



## **Advent**

### **(Week 4/4) Love: God's Love Made Flesh**

#### Small Group Discussion Questions

**Connect** *How do you typically get ready for Christmas? How can you get ready in light of Jesus' return?*

#### **Warm-Up**

1. What are the common portrayals of love that you witness in popular culture?
2. Outside of the Bible, do you have a favourite love story? Does it have any shortcomings?
3. How is God's love different? Why is God's love such better news?

#### **Read John 3:16-17**

4. According to John, what is the driving motivation of God to send his Son?
5. What reminds you of God's love on a regular basis in your life?
6. Who is the ultimate giver? What is the significance of God's love being given and not earned?
7. What does it mean to you to know that God is the one who has taken the initiative?
8. When John says "gave" what is the decisive and definitive act that he is pointing to? Why is it so important that God's love is not a future promise but a present reality based on a past victory?
9. How is it good news that God's love is not *dependent on us*? If God's love was dependent on us, how would it spell disaster for us? How has the security of God's love spurred you on in life?
10. What amazes you about God's love? What gives you confidence in God's love?
11. Who has God given to us? What is the significance of *Jesus being God's one and only Son*?
12. How have you ever been given something unique? How unique is God's gift for us?
13. When John refers to 'the world', what is he referring to? What condition is this world in?
14. Why is it counterintuitive that Jesus would die for a world in rebellion? What do we deserve?
15. Apart from Jesus, what is our destiny according to John? In him, what are we saved to?
16. Who are we saved *through*? How is that possible? In what way does it involve judgement for sin?
17. Even when we severely love someone, how is our love limited? What is the limit of God's love?

#### **Read John 3:18-19**

18. What is the way that we receive God's gift of saving love to us? What does it mean to 'believe'?
19. For those who love Jesus (believe and trust in him), how are we called to express that love?
20. How does God help us to express his love in the world? What also helps you to do that?
21. As we've considered the hope, peace, joy, and love that Jesus brings, how might that shape your celebration of Christmas this year?

**Apply** *In the coming year, how do you long to grow as a disciple of Jesus? What will help you to do that?*

**Pray** *Loving God, thank you that your love for us knew no limits, not even the giving of your one and only Son. Help us to look to you and grow in our love for you. Amen.*

# GOING DEEPER

## **Advent** **(Week 4/4) Love: God's Love Made Flesh**

### Small Group Discussion Questions

#### **On Your Front Line this Week**

*Pray for the people you will celebrate Christmas with, and for the people you will interact with in your preparations in the shops and at the supermarket.*

#### **For Families**

- *Download:* some of the family resources to use at home: [stbartskids.org](https://stbartskids.org)

#### **Listen, Watch, and Read**

- *Listen (sermon):* "An Honest Seeker" by Vaughan Roberts: <https://stebbes.org/sermons/an-honest-seeker/#sermons>
- *Listen (sermon):* "The God of Love and Fury" by Tim Keller: <https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/the-god-of-love-fury/>
- *Read (article):* "The God Who Loves" by Don Carson: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/the-god-who-is-there-part-9-the-god-who-loves/>
- *Watch (clip):* "World Athletics Reception" by Nicola Olysagers: <https://bit.ly/3YDKrli>

#### **Series Resources**

- *Read:* "Advent (Fullness of Time Series)" by Tish Harrison Warren. 📖
- *Devotional:* "Sing in Exultation" by Jonanthan Landry Cruse. 📖
- *Devotional:* "The One True Gift" by Tim Chester. 📖
- *Devotional:* "Advent for Everyone: Luke" by Tom Wright. 📖
- *Read:* "What Christians Ought to Believe" by Michael Bird. 📖
- *Read:* "Is Christmas Unbelievable" by Rebecca McLaughlin. 📖
- *Read:* "The God who Became Human" by Graham Cole. <https://bit.ly/3g68RBj>
- *Read:* "On the Incarnation" by Athanasius. <https://bit.ly/3E5gLmB>
- *Watch:* "The Incarnation (Spoken Word)" by Humble Word. <https://bit.ly/3OhgPUP>
- *Listen:* A Carols Playlist (curated by the St Bart's staff team): <https://spoti.fi/3OaIsTK>

## ADVENT

*Week 4/4 “Love: God’s Love Made Flesh  
by the Rev’d Adam Lowe (21/12/2025)*

사랑: 성육신의 사랑 | NHIËR  
爱: 神的爱道成肉身 | அன்பு: கடவுளின் அன்பினால் மாம்சமானார்

*Bible Passage: John 3:16-19*

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*Loving God, thank you that your love for us knew no limits, not even the giving of your one and only Son.  
Help us to believe this good news and grow in our love for you. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.*

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With *love* being one of the greatest human longings,  
it’s no wonder that we’re kind of obsessed with *love stories*.

