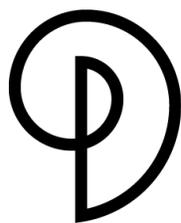


SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE



**PRINCE
OF PEACE**
Called to Connect



WELCOME
THE SEASONS
Advent

Days of Love

December 11 & 12, 2021

The rhythm of love begins when we inhale the sweetness of God's unconditional love for us and learn to love ourselves. And that rhythm continues when we exhale that same love into the lives of others even, or perhaps especially, those we don't particularly like.

SCRIPTURE TEXT: 1 JOHN 4:7-17

Read the scripture text together as a group.

This week's small group guide follows along with Pastor Jeff's message from the ONLINE worship service.

BACKGROUND INFO

Just as an infant's first breath begins with an inhale, the rhythm of love begins by receiving. I think that's what John is getting at when he writes, "This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins." Our faith doesn't begin with the command to love our neighbor, or even to love God. It begins with the proclamation that we are loved by God. No qualifications necessary. No conditions. God chooses to love us, and that love was embodied in Jesus.

The longer I live the more convinced I've become that the real power of believing that God loves you completely and unconditionally is that it empowers us to learn to love ourselves. I don't know about you but I find it far more difficult to love myself than I do to love other people. But when we entrust ourselves to the unfathomable depths of God's love for us, we can dare to believe that we are loveable and worthy despite our failures and shortcomings. The rhythm of love begins when we inhale the sweetness of God's unconditional love for us and learn to love ourselves. And then that rhythm continues when we exhale that love into the lives of others. The love that John is talking about here has little to do with how we feel about people, and more to do with how we choose to see them and respond to them. Loving others means seeing them through the lens of grace, knowing that they, like us, are both saint and sinner. It means putting the best construction on their words and actions, and not assuming the worst.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Share a story about something you absolutely love this time of year.
- Why is it sometimes easier to love others than ourselves?
- How does embracing God's love for us help us to better love those around us?
- Why does this message of love matter to us today, in this Advent season?

APPLICATION: This week, as you think about upcoming gatherings with friends and family, ask God to fill you with his deep love and prepare your heart to share that love with those around you this Christmas season.