



The Greatest Gift: God With Us

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My family often watches *Home Alone* at Christmas time. In it, a boy is left home alone accidentally while his family heads out on vacation. At first, it is really fun to have the whole house to himself and have total freedom. But it isn't long before he wishes his family was back.

Life is like that sometimes. Doing whatever we want is fun for a time, but at some point we realize we don't want to be alone anymore. We long for something more. We want to belong somewhere. Thankfully, God gave us a gift.

In this series we've been building up to what the gift is. Have you ever noticed how a gift sometimes means more because of the story attached? Think of a surprise party. The party is fun, but all the thought and planning also make it special.

1. What is one of the greatest gifts someone has given you? What's the story?

We've been looking at God's story- at his plan to redeem humanity and reconcile us to himself. We've looked at how he has made promises with his people and he has kept his promises. In Isaiah 7:14 we read this prophecy about Jesus, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." Immanuel. It's a Hebrew word that literally means "God with us." The idea of God with Us is not new- Remember the tent!? In Leviticus we read, "I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people." (Leviticus 26:11-12)

Another word for dwelling place is tabernacle or tent.

We have learned about the Tent of Meeting where Moses talked to God as one with a friend and how Joshua liked to stay there. We have also learned about David's tent for the presence of God and how it was open to all people to worship. God said he wanted to rebuild this tent. Then we come to this verse in John 1, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." (John 1:14) The Greek word for "made his dwelling" is literally "pitched a tent!" When Jesus came, God was pitching a tent among us! What does that mean? The tent is about God's presence. His dwelling place. With Jesus God has made his dwelling place among us!

It's time to unwrap the Greatest Gift for you if you haven't guessed it yet!
The greatest gift is: **God gave us himself.**

I want to recognize what a weighty claim that is- God gave us himself.

When you consider all that God is- he is so beyond us, he is so much higher than us—yet one way to summarize the Gospel story is to say: God gave us himself. This is big. It's too big to describe! The best we can do is just point to it and say, "Look how big this is!"

2. What does it mean to you that "God gave us himself?"

3. What does the story behind this gift mean to us?

The problem is that we often start thinking about God, from our own point of view. We start with us. We are finite and we are trying to add God to the mix. Instead, somehow, we may want to start with an infinite God and then add us to the mix! It's much bigger than we realize. Reflect on the fact that God *wants* to be with us. Really. He's not just around. It's more than just being close or in the same room. He is *with* us. On purpose. Very intentionally he wants to be with us.

4. What do you think it means that "God is WITH us?"

Notice that "God with us" might not be exciting to you if you have the wrong impression of who God is. You might picture it like having the IRS always with you—like an audit that never stops! But Jesus did not come to condemn the world. READ John 3:16-21.

When God sent his son, do you realize that what's happening? **God is sending himself.** God is Father, Son, Holy Spirit. He so loved us that he gave us himself! He came to save us. To bring light. When you first turn on the light in the morning it hurts your eyes. We want the light off and we'd rather stay under the covers!

5. Why do you think some people have trouble hearing that God is with them?

One scholar puts it this way, "God has chosen to accomplish our salvation by being himself for us, by opening up his own life and bringing us into fellowship." (*Deep Things of God* by Fred Sanders).

6. In what ways do you see God inviting us into his own life?

READ John 1:12-13. He has given us the *right* to become children of God? It's a right!??

What do *we* do? We believe and receive in his name, and he gives us the right to become children of God.

I don't think we fully understand what that means. We are children of God. We have been adopted by God with full legal standing!

We are not illegitimate. It is our right.

We don't have to beg for it. It is our right.

In America we sometimes talk about "God-given rights." But we don't often hear about our God-given right to become children of God!

7. What does it mean to you that we are children of God?

8. What are ways you need to think bigger about this?

9. What keeps us from experiencing more of God's "life within us?"

GOING DEEPER> Meditate on Romans 8:14-16. Ask God to reveal how you are his child and how he feels about you. What is the Spirit saying about you as a child of God?