



The Greatest Gift

UNWRAPPING THE FULL
LOVE STORY OF CHRISTMAS



ANN VOSKAMP

New York Times Bestselling Author

4-Session Group Study

The Greatest Gift

UNWRAPPING THE FULL
LOVE STORY OF CHRISTMAS

DVD Curriculum
Discussion Guide

ANN VOSKAMP



TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.
CAROL STREAM, ILLINOIS

Visit Tyndale online at www.tyndale.com.

TYNDALE and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

The Greatest Gift DVD Curriculum Discussion Guide

Copyright © 2014 by Ann Voskamp. All rights reserved.

Designed by Jacqueline L. Nuñez

Published in association with William K. Jensen Literary Agency, 1919 Bampton Court, Eugene, Oregon 97404.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,[®] NIV.[®] Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.[™] Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com.

ISBN 978-1-4143-9718-4

Printed in the United States of America

20 19 18 17 16 15 14
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Welcome *v*

Ideas for Group Discussion *vii*

SESSION 1 Look . . . for Hope *1*

SESSION 2 Linger . . . for Peace *5*

SESSION 3 Laugh . . . for Joy *9*

SESSION 4 Love . . . for Always *13*

Welcome

Welcome to the exhale you've only hoped would be possible during a season that's often jam-packed with obligations and distractions. Gifts to buy, decorations to hang, parties to host and attend, family photos to snap, Christmas cards to sign and send—where, then, is the room for peace, for contemplation, for consideration of the true intent of Advent? When do we stop and sit and wonder and wait? When do we wait on all that's to come?

Advent—literally, “to come.” We wait here in Advent—wait for the arrival of our King. We wait with open hands and open hearts, knowing this coming will be grand. It will be worth the wait.

And so, *The Greatest Gift* discussion guide. Your guide, I pray, into that waiting. Into the looking and lingering, the laughter and love that is this season. Yes, beneath all the preparation and orchestration, the busyness and business of “the holidays,” lies the tiny Baby in the crèche, divinity wrapped in humanity, reminding us that He has come, He will come again, He is coming for us, through us, with us—every moment of every day. Will we stop and look? Will we linger over this truth, this Advent? Will we let our shoulders drop and exhale in honor of Him?

Breathe. Breathe easy of the best present of all: the presence of Him. Gather with your friends or your neighbors or your family, and during these four weeks of Advent, may you simply breathe Him in. Prepare your Jesse Tree, if you so desire (for instructions, see pages xiii-xiv in *The Greatest Gift*), put four meetings on your collective calendar, come with soulful expectation, and see what God will do.

Come and see.

Come and hear.

Come and participate.

Come and partake.

This Advent, *come*.

Ann Voskamp

Ideas for Group Discussion

This discussion guide is organized into four sessions, in correlation with the four weeks of Advent. To this end, you'll find prompts suggesting that participants read six or seven devotional entries in *The Greatest Gift* each week. If you need to adjust this rhythm, it is recommended that you adjust the reading schedule so that no devotional entries are missed. (For example, if your group meets twice a week for two weeks only, you could have participants read two entries per day.) The content of this discussion guide hinges on the book's content; thus, you'll want to read each entry to experience the full impact.

To get the most from your group experience, consider the suggestions aimed at various groups below.

Church-Based Small Groups

Consider taking a break from your typical small-group study during the Christmas season in order to implement this curriculum. Be sure all group members have a copy of the devotional book so they can complete the readings prior to the sessions. You might rotate leadership of the material so a different person can lead the discussion each week. If you have additional members who want to be involved, you might invite them to oversee the prayer, read Scripture, or facilitate the icebreaker questions at the beginning of your time together.

Families

If your family wishes to discuss *The Greatest Gift* together, decide how many copies of the devotional book will be necessary in order for each member of your family to review the week's content prior to your discussion. For younger children, you might select portions of the devotional readings most pertinent to their life stages and adapt the verbiage accordingly. Alternatively, you might consider purchasing the family edition (*Unwrapping the Greatest Gift*), which is suitable for children of all ages. To engage active children, consider allowing them to oversee the Jesse Tree experience each week.

Women's Groups

Many churches offer women's group meetings throughout the week, and *The Greatest Gift* is a fitting complement to that menu. Be sure each participant has her own copy of the devotional book, and consider assigning one person to lead the rest of the group in an opening prayer and to transition between the video and the small-group discussion time. Consider purchasing a small artificial Christmas tree for each table so group members have the opportunity to participate in the Jesse Tree experience together.

