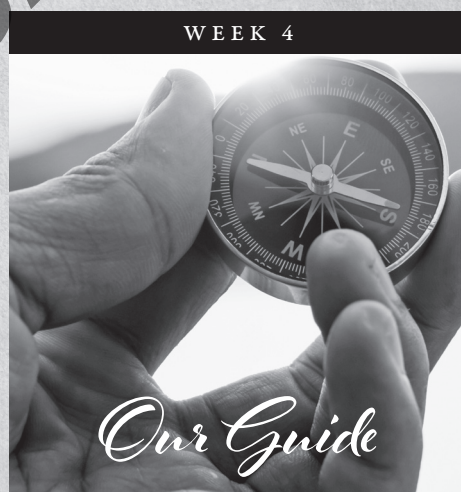
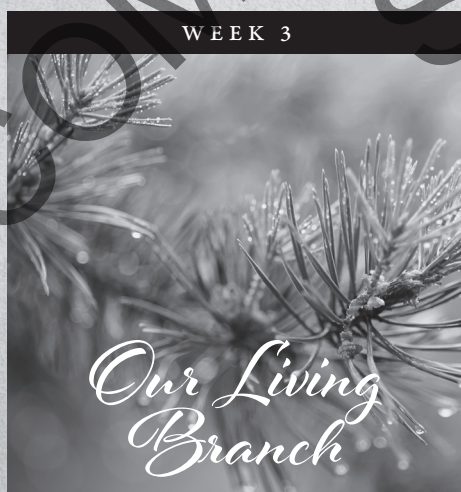
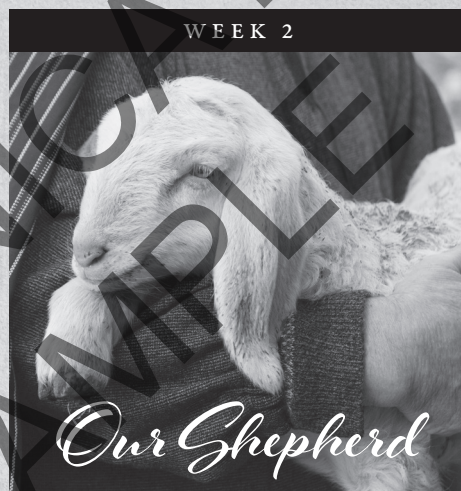
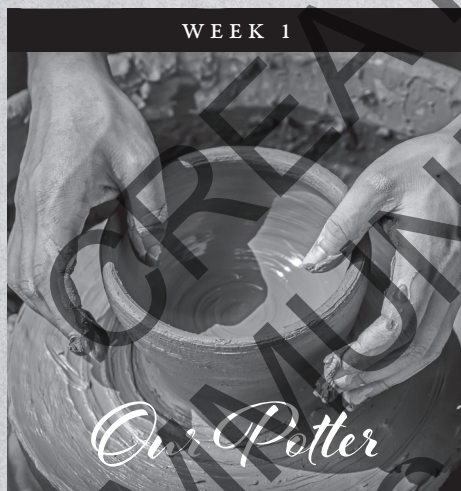




GOD WITH US



A 4 SESSION **BIBLE STUDY**  
FOR ADVENT

leader's guide

CREATIVE  
COMMUNICATIONS  
SAMPLE

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## INTRODUCTION

*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall call his name Immanuel  
(which means, God with us). MATTHEW 1:23*

After the death of David's son Solomon, the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. When the kings of Israel and Syria joined forces against Judah, King Ahaz and the people of Judah were terrified. Their hearts "shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind" (Isaiah 7:2). Although Ahaz refused to ask for a reassuring sign from God, the Lord gave him a sign anyway. A virgin would give birth to a son and call him Immanuel, which means "God with us." God was with Ahaz and his people, and before too long, the enemy kings would be destroyed, their lands deserted.

The world can be as terrifying to us as it was to Ahaz, and the sign he received is a sign for us too. We have seen the promise fulfilled. The virgin-born son is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is Immanuel, God with us, God born among us. How is he God among us? In the words of the prophet Isaiah, God with us is our Potter, our Shepherd, our Living Branch and our Guide. He is our Savior.

## Leader's Guide for Session 1

### BEFORE CLASS:

Read through this session yourself.  
Examine the Bible readings listed and  
become acquainted with them.

**READ:** Have a member of the group  
read the Introduction on page 4 aloud.

**READ:** Have someone read the  
Opening Prayer or read the prayer  
in unison.

### SESSION 1

## Our Potter

*We are the clay, and you are our potter. ISAIAH 64:8*



### OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, as a potter shapes the clay, you created and shaped us according to your will. Bless our study of your Word so that we might grow in faith and express our love for you by serving others. During this Advent season, help us to become ever more useful vessels in your kingdom, vessels through which your love and mercy will flow into the lives of those around us. Hear our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

**DISCUSS:** Discuss favorite handmade gifts given or received for Christmas.

**READ:** Read aloud or have someone read aloud the Introduction.

### *The Clay*

1. God planted a garden in Eden and placed the man there. The man Adam was to work in the garden and take care of it. Answers will vary.
2. God still shapes and forms us in the womb, as the psalmist says. God wrote our days in his book “when as yet there were none of them.” Answers will vary.

