
Ignite

“ Dear Lord, don't let us miss You this Christmas season. Thank You for being the Prince of Peace, and I ask You for that supernatural peace to reign in our hearts.

Thank You for the simple but life-changing message of Your love for us. We acknowledge Your message for us during this Advent season about hope, peace, joy and love which realigns our hearts back to Your calling instead of what we are desiring. As we celebrate Christmas this week, we ask for Your presence to work through us as we seek out the least and the lost and make Your gospel known.

Teach us and mould us to be more like Jesus. Amen.”





SERMON SUMMARY

Note to Word Facilitator: The sermon notes below is a summary of the sermon. You may choose to further summarize it according to the needs and context of your CG members. The goal is not just to go through it “verbatim” but to prepare well, allowing members to recall and engage the message in the best possible way.

Advent: A New Beginning - Choose to Love

Pr. Sara Leong

1 John 3:16-18 (ESV)

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

Introduction

The word ‘advent’ comes from the Latin word ‘*adventus*’, which means ‘coming’. ‘Advent’ simply means “the arrival of a notable person or thing.”

Advent is observed by Christians as a time of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus and also the anticipation of His second coming.

BIG IDEA: Choose as Jesus did. Choose love.

What is love to you?

1 **What is love?** *Matthew 5:44 (ESV), 1 John 3:16a (ESV)*

The word ‘love’ in the Bible has different meanings. If we understand it the wrong

way, then the way we interpret Scripture will be very different, and the meaning it has on us may not be as accurate as it should be. The different kinds of love are:

- a) Eros: sensual or passionate love. This is where the word 'erotic' comes from; commonly used to describe love between two lovers.
- b) Storge: family love. It is when a parent loves a child, and when a child loves a parent; there is a bond that cannot be explained when it comes to this kind of love.
- c) Phileo: brotherly love. It is an emotionally-connected kind of love based on friendship. It is a deep love between friends.
- d) Agape: God's love. This love is based on obedience that stems from our love for God, expressed in action. It is neither a love based on good feelings nor an emotionally-driven one. It is the truest form of love - the greatest and highest form of love. Agape love is unconditional.

In Matthew 5:44, the 'love' mentioned is 'agape' love. Jesus is not saying to have good feelings towards our enemies because that would be a very difficult thing to do. Rather, Jesus is saying to love out of obedience towards Him, despite how we may feel.

The love that we are focusing on today is the love that brought Jesus to lay down His life for you and I. This is the love that God showed us, that God had towards us when Jesus came 2,000 years ago to bring hope, peace, joy, love and light into this world. He ultimately paid the price for our sins on the cross, so that you and I will no longer need to pay the ultimate price for our sins.

Agape love represented in Christ's death is love which expands itself in the interests of others.

Verse 1 John 3:16 says, '*by this we know love...*'. We would not have known what love is if not for the work of Jesus on the cross.

2 Why do we love? [1 John 3:16b \(ESV\)](#), [1 John 4:19 \(ESV\)](#), [John 10:17-18 \(ESV\)](#), [1 John 3:16c \(ESV\)](#), [John 20:21 \(ESV\)](#), [John 15:12-14 \(ESV\)](#), [1 John 3:17](#)

We love because:

- a) Jesus exemplified it

We love because He first loved us. Jesus exemplified love to us by laying down His life for us. In John 3:16 'for God so loved the world...', there is an expression of the vast volume of love that God has for the world. God showed that love to us in that He gave His life, He gave His only Son. The agape love of God for the world brought into action in the form of Jesus coming to us as our Messiah and our Saviour.

This love that Jesus exemplified to us is a love based on a choice. Jesus made a choice to obey the Father. A choice to love us by giving up His life for us. Jesus laid down His life, He emptied Himself, He placed the needs of the world above His. This is the highest form of love exemplified through Christ Himself. We love because Jesus exemplified it.

b) Jesus exhorted us to do the same

We love because Jesus exhorted us to do the same. We need to follow after the example of Christ. We are sent with the same mandate that Jesus was sent. Laying down of lives isn't the literal 'dying for your friends'. Simply put, when we see a need, meet it. To show love by looking out not just for our own interest, but also for the interest of others. In the light of Jesus' self-giving of unconditional love for us, we should not close our hearts towards others in need. If we close our hearts to those in need and still claim to have the love of God in us, that cannot be true.

If we say that God's love is in us, we show it by loving others as well. Agape love is love in action. It has to be demonstrated.

