

BEHOLD

ADVENT

A CROSS POINT DEVOTIONAL



A vertical rectangular image featuring a misty forest landscape. The foreground is filled with dark, dense evergreen trees. The background is a soft, hazy white mist that obscures the distant trees. The word "LOVE" is centered in the middle of the image in a large, black, serif font.

LOVE



SUNDAY: WHAT IS LOVE?

According to Billboard, 9.6 percent of all Hot 100 number one songs feature the word *love* in the title.¹ At least three just popped into your head. As a society, we're obsessed with love. From romantic comedies to reality shows like *The Bachelor*, to music, to books, we've made love the pinnacle of life. As a result, we're conditioned to believe that to experience love is to live the fullest life possible.

But what *kind* of love have we made supreme?

Love, as defined by the English dictionary is a “strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties” or “warm attachment, enthusiasm, or devotion.” We use the word *love* to speak casually of a restaurant we enjoy or to describe our deep paternal affection for our children. Its uses in our language span a wide spectrum.

¹ Bronson, F. (2022, April 6). Top 50 Love songs of all time. Billboard. Retrieved October 5, 2022, from <https://www.billboard.com/lists/top-50-love-songs-of-all-time/>

This loose definition of love in our culture is based purely on feelings. Feelings of warmth and delight or attraction and affection. It's certainly not bad, but is it enough? Is it worth pursuing at all costs?

While Valentine's Day takes the cake for the time of year dedicated to this "love," we've just described, the Advent season evokes a deep sense of love and a deep longing for the love we were made for. Not the kind of love you have for your dog or for a chicken sandwich, or even for a spouse, but a universal love found in the singular person of Christ Jesus. A love far more comprehensive and far more powerful than "strong affection" or "warm attachment."

This love carries weight and satisfies every need of our hearts.

MEDITATION FOR THE DAY

“BUT GOD
DEMONSTRATES
HIS OWN LOVE
FOR US IN THIS:
WHILE WE WERE
STILL SINNERS,
CHRIST DIED
FOR US.”

ROMANS 5:8 NIV

MONDAY: AGAPE LOVE

There are four primary expressions for *love* in the Greek language.

Eros: sexual or romantic love

Storge: familial love, such as for one's sister or mother, etc.

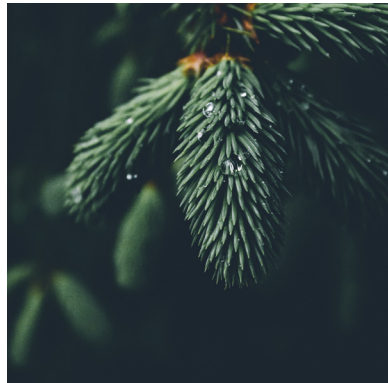
Philea: friendship and camaraderie

Agape: God's love that He has for creation

All but *eros* are used in some form in the New Testament, but there is one that is set apart from the others, one that our English language can't contain: *Agape*.

Agape is mentioned in the New Testament 115 times and is directly tied to the nature of God. He *is* love. It is not a love about mere emotion, but is demonstrated by action. Agape love is sacrificial, without expecting anything in return. The agape love of God is best demonstrated through the person and work of Jesus.

We see this in the first advent, when Jesus entered our world, fully God and fully human, as an infant. "*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*"





We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Jesus' birth is agape love. He showed up to embody agape love, to demonstrate agape love, and to empower agape love in those who put their faith in Him.

This agape love is the love our hearts both rejoice in and ache for. It is the love we've already experienced in the life and death of Jesus Christ and the love we long for in a broken world.

This is the pinnacle of life. As Paul writes to the Philippians, "Indeed, I count *everything* as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Author's italics). The love of Christ is worth leaving everything behind. It's altogether different from the love this world holds so highly.

Meditation for the Day:

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

JOHN 1:14 NIV



**TUESDAY: RECONCILING LOVE
AND PAIN**

To be human is to know pain. Whether self-inflicted or at the hands of others, pain is inevitable. This pain often opens valid questions in our hearts about why the world is the way it is as we try to reconcile a loving God with a suffering world. Simple questions such as, "If God loves me, then why did _____ happen?" arise in response to life experiences.

