

# Advent Love

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] We're going to look at God's Word together. We're going to look at two passages from John's Gospel, well, one from John and one from 1 John, his letter.

So the first one is a verse you'll know well, John 3, verse 16. And it says, For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Now, hopefully you know that verse. Hopefully that's written and etched on your heart. It's the essence of what the Gospel is all about. And then 1 John 4, verses 7 to 12.

This is the theme of love because this Advent service is about Advent love. Beloved, says John, beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. It's quite a statement, that, isn't it? I'll explain it a little while. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.

[ 1 : 3 0 ] In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Amen. The Lord will bless to us the reading of his word. How many times can you get the word love into a few sentences? It's just terrific, isn't it? Okay, can we see the next slide, Josh, please?

So Advent, the coming of Christ, is all about love. Love is the central emotion of the Christmas season. Love came down at Christmas.

Love all lovely, all love divine. Love was born at Christmas. Star and angels give the sign. A familiar passage from Christina Rossetti.

[ 2 : 3 3 ] Now, when I was a child growing up, I knew Christmas was special, but because I wasn't really brought up in a Christian home, I didn't really understand why it was special. I just knew that actually you were meant to kind of have a nice time with your family, and that all of your arguments and all of your disagreements, and we weren't a family that had many, actually.

We kind of, if we had a disagreement, it usually ended up in a fight, and then it was over with, that kind of macho way of dealing with things in the Northeast. We didn't kind of keep grudges, but it was kind of like, you know, if anything, any cross words were spoken or anything else, then somebody would say, this is Christmas.

You're meant to love at Christmas. It is the dominant emotion. Love came down at Christmas. Love all lovely, love divine.

Love was born at Christmas. Star and angels give the sign. This is the very antithesis of my favorite Christmas character. Next slide, you'll see him. The Grinch.

Every year, I would like to watch The Grinch. The Jim Carrey version all over again. I'm kind of like making it one of my ambitions to be able to quote every part of that film, the script of the film, before I die.

[ 3 : 5 2 ] But I don't know if I'll manage that. My mind is not as sharp as it once was. But you know, the Grinch hated Christmas, the whole Christmas season. Oh, please don't ask why.

No one quite knows the reason. It could be perhaps that his shoes were too tight. It could be his head wasn't screwed on just right. But I think that the most likely reason of all may have been that his heart was two sizes too small.

So the reason the Grinch hated Christmas was because the Grinch didn't know how to love. You're a rotter, Mr. Grinch.

You're the king of sinful sots. Your hearts are dead tomatoes splotted with moldy purple spots. Mr. Grinch, you're a three-decker sauerkraut and toadstool sandwich with arsenic sauce.

But then he met Cindy Lou, and everything began to change. Cindy Lou loved him, not for what he looked like, because he was a monster, not because he was nice, because he was horrible.

[ 5 : 02 ] Cindy Lou loved him because she loved. Cindy Lou loved. And had a heart of love. And she, by persistence, was able to change the Grinch.

She changed his heart to a heart of love. And there's this wonderful moment in the film when the Grinch says, Help me. I'm feeling. And he really draws it out.

I'm feeling. And what happened? What happened? Well, in Whoville, they say, the Grinch's small heart grew three sizes that day.

I hope you're not a Grinch. I love the Grinch, not because I'm a Grinch, but because, well, because he changes. That rhymed. That could be Dr. Seuss. There you go.

So love and the heart are connected. But what does that tell us about love? What do we mean by love? Next slide, please. Remember the Beatles sang, All You Need Is Love.

[ 6 : 08 ] Some of you could sing that song off by heart, but I defy you to find a definition of what love is in that song. They just keep saying, All you need is love. All you need is love.

All you need is love. All you need is love. And they don't tell us what kind of love it is. Okay, and of course, you hear all about love, don't you? You know, apparently, when two people hook up and, sorry, this is a Sunday morning, and two people hook up and then have sex together, apparently they're making love.

Well, they might be making something, but they're not making love. Not love. Not deep, abiding, affectionate commitment to one another. They're expressing lust.