After all, we are made to love and for love. The God who made you and I, made us in His image. God made us for relationship not just with Him but also with one another.

3 How can we love? *1 John 3:18 (ESV), James 2:15-16 (ESV)*

a) Practice

We must not just talk about love, but practise actioning it out. Literally, it means using our resources to relieve the needs of others. We love through our actions. Telling someone we love them has an effect on them; but putting that love into action goes a long way.

When we see a sister or brother in need, we go out of our way to love them, by simply meeting their needs. If it is clothes that they need, we clothe them; if it is food that they need, we feed them.

Jesus came to show us love, and how we, in being reconciled back to the Father through Jesus, can also get in the action of loving God and each other. Jesus has made love possible for you and I. Let us put that into our deeds. Start to practise love in action. Practice makes perfect. Eventually, loving in action will become second nature to us.

b) Pause

Sometimes, the loving thing to do is to put a pause on certain things that we may be doing or even saying in order for us to really show love, to stop ourselves in our tracks before proceeding any further. Pausing can at times be the most loving thing we can do for someone else. For example, in love, we pause and think before we speak. In love, we are gracious to each other, we are patient with each other, we learn to hold our tongue and do not say certain things which we may end up regretting as we cannot take them back. In some situations that we may be in, by loving others through deed or love in action, we need to actively and consciously take a step back and put a pause in our speech for the sake of the other person.

What has been the Holy Spirit speaking to you in the situation that you are currently in? For some of us, it is to practise, but for others, it is to pause. To pause does not mean to stop completely; it means to resume later or at the right time.

Conclusion

How can we show God's love during this Christmas season? To many of us, we feel that we have nothing more to give, especially when we feel that the pandemic has already taken so much from us. The economic and public health uncertainties prompt us to keep to ourselves, to save and not to give so much, to not mingle so much, and to spend less time with people outside our bubble. Basically, we begin to feel the need to protect only ourselves.

For some of us, it goes as far as not wanting to celebrate Christmas this year. However, we cannot simply cancel 2020, and we certainly cannot cancel Christmas, because Christmas happened. We can choose not to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have a choice but that does not change the fact that He came, the fact that He brought meaning to Christmas. The Christmas message remains the same regardless of the situation that we are in.

Even in the midst of the pandemic and how we are forced to celebrate Christmas in a very peculiar or different way than what we were used to, Jesus was born. His birth brought salvation to our world, and that does not change. It was never about a perfect season or a perfect situation, but all about a perfect baby that came to save and to redeem us all. This baby Jesus came so that we can have life and life to the fullest, a life for eternity. A life beyond this life that we are currently living in, a life that is free from suffering, free from covid, free from any economic hardship. Jesus Himself is reason enough for us to celebrate and to spread the agape love of God.

The Christmas message is this: God gave, so that we have even more to give. Some of us may be familiar with this concept of the 'emotional bank'. If this bank is in deficit, then we may have no more love to give. Generally, in human relations this is true. But with God, it is very different. When God pours His love unto us, we

overcome any, if not all the deficit in our emotional bank because His love is all we need. Therefore, we need to learn to receive this love from God if we are going to give love without limit.

While we remain conscientious and do our part as a responsible citizen of this nation, we can still be a blessing during this time. We can still spread the love of God during this season. Many are wounded, and many are in need. All the more, this season is the time to choose as Jesus did. Choose to love. Choose to spread that love. Choose others above ourselves. Ultimately, what we choose is important.

What we choose, we focus on.

What we focus on, is where we look.

Where we look, is where we go.

Where we go, we behold.

What we behold, we become.

What do you want to become?

Think about it. Think about how you can choose to love, and act on it.

SERMON REFLECTION

Pastor Sara's personal sharing in her sermon resonated deeply with me. I was emotionally moved by it, for I went through something similar.

I know P from church almost a decade ago. We got close pretty quickly, as we were going through similar circumstances at that time. We hung out often and spent much time together. I count her as one of my dearest sisters-in-Christ, one whom I cherish very much. I tried to learn her love language, and be there for her whenever she needed a listening ear or a helping hand. Once, she was stranded alone in a neighbouring country, and called me for help. I took the next transport out of KL to be with her in her time of need.

Over the years, there have been several bouts of abrupt silence from P; she would snub me for no apparent reason and refuse to talk to me. I am far from perfect, but

in any healthy friendship, I believe there should be honest communications. This was lacking. Many well-meaning friends had advised me to let her go, and to 'free' myself from such constant and intended negativity. I thought that if I am able to show constant love to her, perhaps such situations could be avoided. Fundamentally, I knew I have been tremendously blessed by God and the least I could do is to be a blessing to her and others.