There is an answer to this age-old question. *Everything* started in The garden. It was out of God's overflowing love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that He created the world. He poured out His heart into creation the way a painter slaves over a portrait until every detail is as it's supposed to be.

Since true love is a choice, we were created with the choice to receive

and respond to God's love--or not. In Genesis 3, the serpent plants the idea that maybe God is withholding something from His creation, and maybe Adam and Eve can't trust Him, ultimately doubting the purity of God's love for them. As the story goes, our first parents chose to act on that doubt, making a way for the disconnect we *all* experience between the truth of God's love and the human experience.

What we experience and are prone to as a result of the fall is the tendency toward selfishness, greed, pride, envy, vain conceit, and the like. While there are consequences of the fall, God's agape love for creation never changed. He never stopped pursuing us. The rest of the Bible is a love letter describing God's ferocious pursuit of His people.

MEDITATION FOR THE DAY
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"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

JAMES 1:17 NIV

WEDNESDAY: LOVE EMBODIED

From Genesis until Luke 1, God's creation waits on the first Advent. Scattered throughout the Hebrew scriptures are promises and prophecies of God's plan to restore Israel to Himself through the promised Messiah. *Agape love pursues.*

Then, in the most unexpected and overwhelmingly mundane circumstances, Jesus enters our world as a human. Paul says it best in Philippians 2:7, that he "made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." From an unassuming, poor, teenage girl's womb, God chooses to make His grand entrance.

This is the Christmas story. The beauty of it lies within its irony. Even in His entrance, God illustrates what agape love is. A love that meets us where we are, a love that takes on suffering and every temptation (Hebrews 4:15), a love that would go on to demonstrate and model the agape love that we are then called to embody. A love that would submit itself to death on a cross on our behalf.

MEDITATION FOR THE DAY

"Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature
of a servant, being made in human likeness."

PHILIPPIANS 2:7 NIV

THURSDAY: SACRIFICIAL LOVE

“Then others — evil dwarfs and apes — rushed in to help them, and between them they rolled the huge Lion over on his back and tied all his four paws together, shouting and cheering as if they had done something brave, though, had the Lion chose, one of those paws could have been the death of them all. But he made no noise, even when the enemies, straining and tugging, pulled the cords so tight that they cut into his flesh.”

“And even now, as they worked about his face putting on the muzzle, one bite from his jaws would have cost two or three of them their hands. But he never moved. And this seemed to enrage all that rabble. Everyone was at him now. Those who had been afraid to come near him even after he was bound began to find their courage, and for a few minutes the two girls could not even see him — so thickly was he surrounded by the whole crowd of creatures kicking him, hitting him, spitting on him, jeering at him.”²

If you're familiar with the story of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, then you probably remember this scene. Aslan, the King of Narnia

returns to defeat the White Witch, ending the eternal winter they'd been living in. He knows what has to be done and submits himself to torture and ultimately death in order to defeat her.

It's no secret that C. S. Lewis intended to draw a parallel between Jesus and Aslan, but the juxtaposition of Aslan's physical strength, the strength of a lion, and his restraint as he chooses to endure torture has a way of making what Jesus did on the cross all the more profound.

The human heart is moved by sacrificial *love*.

Jesus' birth *and* His death together best illustrate agape love. Christmas and Easter *together* deliver the final blow to the enemy. First He entered our world, denying Himself all the glory and honor that is rightfully His, modeled through His life what agape love looks like, and then put the nail in the coffin through His death and resurrection. This is the master's wisdom that would finally restore creation and the Creator.

² The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch & The Wardrobe

MEDITATION FOR THE DAY



"By this, we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers."

1 JOHN 3:16 NIV

MEDITATION FOR THE DAY

“BY THIS
EVERYONE WILL
KNOW THAT
YOU ARE MY
DISCIPLES IF
YOU LOVE ONE
ANOTHER.”

JOHN 13:35 NIV

FRIDAY:

THE NEW COMMANDMENT: LOVE ONE ANOTHER

“Love is not an affectionate feeling, but a steady wish for the loved person’s ultimate good as far as it can be obtained.” - C. S. Lewis

We received a generous gift when Jesus ascended into heaven. A gift meant to aid us while we wait on His return. The gift of the Holy Spirit. The difference between the first and second Advent is the gift of the Holy Spirit. We no longer wait alone. Instead, our waiting is purposeful and contains glimpses of what the world will be like someday.

