is with us. But we have the comfort of Scripture to remind us that the Lord is with us, and He is near. The Lord's nearness is not dependent on what we do or don't do.

Romans 8:38-39 says it this way:

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

— ROMANS 8:38-39

If you need a little more convincing, we see throughout Scripture that the Lord is with us, and He will never leave or abandon us (Deut. 31:8). We can trust that God is trustworthy, reliable, and dependable.

But in Luke 1, we see that Mary was troubled by this statement and wondered at this greeting from the angel. Angels popping in to bring messages from the Lord is not a common or ordinary occurrence. Gabriel is sent by God to deliver a message to Mary, and she is told that she is favored and the Lord is with her.

We don't know what prompted Gabriel to expand on his message, but he did: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God" (v. 30). Gabriel began by reminding Mary to not be afraid before putting her favor in perspective. She had found favor with God—the One whose opinion truly matters. After Gabriel encouraged her to not be afraid and centered her perspective on God, he announced her assignment. I believe it was done in this order for a reason, like the pep talk before the game.

As we will continue to read, Mary will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and His name will be Jesus. It may feel like we skipped a few steps. Didn't we just say that Mary was a virgin?

Now it's being revealed that she will become pregnant and have a son (talk about a quick gender reveal), and she is given His name, Jesus. In Matthew 1:21, an angel of the Lord tells Joseph that His name will be Jesus because He will save His people from their sins. Mary was just told that she will bring forth the Savior of the world. Her Son is the long-awaited Messiah, the fulfillment of many prophecies, the answer to their prayers.

This revealed plan for Mary to give birth to the Savior of the world is an answer to many people's prayers asking God for a King, a Helper, and a Savior out of their oppression. This is God answering yes. God is giving His one and only Son as an answer to our prayers.

Everything that was revealed is profound. It takes time to process when big news—good or difficult—is shared. This is huge news. Mary asked a very practical question of how this could be since she was a virgin. I love Mary's question here. She had a lot to digest from what the angel had just revealed to her. Mary heard her assignment and recognized the magnitude of it. Her question didn't seem to denounce anything that the angel had proclaimed to be true. She wasn't knocking down anything mentioned but questioning the logistics. The angel answered her and allowed her to see by God's power and the Holy Spirit how this would happen.

This echoes true today. By God's power and the Holy Spirit within us, God can use us to do His perfect will for His glory and to build His kingdom. I love how the angel, Gabriel, gives the example of her relative, Elizabeth, taking that minute for Mary to reflect and remember how God has done the impossible before.

A little bit about Elizabeth: She's older in age and has never had a baby. Now that she is older, it seems impossible in everyone's eyes, yet she is six months pregnant.

"For nothing will be impossible with God."

– LUKE 1:37

I want this to ring true in our hearts and minds over and over. We may see things from our own limited perspective, but God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and always present. God is greater than we can think or imagine. Nothing is impossible for Him. This should bring us comfort. Our God who is all-knowing, all-powerful, and always present loves each of us so much that He sent His only Son to die in our place to allow us to have a relationship with Him. He loves you that much. You are worth that much!

Mary answers back, "I am the Lord's servant. . . . May it happen to me as you have said" (v. 38). This is a beautiful response. She went from being confused about the logistics to accepting it just as he said. This transition is a shift toward hope for the fulfillment of God's words. We can acknowledge what is happening and still rest in perfect peace that God is fully in control and it will happen just as the Lord has said.

MEMORY VERSE

It's so important to not just read Scripture but to move it from your head to your heart. Then, when you need it most, God's Word is available to you. Throughout this study, we will focus on memorizing Isaiah 9:6, a prophecy about the coming birth of Jesus.

For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

– ISAIAH 9:6

Group Time

by Jillian Deaton

CHRISTMAS FUN

You know the activities you watch online or hear about and wish you had the time to do? Well, here's your chance. Let's make this a Christmas season to remember!

Gather string, beads, paint, brushes, and ornaments. With string, you can make bracelets, ornaments, or even a charm for your water bottle. Or use paint to create your version of the "perfect Christmas" on the ornaments. (Mine would include bows everywhere, but everyone's will be different.) Take this time to see what others are creating and to talk about what Christmas looks like in your home. Do you have any favorite traditions? If you could create a tradition for your family, what would it be? Soak in these moments together creating new Christmas memories.