- Everything from the classic — *even ancient* — love stories.  
Right through to tiktoks speculating on random people’s love lives.
- For as far back as we can glean, across almost every culture imaginable,  
every genre conceivable: be it books, film, or art, from Shakespeare to Swift,  
be they triumphs or tragedies, we’re all kind of longing for love.
- But if you want to see the peak cultural expression of that,  
*the jewel in our cultural crown, then you need look no further than the Romantic Comedy!*
- If you’re not familiar with the cultural masterpiece that is the modern day Rom Com,  
I’ve got great news: they all follow the same four-stage fail-safe narrative arc.
- **Stage 1: The Context:** *Two unlikely people — perhaps those even resisting love —  
meet due to their worlds colliding in circumstances beyond their control.*  
**Stage 2: The Connection:** *Against all odds, perhaps even with a mutual animosity towards one  
another, they develop a deepening bond and mutual affection.*  
**Stage 3: The Catastrophe:** *What would typically be an easily resolvable issue in any other  
circumstance, their relationship is put in jeopardy by a misunderstanding or their baggage.*  
**Stage 4: The Commitment:** *As at least one character seeks out the other, often with a grand  
gesture, their love is proven to be worth fighting for, not because circumstances are perfect,  
but because love is worth the risk.*

- That's the modern recipe for love. /
- It's no wonder it kind of leaves us wanting.
- It leaves us wanting, because the type of love that we truly long for is greater.
- *Less fragile.*  
*Less flittery.*  
*Less fleeting.* / Less dependent on us. /
- We're wired for love. Yet our experience of it—for all sorts of reasons—regularly disappoints.
- *But John tells us that there is one love—in fact there is only one—that will never disappoint.*  
*Because it is a love from God.*
- **For God SO LOVED the world.** /
- Christmas in many ways is the ultimate love story of God's love leading him into action.  
But it's not just one for us to watch on with interest, *to stream from a distance*,  
it's one we're invited into.

So what makes this love different? //

- John 3, or least John 3:16, is possibly the most well-known passage of all time.  
so let's pass over it slowly to examine the nature of God's love.
- As we do, we see *very simply* that God's love is:
- **Given;**  
**Saving; and**  
**To be Believed.**

## GIVEN | VERSE 16

주어짐 | Gëm | 賜予 | கொடுக்கப்பட்டது

First, God's love is **GIVEN**. Verse 16...

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For God so loved the world that he **gave** his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

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*On Christmas Day when the wrapped gifts that have been tucked up under the tree are fin given out, there are two things we're usually curious to know: WHO IS THE GIVER + WHAT IS THE GIFT.*

And actually, our curiosity should drive us to ask the same pair of questions about this gift.  
So first, *who according to John*, is the giver of this gift?

- God so loved the world that HE gave.  
**God is the giver.** / Let the weight of that sink in.
- It means that this is a gift. *We haven't earned it. It's not a payment or a reward.*  
It means that it comes from God himself. *This is a very special type of gift.*  
But we're also told that his driving motivation to give was because HE LOVED US.
- *When you see the word, "FOR" at the beginning of the verse, you can swap it out with 'because'.*
- **Because** God so loved the world he GAVE US... // His *perfect love drove him to action...*
- Sometimes we receive gifts because we have earned them or deserve them in some way.

- They might be in appreciation of you, or in gratitude for what you've done. That's nice.
- But the type of love that God demonstrates to us is different.  
*It's not dependent on us in any way.*
- And whilst when people give gifts, there are sometimes strings attached  
*so we might rightly question their motives or even their agendas,*  
we can delight that the cause of God's giving is due to his love for the world.
- That means that we can have confidence that whatever God gives is secure.  
*It's not fragile, flittery, or fleeting like that in a rom com!*  
*It's not conditional on how well we perform. /*  
*It's not dependent on God getting what he wants. //*
- It's important to note, that John doesn't say this gift *is ongoing*,  
or that God *will give in a future sense*, but that God *HAS given*. He gave. It's done.
- It points to a *decisive* point. A *definitive* historical action.
- This is not a casual type of generosity based on a whim,  
or one that may or may not happen, but this is a gift that has already been made.
- In fact, it's implied that this gift *already* made is one involving personal loss and sacrifice.

That makes more sense when you consider what—or *who*—God gave us.

- The answer to WHO gave the GIFT and WHAT HE GAVE are linked.  
God gave his one and only Son.