The 'worst' episode (so far) has been an unprovoked outburst from her where she lashed out at me, and as expected, she spurned me for an extended period of time. I really could not understand such a treatment from her. My hands literally shook when I read that awful text message from her. I was deeply hurt and could not fathom how someone whom I showed much love to could have the gumption of treating me in such an uncalled-for manner.

First thing at the top of my head was to seek reconciliation; to apologise for anything that I might have done that might have offended her (even though I could not think of any). With her clamming up, this was almost impossible. I spent much time in prayer and asked God what He wanted me to do instead. I committed the entire situation to His hands, and decided to trust Him to know what would be best for me - even if it meant that my season of friendship with her could come to an end.

I am aware that by demonstrating love to others, I should not expect anything in return. However, given that I was upset, was that an indication that I expected a lasting friendship from her? I had to be conscious not to slip from love to hate. Hence, I decided to pray for her and committed her to God. I knew I could only turn to and trust God to work things out.

God is good - He gave me this impression that once I cast my cares on Him, I can rest easy. During the 'pause' season, peace and subsequently hope, washed over me, even though the situation remained seemingly the same. I believe that it was during the 'pause' season that God was also strengthening and working in me, to train me to trust Him more, no matter what happens. I chose to set my sights on Jesus alone. During one of the altar calls, I went forward and sought prayers for this situation. Miraculously, P called me out of the blue after that particular Sunday church celebration! We apologised to each other, and our friendship is now stronger than before.

God's love is the root of a tree that bears desirable fruit. He first loved me, and this undergirds why I should love others. Love goes beyond just having some lovey-dovey

pleasant feelings; it is a decision and consequently, an action. If my love grows cold because of other people's injustice and sin, then that love is only human and superficial.

In John 21, Jesus prepared breakfast for His disciples, and then He commanded Simon Peter to feed His sheep. This tells me that Jesus actually fed His disciples first, before asking them to feed others! On the same note, Jesus has poured out His love for me, and is continually doing so by filling up and replenishing my emotional bank, so that I can continue to show love to others just as how He has shown me!

In this season of Advent, I am constantly reminded that Love has come down, and dwells among us. Jesus' love is immeasurable and surpasses all knowledge. Jesus is the hope that we need; this hope brings much peace to my heart, and unspeakable joy springs forth. His command to love is often challenging, but it is also a reminder of how God loves us - relentlessly, completely and unconditionally, even when we are at our ugliest and think we are unworthy of His love.

Contributed by May Ng



APPLICATION

Note to Word facilitator:

As you prepare for this session, this is a great time to pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you to use the questions efficiently. You can select, modify or entirely create your own questions, according to the needs of your CG, especially if you feel that there are too many questions than required for the allocated time. The questions below are crafted with a certain flow in mind. You could use these towards the end or insert them in between your own sermon reflection and summary.

Suggested Icebreaker Questions / Activities

- Name the one food that you absolutely love.

Suggested Word Introductory Questions

- In this season of Advent, what are you expecting to come your way as Christmas approaches? [*Besides the second coming of Christ, of course.*]
- Between things and people, which do you love more?

Suggested Questions linked to main point:

What is love?

- In demonstrating love to others, how would you distinguish between the various types of love as shown in the Bible?
- It is very easy to love others when things are going well. However, God commands us to love our enemies too. How willing are you to make loving sacrifices in your various relationships right now? What does your willingness indicate the way you see and define love?

Why do we love?

- In demonstrating love to others, how do you ascertain your motives or intentions in doing so? Do you show love to others to make yourselves feel good and happy or do you genuinely want the recipient to be happy?
- God showed His love for us by sending Jesus to die for our sins. What insight does this give you into how God expects us to show love to others?
- Talk about a time when you experienced agape love. How does the experience motivate you to love others?

How can we love?

- How do you respond when negativity hits you? How can you put love in action with such situations? [*For example, rude drivers on the road, nasty comments left on your social media account, friends who snub you, etc?*]
- The people of the world show their love through various pursuits (e.g. charity work etc), and so do Christians. How then should Christians show God's love in ways that differentiates them from that of the world?
- Do you need to be in a 'pause' moment right now? What do you think God expects you to do while you pause?