START THE CONVERSATION

When do you put up your Christmas tree? Before or after Thanksgiving?

What is one thing you are looking forward to this Christmas?

On a scale of 1-10, how excited or nervous are you to do this study?

1		5		10
A little nervous.				So excited!

READ THE CHRISTMAS STORY IN LUKE 1:26-38.

REFLECT & DISCUSS

What stood out to you as you read this part of the Christmas story?

Share anything that you learned in the story that was new to you.

How did Mary initially react to the news? What would your response be?

In verse 28, the angel proclaimed “the Lord is with you.” How do we know the Lord is with us?

In what ways do you need God’s help this Christmas? Share with your group.

Why did Mary praise God? What reasons do we have to praise the Lord?

Like Elizabeth encouraged Mary, who do you have in your life pointing you to God and reminding you of His promises this Christmas?

WRAP UP

Read your memory verse out loud, then pray for one another. Pray for your hope in the Lord to be strengthened, for each of you to see God in your current situation, and to remember you are never alone. As you close, write down a reminder or set an alert in your phone to continue praying for your group throughout the week.

*Silent Night,
Holy Night*



DAY 1

Wanting a Hallmark Christmas

by Kate Downing

If you could live inside any movie, what would you pick? I'd choose to live in a Hallmark Christmas movie. It's not because I particularly love those movies, but because the girl always gets the guy, the problems get resolved, and they all have a merry Christmas in the end. Without fail, these movies end with everyone getting what they want, and that sounds like a pretty good life to me!

Who wouldn't want to get everything they want? It seems like this whole Christmas season is about just that, getting what we want. We are fed this lie that if we get what we want—that guy to like us, a spot on the team, a seat at the popular table, that pair of shoes, a car, that scholarship, the gift at the top of our list—we will finally feel happy and fulfilled. I've believed that lie many times. Yet, over and over when I've finally gotten what I wanted, I realize I am still empty. Maybe you are feeling the same emptiness this Christmas season.

Today, we're going to look at a story of a guy who got everything he thought he wanted but still wasn't fulfilled. He learned the hard way that getting everything you want isn't always the happy ending you hoped for. It's no Hallmark Christmas movie, but this story line offers us something so much more exciting than a happily ever after. It shows us where true fulfillment is found.

READ & REFLECT

Before we jump in, let's understand the context of the parable we are about to read. At this point in Luke, Jesus is teaching His followers principles about God and their relationship with Him. Jesus used stories known as parables to communicate heavenly truths with earthly examples.

READ LUKE 15:11-12.

This story begins with the younger son demanding his inheritance from his father. It's important to understand that he is not asking his dad for a loan or an allowance. He is asking his father to sell a portion of his land, his livelihood, so he can have his inheritance early. Traditionally, this was something he would have received only after his father died. Therefore, this son was basically saying, "Dad, I wish you were dead so I could have your money." The son wanted what his father could give him but didn't want a relationship with the father.

How do you think the father must have felt when his son demanded his inheritance early?

When in your life have you wanted something so badly, you were willing to do just about anything to get it?

READ LUKE 15:13-16.

The son wasted the money his father gave him on the things he wanted, things that sounded fun and fulfilling. However, in the end, they left him empty. So empty, in fact, that he resorted to feeding pigs to survive. He was so hungry and desperate that he was willing to eat the slop he was feeding the pigs.

When in your life have you gotten something you really wanted but ended up still feeling empty?

What did that experience teach you about what is truly fulfilling and what is not?

READ LUKE 15:17-19.

The phrase “came to his senses” in verse 17 is a Hebrew phrase that means “repented.”¹ The son realized the sin he had committed against his father. Repentance is “a complete change of orientation involving a judgment upon the past and a deliberate redirection for the future.”²

How did the son practice repentance in these verses?

READ LUKE 15:20-24.

At this time in culture, it was unheard of for an elderly man to run. Even more unheard of was a father who had been so dishonored by his son offering forgiveness. However, this father not only ran to meet his son in his repentance—he also freely offered him forgiveness.