- In the original language, the word for '*one and only*' is a compound word.  
*It's packed with meaning, conveying both a sense of something unique, but also one of a kind.*
- Jesus is not only God's Son, but he shares God's nature in a way that no one else does.
- Jesus has no rivals and no equals.  
Jesus is unique in status, nature, and relationship with the Father. /
- Don't miss how extraordinary this is.  
*God gave us the most precious and unique gift he could possibly give. /*  
Not precious and exclusive in the sense of a limited edition artwork,  
or a luxury item that you might be in a queue for years to acquire.
- But God gave us his Son of which he has only one.
- God didn't give out of his abundance, of which there is much.  
*Remember: he is both the creator and sustainer of all that is seen and unseen.*  
*The whole universe is his. There's 100 billion stars for every person who has ever lived.*  
*This isn't like a billionaire giving away \$100...*
- But the quality of God's love is so great, that it didn't drive him to give him out of his plenty,  
of which there is more than we can possibly conceive,  
but to give the one thing which is scarce because that is what we needed. //

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One of our family members is a bit obsessed with finding *supposedly* rare Pokemon cards. He loves the idea of finding or being given something that is unique, maybe even one-of-a-kind. We can all be a bit like that.

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- We all can long for that type of thing,  
not just because of their apparent value, but because they can make us feel valuable.
- It's no wonder that in a machine world, with millions of widgets being spun out of factories and being made available to us with express shipping, it's common to see advertisements accompanied with the claim of their products being unique.
- They're tapping into a longing that we have.  
*But at best, they're just offering the same thing with small variations. /*
- But not so with God.
- *Do you understand how valuable the world is to God?*  
*Of how valuable you are to God?*
- God loves you so much, that:  
not only has he taken the initiative to give you a gift — *it's given, not earnt;*  
not only has he already done it — *if we just look to the cross;*  
but *he gave us a gift of which he only had one.*
- And he did so, to save us.

## SAVING | VERSE 17

구원하심 | Luëëk | 拯救 | இரட்சிக்கிறது

God's love is **SAVING**. Verse 17...

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For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to **save** the world through him.

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*John wants us to be left without a doubt that God's love-driven intention is to save the world.*

- That's laid out in verse 16, but especially here,  
as both a *correction* and an *assertion*.
- The Correction: God *did not send* his Son to condemn the world;  
The Assertion: God *sent* his Son to save the world.
- Some people's picture of God is one who only judges — who always says NO;  
Other people think that God loving cannot ever involve judgement — always says YES.
- But both of those are oversimplifications. //
- When John says that God loved the **world**;  
sent his son into the **world** not to condemn it, but to save the **world**,  
the word for 'world' doesn't *just* mean to *earth* or to *humanity as a whole*.  
Of course, Jesus did enter into the physical world. And Jesus did come to save everyone.
- But in John, **WORLD** also carries the sense of a **world in rebellion**.

- That's who we are. A world who has turned against our creator. A world resistant to God.
- So when John says, God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, it's almost a bit of a surprise. *Because condemnation through judgement is what we deserve.*
- Yet in God's love that is not how it ends.
- God doesn't put away judgement — it would be unloving if there was no justice. But God takes that judgement on himself to save us. //
- There is both a saving FROM and a saving TO.  
**He saves us from perishing.** *That's the trajectory we're on without a rescue.* AND:  
**He saves us into eternal life.** *That's the trajectory we're on with our rescuer.*

How did he do it? *The answer is at the end of v.17./ God sent his Son to save the world through him.*

- Remember that when we read that God **gave** his one and only Son, *it does not only mean a gift*, but he's pointing to a distinctive action that's done. The definitive work of the cross. God's love is not only a future promise, but a present reality because it is based on a past victory.
- Jesus coming into the world is not just a token of God's love. Jesus coming into the world and dying for us is an *effective* expression of God's love. God is pouring out his love in order to meet us at our deepest need: forgiveness.
- He's not overlooking the sin and evil of our world — or in each and everyone of us. But he sees the depth of the problem laid bare, and plunges himself into the thick of it.