I love my football team, but I don't love my football team the same way I love my wife or my children. And if I did, you wouldn't think much of me, would you? I do love them, mind.

And I get really upset if they lose. But I'm not sure love is the right way to describe that kind of strange fascination with failure. I will go to see them again on Tuesday, though.

[ 7 : 15 ] I love my music. Big fan of U2 have been for years, spent a fortune seeing them over the years. But again, they draw out some affection from me, some reminiscence, some, I don't know, some feelings of kind of being lifted sometimes when I hear them sing and play, but is it love?

I love lasagna. I love fish and chips. We had them last night. Yeah. I love cars.

I love clothes. Now I don't. I'm starting to run out of things. But we talk about loving things and stuff and memories.

But actually, we're not defining love in any of those situations. So what is love? Knowing what it is is really important because Jesus said, and he sums up life like this, he says, the most important thing you can do in life is to love God with all your heart, your mind, your will, your strength, your soul, your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

Well, thank you for that, Jesus. So now, I need to know what love is in order to know that I'm loving God properly. See, as a teacher, I know that the most important thing you can do for a child that you're teaching is to show them what good looks like.

[ 8 : 49 ] Yeah? So you need to do your best work, but you need to show them what does the best work look like? And then you get some really smart kids and you say, this is the best work. You should aspire to that.

So Jesus says, the most important thing you can do in life is love. Okay, Jesus, show me how to love so that I can model my love from you. Jesus defines love You see, next slide, love is multifaceted.

Just as in English, the word love means more than one thing. And there are two important words. There are lots of words that cover love in the Old Testament.

So, for example, in the Song of Songs, which is all about love, there's all this kind of thing about, well, you know, the beloved and the lover. And they're talking very affectionately to one another.

And in their affection, there's some, you know, there's some, you know, quite physical kind of attraction going on there. But the kind of love they're expressing is a strong, intense feeling.

[ 9 : 56 ] It's the same word used of showing love to an uncle or to a family member. So that's kind of about feelings.

It's a noun. But in the Old Testament, as in the New, love is also a verb and actually probably predominantly a verb. It's not something you just feel. It's not just something you describe, an

adjective, but it is something you actually do as well.

And the two key words, the first word is *ahav* in Hebrew, refers to relational love. It's invariably a verb. It is something you do for your children, something you do for your wife, something you do for your friends.

It's an expression, an action of affection. And this is the word used by Moses to describe the relationship that Israel have with God.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, your mind, your strength. In other words, this is something you do by obeying the commandments. It's not something like you have to feel.

[11:08] It's like, well, Lord, I might not commit adultery today. It depends how I feel. Or, Lord, I may decide not to bow down and worship an idol.

I'll just see how I feel. No, no. Commandments don't work like that. It's like, you don't do this because I tell you to. And I say, right, Lord, I won't do that because I love you.

I might not feel very much there. I just kind of respect God and I acknowledge that he deserves my best. So when Jesus says, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, what does that love look like, Jesus?

It means, I obey him regardless of whether I feel that I want to or not. You know, and you can't grow up in the Christian life without understanding that kind of deep commitment that says, I really want to do this but I'm not going to do this because God would not be pleased.

It brings in a form of self-control or self-restraint. It is a love born out of commitment. A verb. But then there's a beautiful word, *hesed*.

[12:18] I can't say it like a Jew because I'm not Jewish. They say it from the back of their throat. So it'll be, *hesed*. Yeah, you'll spit at people by the time you get it out. But I'm a Geordie and I can't say it.

Or Scots or Irish I could say it. You can get the *loch, loch*. So *hesed* said very poorly is loyal love. It's covenantal love.

It's largely, primarily a noun that describes your loyalty. And it's a loyal love that's shown by God to Israel and by Israel to God.

and by friends to one another. And the greatest example of this is Jonathan and David. You see, David was in trouble because Jonathan's father, Saul, wanted to kill him.

And Jonathan could have given away his location and could have carried favor with his father by having his father's great enemy killed. But David appeals to him on the grounds of his *hesed*, his covenantal loyal love.