Look up the definition of the word “compassion.” Then, rewrite verse 20 and replace the word “compassion” with the definition.

How have you seen God meet you with compassion and forgiveness when you have repented of sin?

How does the father’s response to the return of his son help you better understand God’s response to you when you repent and return to Him?

The son was convinced that if he could get what he wanted, he would feel fulfilled. He cared more about what he wanted from his dad than what his dad wanted for him. It’s so tempting to make this time of year about what we want from others or even from God and, in turn, totally miss out on what God wants for us.

God wants us to turn from our sin, return to Him, and experience the love, forgiveness, and fulfillment found in a relationship with Him. He is the Father who sees us in our sin and longing, waits for our repentance, and runs to welcome us into His forgiveness.

RESPOND

Write out a list of things you want from God in this season.

Examine your heart. Without a relationship with God, all the things you just listed will leave you empty in the end.

Write the word “empty” next to any of the things you want more than you want a relationship with God.

Knowing your heavenly Father is waiting to give you what will really bring fulfillment, how can you follow in the repentant footsteps of the younger son in Luke 15?

PRAY

PRAISE: Praise God for being the Father who wants more for you than you want from Him.

REPENT: Confess anything in your life that you are wanting from God more than you are wanting His presence.

ASK: Bring the longings of your heart to Him as your loving Father.

YIELD: Surrender your wants to Him, trusting that what He wants for you is the best gift you could receive.



DAY 2

Trying to Be Good this Christmas

by Anna Archer

Have you ever had the most delicious cup of hot chocolate? I'm talking milk (not water), tiny marshmallows, whipped cream, and little peppermint flakes. Now picture it in the cutest Christmas mug Target has to offer while sitting beside a fire and watching it snow outside. Dreamy, right? Unfortunately, I wouldn't know. I live in the Deep South (aka, an area of the country where there's a pretty good chance you can wear short sleeves on Christmas Day any given year). But let's dream together—maybe make yourself a cup of your own and let's dive in!

READ & REFLECT

READ MATTHEW 23:25-28.

Before we break down what Jesus is saying, let's look at who He's talking to. Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. This group of religious leaders held significant authority and influence in Jewish society. They were known for being strict and no nonsense. We see Jesus criticize the Pharisees several times in the Bible, including Matthew 6:5:

"Whenever you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward."

Pharisees were known to pray loudly in public places and make a show of their worship. Jesus saw through to their hearts, pointing out that worship as a performance put on for others to see isn't really worship at all.

What do you think Jesus means when He says, "Truly I tell you, they have their reward"?

Those who pray for the sake of being seen and praised by those who are watching have already received the recognition they seek. Their “reward” is the approval or admiration from their fellow man, and guess what? They got it. When we worship this way, we serve ourselves—not God.

Have you ever done something because you wanted someone to see you do it and not because your heart was truly in it?

Let’s go back to our main text, Matthew 23:25-28. Read it again and keep in mind what we now know about the Pharisees.

This passage is yet another criticism of the Pharisees’ hypocrisy. Just as they pray loudly for attention, they focus on external appearances instead of a pursuit of inner righteousness. Righteousness is defined as living in a right relationship with God.

Remember our mug of hot chocolate? What happens when you’re done with that mug if you only clean the outside? Is it really clean? Of course not. To clean the mug, you have to clean the inside—the part where the really dirty stuff is. If you only clean the outside, you’re going to have quite the sticky, and eventually stinky, mess. Sticky and stinky, greedy and self-indulgent—they’re kind of one and the same. Jesus tells the Pharisees that just like a discarded mug of hot chocolate, their lives appeared clean on the outside, but inside was a different story.

In 1 Samuel 16, God sends the prophet Samuel to anoint a new king of Israel. Samuel sees Eliab and assumes this *must* be the guy based on what he can see from the outside, namely, his strong stature and the fact that he just “looks” like a king. But the Lord had a different plan.

READ 1 SAMUEL 16:7.

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or his stature because I have rejected him. Humans do not see what the LORD sees, for humans see what is visible, but the LORD sees the heart.”