### **DISCUSSION**

Have you ever received or given handmade gifts for Christmas? Which was your favorite?

### **INTRODUCTION**

Perhaps as a child you enjoyed creating little pots and dishes and other shapes out of clay, twisting and shaping the clay to achieve your purpose. God shapes us, as a potter designs and creates a vessel out of clay, but we are rebellious clay. We question the purposes of our Maker and the designs he has for us. Yet in love, the Potter does not destroy what he has made. He sent his own Son to suffer the penalty we earned for our rebellion, and in Christ Jesus our Potter has made each of us a new creation, a holy vessel designed for use in his kingdom.

### **THE CLAY**

1. From the beginning, our divine Potter shaped us. **Read Genesis 2:4-17.** Where does God place the man he formed from dust? What was Adam to do? Where has God placed you at this time in your life? What are you to do in service to your Creator and Lord? How has the Potter shaped and prepared you for the work you do?
2. **Read Psalm 139:13-16.** How does God still shape our beginnings today? In what particular ways are you “fearfully and wonderfully made”? What does verse 16 mean to you? Is that verse comforting? Why or why not?

3. Israel thinks that no one can see its sinful ways. The people are like clay that talks back to the potter and questions the way it has been shaped. They have turned their relationship with the God of Israel upside down, believing that they are the ones who should command God. Yet God is the one who gives them hope, who will come to set the exiles free and restore them to their land. • Answers will vary. • Answers will vary, but we are sinners too, and we often do the same things we condemn in others.
4. Job says that God is watching him and does not forgive his sins; God hunts him down like a lion would hunt him. Job knows that in the end he will die. • Job knows he will see his Redeemer and he will, in his own flesh, see God. • The man will return to the dust from which he was created. • God promises that a descendant of the woman will come to destroy the tempting serpent.

3. We may think of clay as very pliable, as something that is easily shaped according to the potter's design. That is not necessarily the way things turn out. **Read Isaiah 29:15-22 and Isaiah 45:9-13.** How does clay illustrate Israel's rebellion? What relationship has been wrongly turned upside down? What is God's Advent promise for his people? **Read Romans 1:28-32.** In what ways do you see evidence of the clay's rebellious nature in our culture today? **Read Romans 2:1-2.** Where do you see evidence of this rebellion in your own life?
4. **Read Job 10:8-22.** What does Job say in his complaint against the Potter who created him? In these verses, what does Job say will finally happen to him? **Read Job 19:25-27.** What is Job's hope? **Read Genesis 3:17-19.** What will finally happen to the man made from the dust of the earth? **Read Genesis 3:15.** What hope is there for Adam, the man of dust, for Eve and for all of their descendants?

#### THE POTTER

1. God is our potter. As a potter carefully forms the clay into a useful bowl or jar or vase, our divine potter shapes us according to his Word and his will. He shaped the people of Israel as his own holy people. **Read Isaiah 64:8-12.** What is the prayer of the clay in these verses? In what circumstances might it be your prayer? How is that prayer answered?
2. **Read Jeremiah 18:1-11.** What lesson did Jeremiah learn about Israel when God sent him to the potter's house? Just as in the days of Israel, so also in our day we see nations rise up in pride and power. What is God's message concerning those powerful nations? Do you find comfort in this message? Why or why not? What do we learn about the divine potter in these words from the prophet Jeremiah?

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#### *The Potter*

1. The clay, that is, the people of Israel, pray that the Lord would not be angry and would not remember their sin forever. Answers will vary. Our prayer for forgiveness is answered in the redeeming death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
2. When a clay vessel was spoiled in the potter's hand as it was being formed, the potter reworked the clay into a different vessel. In the same way, God can destroy a nation or relent from sending disaster on that nation, as he chooses. If the nation does evil, he will relent of the good he intended to do for it. God warns Israel that he is shaping disaster against them and they are to repent and amend their sinful ways. Answers will vary. The divine potter has power over all nations, to raise them up or strike them down, as he wills.

3. Apart from Christ Jesus, we were dead in sin, unable to save ourselves. We lived according to our own desires, as all people do. God raised us up with Jesus and made us alive in him, showing us the riches of his grace. Each of us is a new creation in Christ. Answers will vary, but we know the way we are to walk in God's will and do good works as we learn from the Ten Commandments and from other parts of Scripture.
4. God shapes us through discipline out of love for us, so that we might share his holiness and bear the fruit of righteousness. Answers will vary, but God may shape us through various trials and suffering we endure in life. We are to strive for peace with everyone; we should not be bitter or involved in sexual immorality and unholiness.