[13:26] You have made promises to me. You must protect me. If I'm worthy of death, then I should die. But you know that what your father is doing is wrong here.

And David, sorry, Jonathan showed his loyal love by protecting David from the wrath of his father. And later, David reciprocated that by having mercy upon Mithubbusheth, who was Jonathan's disabled son.

Loyal love. *Hesed*. And it's a beautiful word, as I say, used often in the Old Testament. My favorite example of *hesed* is in Hosea.

Because in Hosea, Hosea is describing Israel's disobedience against God, their murder, their stealing, their violence, their adultery. And God says to Hosea, I want you to experience what it's like to be betrayed.

So you're going to marry a woman called Goma, and she's a prostitute. And she's going to let you down big style. She's going to commit adultery, and then she's going to do it again.

[14:36] And she's going to find herself in a slave market for her sin. And your job is to go back into that slave market and buy her from her shame and love her again.

I want you to be loyal to somebody who doesn't deserve your loyalty, who doesn't deserve your mercy, who doesn't deserve your affection, who doesn't deserve your love.

Imagine that. I want you to love Hosea like I love my people. I want you to feel the hurt that I feel when they turn their backs on me.

I want you to know what it is to be betrayed, but to love. There's a beautiful passage in Hosea chapter 11, I think it is, where God says, my notes have just disappeared, but never mind, where God says, how can I give you a boy Israel?

You were like a child that I taught to walk. I carried the child, I carried the child under his arms, and I taught him to walk.

[ 15 : 42 ] You've got that picture of the loving father or mother that does that, to get their child to take their first stumbling steps. I taught you to walk. I watched you grow up.

You were beautiful. And then you prostituted yourself under every tree, under every olive grove. and I should destroy you.

I should send you away. I should divorce you, but I can't give you up because I love you. Now, I've never loved like that.

I've never been tested to that degree. I hope that if I was ever tested to that degree, I would prove loyal. I've said this before.

I'll say it again. It's not terribly romantic. If I'm asked, would I ever commit adultery or have an affair, to use the colloquial language, I would say, no.

[ 16 : 45 ] If I'm asked why, I say, because it would be wrong. It's not very loving, but it is loyal.

And it is loyal to a concept of love that says, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death do us part.

Loyal love. God has that love for you. God is never going to throw you away. He's never going to cast you aside. He's never going to abandon you.

And it really doesn't matter how bad you will be. God will love you, even if you prove faithless to him. And isn't that reassuring?

John says, if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. You say, oh, you don't know, I've sinned again, Lord, I've let you down, I've broken the covenant, I don't deserve your love, and your heart condemns you.

[ 17 : 51 ] And John says, God is greater than your heart. He knows you, he loves you, and he will never leave you or forsake you. So that's in Hebrew.

What about in Greek? Three words in Greek, beloved, that you, there's four actually, but one doesn't appear in the positive in the New Testament. Storge is a love for a parent has for a child. But the three words that are primarily used are phileo, irao, and agapao. Yeah, gives us the noun agape, you've heard of agape.

Phileo you've heard of because Philadelphia is the city of brotherly love. Phileo refers to a relational love, similar to ahev in the Old Testament, the love that is a family bond, or the friendship love that David and Jonathan had.

Love between two people. It's intense, it's affectionate, it's loyal. Irao is the word that gives us eros, or erotic and not sensual love.

[ 19 : 02 ] The love rightly expressed between a husband and wife, but it can be erotic love of all kinds, including pornea, pornography, illicit sexual love.

the Greeks used those two words regularly in their everyday life. They had this word agape, but they didn't use it very often because it's the highest form of love, and it's unconditional love.

It's a love expressed to an undeserving person, like a poor person begging on a street corner. And of course, in Greek thought, and in Roman thought particularly, weakness was despised.

And so, there was no real opportunity to express love to those who were undeserving. They were getting what they deserved. So, if they were beggars, well, it was karma. Karma, of course, is not a Greek concept, an Indian concept.