- Taking all of that sin on himself. Taking the judgement on himself. So that we might live. And he's the only one who can do it. //

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Some of the most heartbreaking times in our lives are the ones in which we're powerless to truly help someone we love. It doesn't matter how sincere our love is, but sometimes there is nothing we can do to help. *Do you know that feeling?* Often at this time of year, for many, it's a stark reminder of the losses we've experienced. To love — as Lewis puts it, makes us vulnerable. When we witness the pain in our world — when we witness evil at work, like we did just one week ago, we cry out for justice, we long for the eradication of evil. Yet, whilst we can console and comfort, seek to protect people and point to God's Kingdom, we're ultimately unable — we're powerless — to address the root cause of the problem in our world and in ourselves. The problem of sin. // The catastrophe that has broken our relationship with God is completely of our own doing. /

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*The context for these verses in John is an interaction between Nicodemus, a Pharisee, and Jesus.*

- Nicodemus was a sincere seeker. He had more reasons to think he was right with God. But Jesus tells him that one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born again. / Nicodemus takes that quite literally so thought it sounded like a physical impossibility.
- But Jesus in effect, no Nicodemus, that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about being born again spiritually. *But that too is impossible on our own.* /
- God had to make a way. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, *Jesus said*, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.
- In the wilderness, the people were facing judgement for their rebellion. For their sin. But if they looked at a bronze serpent that Moses held up, then they would live.



## TO BE BELIEVED | VERSES 18-19

믿게 하심 | Nē kē bēne yēen Gääm | 值得相信 | நம்ப வேண்டும்

- Not because the bronze serpent had any power on its own. This wasn't magic. It required an act of repentance and relying on God's provision for grace.

Do you hear what Jesus *and John* are saying? It's stark but it's honest.

- The whole world — including us — is in desperate need of rescuing. We're not only living in the mess of our sin, but one day we will face judgement for it. /
- But because of God's love, he has made a way through his Son's death and resurrection, not only that we might live — but so that we might live forever.
- His love is given to us. Not earnt. / His love is saving through his Son.
- But his love is also **TO BE BELIEVED**. That's how it takes a grip on our lives.

*Verse 15: whoever BELIEVES may have eternal life in him.*

*Verse 16: whoever BELIEVES in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

- Then picking up at verse 18...

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Whoever **believes** in him is not condemned, but whoever does **not believe** stands condemned already because they have **not believed** in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people **loved darkness instead of light** because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. *But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.*

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John is laying out two trajectories:

- Whoever *does not* believe stands condemned already.  
Whoever *does* believe is not condemned. //
- To 'Believe' doesn't simply mean acknowledging that Jesus lived, died, and rose.  
That's the first step. But it's taking that knowledge and responding with your life.
- It involves your *head, heart, and will*.
- It's seeing God's love poured out on the cross, and saying: Jesus is *my* Lord and Saviour!  
*I'm so sorry for my sin. Thank you that you died for me. Please help me to live your way. //*
- On the odd occasion in a Romantic Comedy, when someone makes a declaration of love, they make a detour from the well-worn narrative, and the other person is unmoved.
- But please don't be unmoved by what Jesus has done for you.  
Our world approaches love in such a consumeristic way.  
*The question is not what do you want or what more could you ask for?*  
But: can't you see that he's offering everything you need?

Responding to his love is not just loving him but loving his ways: *walking in his light*.

- But the tragedy is that some would prefer to love the darkness rather than loving him.  
John warns: one day the light—that is Jesus—will expose every evil we've committed. /
- *When John refers to those who do evil things, he doesn't mean that anyone who sins is not saved.*



- If that was the case, none of us could be saved.
- But he's talking about those who persistently choose that path instead of pursuing Jesus.
- *If you believe in Jesus as your Lord and Saviour you have no reason to doubt your salvation.*
- That promise is clear. We spend our whole lifetime making mistakes, and seeking to live his way. But we can do so with absolute security of our future in him.
- It's gives us a freedom to love like him as we await his return.

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Just a few weeks ago, the Australian high jumper, Nicola Olysagers, was awarded the 2025 World Athletics Field Athlete of the year. During her acceptance speech, she pointed back to the days when she worked as a dishwasher in a cafe, saving money and dreaming to compete internationally. But she made it clear that what really drives her *and gives her strength* is the love of God which she knows. She said, his love sustained me back then when I was washing dishes and it sustains me now on top of the world.

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- It's a love the gives us a future.  
It's a love that transforms our present. / *Do you want to know a love like that? //*
- The longing to love *and to be loved* is right.
- But your first love can't be in a person or a thing — realised *or longed for*.  
*Because it is powerless to save. /*  
I pray that I bring hope, peace, love, and joy to my loved ones.  
But at worst it is counterfeit. At best it *reflects the one who is the ultimate source of love*.  
*When it comes to your first love, go to the source. / The one who is love. And whose love saves. //*

- People look for love in all sorts of places.  
But there is one who you can love with absolute confidence because he loved you first.
- *A love that knew no limits, not even death.*  
*A love that lives on, because Jesus lives on.*  
*A love that can be known, because God revealed himself to us.*  
*A love that makes us into a beloved people.*  
*A love that can be experienced, because God gave us his Spirit.*  
*A love that saves because his death breaks the power of sin and death.*
- For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son,  
That whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.