3. **Read Ephesians 2:1-10 and 2 Corinthians 5:17.** God, who shapes the nations according to his will, has also shaped and created us anew in Christ. What was our condition while we were still lost in sin? What did God do for us in Christ? We are now God's workmanship, his new creation. What does it mean to walk in the works that God has "prepared beforehand"?
4. The potter must have a gentle, yet firm hand as he creates vessels from clay. Clay is not always as cooperative as we might imagine it to be. It may be hardened, and the potter must repeatedly throw it against a table or the floor to soften it and remove air bubbles that could cause the final, fired piece to crack. When clay is spun on a wheel, the potter must hold it firmly in place as it is shaped, or the entire piece will spin off of the wheel and be destroyed. **Read Hebrews 12:3-17.** For what purpose does our divine potter shape us through his discipline? Share, if you wish, experiences that have disciplined you and shaped your life of faith. Verses 12-17 give us a glimpse of God's new creation, his masterpiece that is our new life in his Son. What does this masterpiece look like "in action"?

#### JARS OF CLAY

1. **Read 2 Corinthians 4:5-18.** What are the "jars of clay" to which the apostle refers? What is the treasure that they hold, and why is this treasure placed in mere jars of clay? How does Paul describe his life and the lives of the other apostles? What is the purpose of their suffering? The outer "clay" is wasting away. What is the "inner self" that is being renewed? What is the hope we have as jars of clay?

### *Jars of Clay*

1. The jars of clay are the apostles' physical, earthly, sinful bodies. The treasure is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God seen in Jesus Christ. That such a treasure is placed in mere jars of clay shows that the power belongs to God and not to the apostles. The apostles cannot claim any special powers or abilities that would make them

worthy of such a treasure. The glory belongs to God alone. The apostles are always persecuted and injured, suffering as Jesus did, even to the point of death, so that they can spread the good news of Jesus. Answers will vary, but our inner self may refer to the soul or to our faith in Christ, which continues to grow in strength even

as our bodies may become more frail. Even in suffering, we look forward to the "weight of glory" that will be ours for all eternity.



2. The psalmist asks for the comfort of God's love and mercy and that his law would be his delight. He asks that sinners who have wronged him would be put to shame and that those who believe would learn from the psalmist. He asks that he would be blameless according to God's law. Answers will vary.
3. We become useful to the Master, our Lord Jesus, by cleansing ourselves from that which is dishonorable. We are cleansed through the forgiveness that Jesus won for us on the cross and we ask the Holy Spirit for help in amending our sinful lives so that we can be useful to the Master of the household of God.
4. We now bear the image of Adam, the man of dust. On the Last Day, Jesus will raise us up from our graves and we will bear his image, the image of the man of heaven (see 1 Corinthians 15:35-41 and 1 John 3:2).

2. **Read Psalm 119:73-80.** Knowing that God has formed him, what does the psalmist ask of his Creator? In what ways does the Word of God form or shape your life in Christ? How can you share that formative Word with others?
3. **Read 2 Timothy 2:20-26.** Sometimes we may wonder if we are "good enough" or "talented enough" to serve God. We may compare ourselves to fellow believers who seem to have more obvious gifts, in music or speech, for example. The young pastor Timothy might have felt this way, comparing himself to older and more experienced servants of Christ. How can we become vessels (jars of clay!) that are useful to our Lord Jesus, the Master of the house?
4. "You are dust, and to dust you shall return." In death, the clay returns to the dust from which it was formed, but the masterpiece of God does not end there. **Read 1 Corinthians 15:42-49.** Some great earthly masterpieces of art and architecture have endured for centuries. Our earthly clay, shaped by the hand of God, will be restored as an eternal masterpiece! Whose image will we bear on the Last Day when Christ returns?

**READ:** Read responsively the words of the psalm.

**PSALM 139:13-16**

*For you formed my inward parts;*

**You knitted me together in my mother's womb.**

*I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*

**Wonderful are your works;**

*My soul knows it very well.*

**My frame was not hidden from you,**

*When I was being made in secret,*

**Intricately woven in the depths of the earth.**

*Your eyes saw my unformed substance;*

**In your book were written, every one of them,**

*The days that were formed for me,*

**When as yet there was none of them.**

CREATIVITY  
COMMUNICATIONS  
SAMPLES

**SING:** Sing (or speak) aloud the words of the hymn in unison.

**READ:** Have someone read the Closing Prayer or read the prayer in unison.

**DISCUSS:** Discuss the activity suggested for the coming week.

#### **HYMN**

*(Tune: Nun Komm, Der Heiden Heiland 77 77)*

Let the earth now praise the Lord,  
Who has truly kept his word  
And at last to us did send  
Christ, the sinner's help and friend.

Bruise for me the serpent's head  
That, set free from doubt and dread,  
I may cling to you in faith,  
Safely kept through life and death.

#### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Almighty God, you formed us according to your will, yet we confess to you that we are rebellious people, like clay that talks back to the potter that shaped it. Forgive our sins and form us into vessels for holy use in service to our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. Hear our prayer in his name. Amen.

#### **SHAPING THE CLAY**

This week using clay, paper, fabric or other craft materials, create a simple ornament to give to a family member, friend or neighbor. Include a Bible verse and a note about God who is with us in Christ Jesus.



In this Advent Bible study participants explore the biblical backgrounds of Christ as our Potter, our Shepherd, our Living Branch and our Guide. Study and discussion questions, prayers and reflections help students see that the Immanuel foretold and born so long ago is still present with us now. The large-format Leader's Guide includes all answers, helpful study notes and session directions.