You know what I mean. So, agape is something unusual, but it's a word Jesus loved to use. Greater love have no man than this than a man lay down his life for his friends.

[ 20 : 15 ] That's agape love. And the best example you might have heard of this in John 21 is where Jesus speaks to Peter, and Peter has denied Jesus three times, and, you know, having said, I'm going to die with you, Jesus, he then, when he's asked if he knows Jesus, he says no, and three times, and he weeps bitterly.

And then he goes his way off fishing, and he thinks his life as a disciple is over, and the risen Christ appears to him, and says, Peter, do you love me? Peter, do you agape me?

Do you love me with an unconditional love, the love that God has for an undeserving person? And Peter says, Lord, I will let owe you.

I love you as a friend. So a second time Jesus says, Peter, do you love me with the love that God has for the undeserving?

And Peter says, Lord, I love you as a friend. And then the third time Jesus says, Peter, do you love me as a friend?

[ 21 : 26 ] And Peter says, you know everything, Lord. You know I love you as a friend. In other words, Jesus recognizes that Peter cannot, he cannot with conviction in his heart say, I love you with a sacrificial love that I would go to a cross and die for you, Lord.

But I love you with all my heart. I love you as much as I can love anyone as weak and as frail and as fragile as I am. In other words, we cannot love with the love of God unless God gives us that love.

If we try to love, we can only love with the best we've got. With our inconsistencies, our frailties, our weaknesses. Lord, I will give you the best I've got.

I'm not sure I can die for you. I think I can, but when it comes to it, I'm not sure I can. I'm not sure I could go to prison for you. I think I can, but when it comes to it, I might not be able to.

I'm not even sure, Lord, I have enough faith to know that I will be able to survive if the doctor tells me I'm going to die tomorrow of cancer. I think I'll be able to survive, but I'm not sure because I'm weak and frail.

[ 22 : 37 ] love. But Lord, if you fill me with your love, I might be able to love with the love that you have, a love that lays down its life for its friends.

And that is why John says love is from God, God is love, and the person who lives in love lives in God, but the person who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

And then he's using the words agape, and then he's saying if you're going to love each other as God loves you, you can only do it if God lives in you and his love is made complete in you.

Does that make sense? He's not asking us to love with the best we've got. He's asking us to love with the love that he has for others, a sacrificial love in which we will lay down our lives for our friends.

So next slide, Josh. This is what love is. It's an affection and a loyalty that brings us to our parents, that binds us rather to our parents, our siblings, an extended family via blood ties, friendships, etc.

[ 23 : 48 ] If you've got that kind of love, you know something of love. You can love. Congratulate yourself. There are some people that are so narcissistic that they can't even do that.

They only love themselves. There are some people that are so broken by life circumstances that they can't do that. They can't trust anymore because their love, their affection has been abused and taken from them by abusive parents or abusive lovers or whatever.

So it isn't a given that people can love like that, but it's at least that. It's a desire. It's a heart-skipping feeling that makes us go, wow, when we meet somebody and fall in love.

It is that. It is eros. At least it should be, and there's nothing wrong with it in the right context. But it is a determination to show love to the unlovely.

It is a determination to love someone with the love that God has for us. And it is a commitment to live out the two greatest commandments that Jesus gives us, to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and love our neighbor as ourselves.

[ 25 : 07 ] And that is a command that we're called to do. So we can never get to the point where we say, hey, you know what, I'm the best Christian I could ever be.

In fact, you will never meet a Christian better than me. That won't happen because the love, the demand, the calling is so high to love God with the love that he has for me and to love my neighbor with the love that Jesus has for people that would lay down his life for his friends.

Not there yet. Never going to be there this side of heaven, but it doesn't stop me longing for it. And so next slide please. love is the essence of the season of Advent.

This is what it's all about. Love came down at Christmas to teach us how to love. Are you a loving person?

A love that is expressed to your family, your friends, a love that is expressed toward your commitments, a love that is expressed to the undeserving, to the people who have hurt you, damaged you, betrayed you, turned their backs on you.