Eliab was David's brother—yes, *that* David, the future king of Israel. This was also the same David from whom Jesus traced His lineage. God had big plans for David, regardless of how he appeared to man. The Lord saw his heart, just as He sees ours.

The Christmas season is unfortunately a time where our greed, self-indulgence, and even hypocrisy can get the best of us. We can seem to be doing all the right things but still be far from Him. It's easy to attend church services with your family, give to the special offering, make cookies for your local nursing home, and do all the things that appear "good" at Christmas to seem righteous. But where's your heart this Christmas? What are you truly pursuing?

RESPOND

Take a moment to reflect on how you can seek righteousness this Advent. Jot down a few ideas below.

Seeking righteousness might seem overwhelming. In fact, take a look at Romans 3:10:

As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one.

Not even one. Where does that leave us? On the naughty list?

Rejoice, friends! It leaves us with Jesus. It's better than the best Christmas present you've ever received. Righteousness cannot be achieved alone, but through God's grace and the gospel of Jesus Christ, we can be near to Him during the Christmas season and always.

PRAY

Pray that in the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season, your heart may be guarded from just going through the motions. Pray that everything you do in the name of Christ will be done as an act of worship or service to Him and that you would desire His approval over those of your peers or family.

We live with the hope of Jesus Christ—what good news! The Savior was born to fulfill the gospel story. May we celebrate Christmas with the joy of Jesus in our hearts!



DAY 3

Searching for Hope this Christmas

by Melina Baird

Have you ever had a moment, day, or week where you thought to yourself, *I have so much going on. Does anybody know or care? Can anybody help?* What if I told you the answer to these questions is yes! Would your immediate thought be relief, or a continued state of doubt? I know your life is full of constant noise, trying to make sense of people's actions and trying to align your daily actions with God's character. My personal wish for you this Christmas is that hope comes to life for you in a way that never leaves you.

READ & REFLECT

Today we're going to examine a passage of Scripture in the Gospel of John. I am hopeful this will stir up your curiosity for what is possible for and with God, inspiring you to consider that God is not limited by things that are visible. Nothing is too big for God; He is always bringing things from death to life. Hope is the essence of being reminded that our capacity is in Him and not our humanness, thankfully!

READ JOHN 11:1-16.

List the key people in this passage of Scripture.

Summarize the passage in your own words below.

READ JOHN 11:17-27.

Mary and Martha greet Jesus when He arrives with similar words, but He responds in different ways, meeting each woman exactly where she needed Him. What does this tell us? God can handle our questions. And He will never act against His character, even when what we see doesn't make sense to us. This truth has helped me many times when sitting in my waiting, because it's only through God's heavenly perspective that we can find hope in life and death. Hope can only be found in the things of God.

Where do you go for support when you're in need of hope? Are you tempted to look to things or people instead of God?

READ JOHN 11:28-37.

These verses give us tangible evidence that God sees and knows our emotions and feelings. Jesus's empathy is clearly on display as He mourns with Martha and Mary. He knows that this isn't the end but still pauses to feel the sorrow and sadness of His friends. We often think that we can only come to God with our best. But God is our refuge, and He longs for us to come to Him when we're at our best, our worst, and every moment in between. In our coming to Him, He can give us the gift of His perspective in which hope is assured as is promised in Scripture. As you continue to deepen your faith, your belief will grow each day, often in spite of what may be seen through an earthly perspective. What's remarkable is that every part of your story can provide opportunities to empathize and connect with others—just as Jesus is able to empathize with us.

When have you been able to empathize with a friend because of a similar experience in your life?

When has a friend comforted you in your pain and shared from a place of similar hurt and understanding?

READ JOHN 11:38-44 AND SUMMARIZE THE VERSES BELOW.

RESPOND

Nothing is too hard or impossible with or for God, and this is still true today!

How can you live fully this Advent season in the hope you receive through Jesus's sacrifice?

Ask God to show you the areas where you struggle to believe and trust in Him. List the areas or situations as they are revealed to you.

This week, look up a few verses that remind you of God's character and strength and repeat them over those situations.

PRAY

During this Advent season, may God graciously reveal His promises in such a way that you stand firmly anchored in hope. Celebrate that God is with you. We are not alone, and He is always bringing things from death to life!