Neighbors and Work Associates

To implement *The Greatest Gift* with neighbors, consider inviting those in your building, on your street, or in your place of employment who have expressed spiritual interest in the past. Let them know that this study includes four small-group discussions about the love story known as Christmas. Be sensitive to the fact that some participants may not agree with concepts such as the authority of God or the preeminent position of Christ presented in this curriculum. Instead of letting disagreements splinter the group, use them as opportunities for honest discussion, heartfelt prayer, and a chance to see life through lenses other than your own.

SESSION 1

Look . . . for Hope

The heart that makes time and space for Him to come will be a glorious place. A place of sheer, radiant defiance in the face of a world careening mad and stressed. Because each day of Advent, we will actively wait. We will wait knowing that the remaking of everything has already begun.

THE GREATEST GIFT

Beforehand

In preparation for Session 1, read the devotional entries for December 1–6, found on pages 1–54 in *The Greatest Gift*.

Beginning

Select one of the following questions to help center your group prior to viewing this session's video. You might think through your responses ahead of time, in case you choose to kick off the conversation yourself.

1. What is your family's favorite Christmas tradition? How did it begin?
2. What does Advent—the word, the season, the observances—mean to you? What personal experiences have shaped your understanding of Advent?

This week's video focuses on the single greatest priority for our lives—from God's perspective, anyway. It's the priority of lineage, of our being grafted into His family tree.

Video

View video, Session 1 [run time 15 minutes].

At the conclusion of the video, say a brief prayer, asking God to direct your conversation and shed His light on the parts of your life needing illumination.

Questions for Discussion

Work through the questions below that seem most pertinent to the group's needs and desires.

1. What word, phrase, promise, or refrain stood out to you most in the video? Why?
2. Read Isaiah 11:1-2, 10 and then respond to the idea presented in the video that “the mattering part is never the chopped-off stump.” If this is true, then why do we so often define ourselves and even describe ourselves to others in terms that reflect that chopped-off stump—that failure, that fear, that foible, that fallacy? Why do we seem to relate more to the “stump” than to the shoot, the new fruit-bearing Branch, Jesus Christ?
3. The essence of hope is ultimately presence—namely, God's presence. And yet Christmastime has a way of revealing to us the “other things” we hope in—goods and glitter, trinkets and lighted trees. What tends to distract you during this season of Advent from training your eyes—and your hope—on Christ alone?
4. Do you agree or disagree with the notion that “we only find out where we are when we find out where [God] is”? How would you describe “where you are” these days? Are you satisfied with where you are?
5. This session's title is “Look.” What are you really, truly, wholeheartedly looking for this Christmas?

If time permits, turn to page 44 in *The Greatest Gift* and answer the questions you find there.

Ending

Read aloud the devotional entry from December 1 in *The Greatest Gift*, found on pages 4–5. Then name the “unfurled grace” you would most like to see this Advent season. Perhaps “unfurled grace” would look like a

prodigal child returning home or a few moments of stillness at the start of each December day. Or it may look like release from a troubling addiction or a life-giving conversation with a combative colleague. Maybe it would look like a deep breath or a fresh appreciation for snowfall on tree limbs or ears to hear—really hear—the words of the wondrous carols. Maybe it would look like eyes to see the Word of God in new and personal ways. Maybe it would look like true rest.

After everyone who wishes to share has spoken, close your discussion time in prayer. Sample prayer points are provided below, which can be adapted for your group. Or you are also free to pray along different lines based on the needs of your group.

- Thanksgiving for this life—stumps and all—and for the greatest imaginable Gift—the Shoot, Jesus Christ
- Intercession for the needs expressed during group discussion
- Determination to seek after what really matters this Christmas

Until Next Time

Prior to your next meeting, be sure to read the entries for December 7–12 found on pages 55–120 in *The Greatest Gift*. To seal this session's core concept in your mind and heart, ponder these two questions between now and Session 2:

1. **The stump.** As you enter this Christmas season, what “stump” troubles you most? A flagging relationship? Financial strain? An emotional valley? A moral dilemma? A general sense of purposeless, hopelessness, or pain?
2. **The shoot.** Even if your life seems devoid of brazen miracles, what little things—events, circumstances, or other small but significant signs of new life—are coming together for you this Advent season in a way that indicates God is behind them?