[ 26 : 36 ] That's hard, isn't it? But that's what Jesus did. That's how Jesus loved. And that's a high calling.

you see, you hear of somebody falling out with their husband and throwing themselves in the harbor, or somebody being so sad with life that they throw themselves in the harbor and die.

That happened in Whitby this week somehow. You see people sitting on the street corners and you wonder how they ever got there, living out on the streets.

You hear of things where people behave terribly and you kind of feel like judging them. Actually, our heart should break. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

That feels good because I'm not really that bad, you know, and I'm quite lovable, really, as you know, and God can love me, that's easy, but what if he's vile? What if he's ugly?

[ 27 : 58 ] What if he's wicked? God should love him? Yes. Greater love of no man than this, than a man lay down his life for his friends.

It's a downside easier than laying down your life for your enemies, but that's what Jesus did. Father, forgive them, even the one who spits in my face, for they know not what they do.

It's the essence. And secondly, next slide, Josh, it is the consequence. The consequence of the season of Advent is that we are called to love one another.

And that is in, oh, I quite like you, I'll give you a Christmas card, or, well, I'm quite committed to you, so I'll turn up and help with Bethlehem. it's actually, I will love you no matter how bad you have been, and no matter how bad you may become.

I will be loyal to you if you let me down. I will stick with you if you betray me. I will care for you when you're sick and in need.

[ 29 : 22 ] I will always be there for you because I love you. And just as the Father says, I will never leave you or forsake you, the Christian says to his brother or sister in Christ, I will never leave you or forsake you.

Because John says, if we do not love our brothers whom we have seen, we cannot love God whom we have not seen. A person who does not love his brother is like Cain, a murderer.

And we know that a murderer has no life in him. The love we have for each other is committed love. It's something we don't give up on or walk away from.

Not if the love of God is in our hearts. And so the last slide. Our call at Advent is to express love for God as we enter into a relationship with the Father and the Son.

If we have not entered into a relationship with Jesus, we will not understand any of the kind of things I've been talking about in regard to our commitment to each other.

[ 30 : 42 ] And that's why, you see, when people walk away from church, John says, when people walk away from the Christian community, they were not of us.

Because if they'd been of us, they would have stayed with us. See, a person who walks out on his wife and children has got something wrong with his heart.

lost his love. If you lose your love to the principle of the marriage, you lose your love to the circumstances of the marriage, too.

You can no longer belong to the family because you no longer feel the love. It's exactly the same in the spiritual realm. People who walk away from church are walking away from God, and they need to repent.

you cannot separate your love for God from your love for the church family. We can't love God whom we have not seen unless we love our brothers whom we do see.

[ 31 : 50 ] So it is expressed in relationship with the Father and the Son. It is maintained by continual communion with Jesus. We abide in his love. That's what God calls us to do in Jesus.

And then we demonstrate it. We demonstrate our truth claim by showing love to one another. Just in closing, if we look at that passage in 1 John 3, just want you to read it.

Have your Bible open and read it and just let it sink in as we close today. remember this is not John Winter speaking, this is the apostle John.

The best ever I've got to is kind of pastor, yeah, not an apostle, have no aspirations to be, don't believe God will call me to that.

1 John chapter 3 verse 10. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest.

[ 33 : 02 ] Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. Notice that. He doesn't say, nor is he who does not love God.

He says, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain, who was of the wicked one, and murdered his brother.

And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brothers righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we pass from death to life.

Why? Because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because he laid down his life for us, and we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever! What does John mean by love?

[ 34 : 08 ] This is what it looks like. Whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before him.

Our Heart and Knows All Things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask, we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

And this is his commandment. This is what you need to know, that we should believe on the name of his son Jesus Christ and love one another as he give us his commandment.

One thing he says I want you to do above everything else is to love your brother and your sister in Christ.

[ 35 : 16 ] Love came down at Christmas but you can't find it in a present under your tree. You find it in your heart that grows three times the size that it currently is.

Let's not be grinchies. Let us love one another. Amen.