Question Bank (*Extra questions you can use to bring discussion further as you see fit*):

1. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Which of these aspects would help you exemplify Christ in loving others? Name an example of what you would do.
 2. How do you discern what to do in showing love to others and in meeting their needs? To what extent do you rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance?
 3. How does God's love transform the way you see and treat other people?
 4. Things are rough and tough in this pandemic and you could be questioning God's love in your circumstance. Has that stopped you from loving others? Why did you stop? Or why didn't you?
 5. When are you most loving and when are you least loving? How can an awareness of this shape your behaviour to become more loving?
 6. How do you balance between meeting the needs and wants of the recipient and displaying 'tough love'?
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WHAT'S YOUR STORY?



Photo by Annie Spratt from Unsplash

Story of the week...

In this season of Advent, we will be reflecting on the One who brought us Hope, Peace, Joy & ultimately, Love. A video podcast is released each week for four consecutive weeks leading to Christmas. This week's theme is LOVE and being featured is Lex Low, Professional Hairdresser & Founder of Othrs Barber. In this podcast, Lex Low shares on the why and how he made his career his ministry, by taking to the streets of KL offering free haircuts to the homeless..

Watch the podcast [here!](#) Better still, share it with others that you think will be inspired by Lex Low's story!

Note: Videos will be posted on dumc.my/chats every Sunday at 12am (for the duration of Advent).

This 4-part [video podcast](#) is put together by Darren Ong and Team



“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”

- Maya Angelou

If you or your CG member(s) has a story to share related to today's Word or any other story that speaks of His goodness or of IMPACTNow, **share their/your story** [\[HERE\]](#)



PRAYER

Note to CGL: You (or someone you assign this portion to), may lead by praying OR reading these prayers together as a CG during worship.

As we celebrate Christmas this week, let us be reminded of Jesus and His plans and purpose for the world.

Pray for:

1. Jesus being the Light of the World

Jesus, the Light of the World, as we celebrate your birth, may we begin to see the world in the light of understanding you give us. As you chose the lowly, the outcasts, and the poor to receive the greatest news the world had ever known, so may we worship you in meekness of heart. May we also remember our brothers and sisters less fortunate than ourselves in this season of giving.

2. May the people be filled with wonder

May we be filled with the wonder of Mary, the obedience of Joseph, the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the determination of the magi, and the peace of the Christ child. Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless you now and forever.

3. For God's (agape) love to be evident to all

In a world where worry, not peace, prevails, stir up that good news again. This Christmas, make it real in our hearts. Never have we needed Your joy and peace more than now. Thank You for the gift of Jesus, our Immanuel, the Word made flesh. Forgive us for forgetting that Your love never changes, never fades, and that You never abandon the purpose for which You came: to save us from our sinful condition, and to give us life eternal, the joy of relationship with a holy God. Your birth and Your death sealed Your promise to us forever. Amen




OTHER RESOURCES

Below are some links to resources for you. Do **CLICK** on the images below!

FEATURED

In view of our current changing landscape that affects us individually and corporately, here are some featured resources for you this month!



 **Waiting in the Dark: Why We Need Advent T...**


1 hour

[youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)

Prayer & Spirituality

Video Clip



 **Breathe: Being with God in Silence**

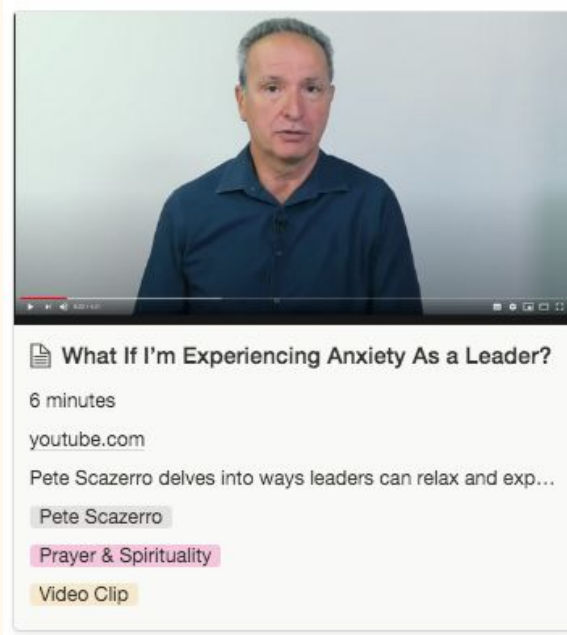
15 minutes

[youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)

This 15 minute experience was created to provide a guide...

Prayer & Spirituality

Video Clip



OTHER RESOURCES

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Be blessed by a compilation of inspiring DUMC Stories that you can share with others!