Jesus’ most famous and highest command is simple: “*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another*” (John 13:34).

By the power of the Holy Spirit, it is our privilege and duty as followers of Christ to agape. We receive God’s agape in order to boldly give it away. John goes on to say “*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another*” (13:35).

The way you love your family, your friends, your neighbors, and your enemies will serve as a sign to the world that Jesus is alive and active, and that there is a love far greater than anything we could experience on earth, available to anyone who desires to know Him.

The Christmas season, the Advent we symbolically celebrate today, is simply a reminder to followers of Christ of God’s mission and an open invitation to participate in something better than we could ever imagine with Someone who is better than we think.

SATURDAY: THERE IS LOVE

After the last tear falls after the last
secret's told
After the last bullet tears through
flesh and bone
After the last child starves and the
last girl walks the boulevard
After the last year that's just
too hard
There is love

Andrew Peterson, *After The Last
Tear Falls*

The tension of the in-between is the already and the not yet. Salvation is the single greatest moment of someone's life. In a confession of faith in Jesus Christ, and response to the Father's lavish love, there is a supernatural exchange: a heart of stone becomes a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26) and the extravagant love of the Father is received. At the very same time, there still exists an entire world desperate for that same love.

Romans 8 says it best: "For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only

this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (22-23). Along with creation, the Spirit inside us groans for the day "when the last tear falls after the last secret's told." Even in the hearts of Jesus' followers, a war wages as we battle sin and selfish desires.

Jesus made it clear that the war was won when He breathed His last breath on the cross. But the battle endures and it won't cease until Jesus returns.

At the end of 1 Corinthians 13, Paul describes in detail what the agape love of Christ looks like between disciples, then concludes with this:

"Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like

a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now, we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (8-12).

In a world where agape love can be hard to notice amidst so much violence, sorrow, and injustice, there is hope knowing that what we know

now is only in part. On this side of eternity, even our best days with God pale in comparison to what is coming. A day when God's work is complete and we see Him face to face. A day when all else ceases, but love. Forever.

The Christmas season is a reminder that we've received the best gift we could ever receive and there is still so much more we look forward to in anticipation.

MEDITATION FOR THE DAY

"For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now, we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

1 CORINTHIANS 13:9-12 NIV

CHRISTMAS



DAY



Throughout the entire story of scripture there's a juxtaposition between darkness and light, counterparts both physical and spiritual. It first appears in Genesis 1:3-4. "And God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness."

From the beginning the thing that brought light from darkness was the Word of God. This imagery took on a deeper significance after sin's entrance into the world. Evil and darkness become somewhat synonymous throughout the narrative of Scripture, so much so, that Isaiah, who was speaking the Word of God during the eighth century B.C., foretold of a day when "the people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned" (Isaiah 9:2). That day was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus.

The world languishes under the curse of sin and darkness, both externally and internally. Which is why hope and peace and joy and love are clung to so tightly. These are the ingredients of true life. We're desperate for them. We long for light to break through and pierce the darkness of our world and of our hearts.

Jesus once declared, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). The advent of Jesus was the arrival of true light and life. It was the dawn of a new day.

For hundreds and hundreds of years now, the Church has concluded the Advent season with the lighting of what's called the Christ Candle on Christmas Day. This candle symbolizes Christ's entrance, the light of the world, the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14). It is a tangible reminder that we were never meant to live in darkness; that God has not left us to ourselves. And He has arranged things in such a way that when the gospel is proclaimed, God speaks to darkened hearts through the message. As one who experienced that firsthand, the Apostle Paul says, "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to

give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). The light passes from one person to another in the receiving of the Word.

In many churches, this happens by turning all the lights off, lighting the Christ Candle, and then passing that light from one candle to another until the entire room is filled with light. It is a declaration of the gospel, in a performance of light being shared with one another. This is what Advent is all about. Because just as we rejoice in Christ's first coming, we eagerly await His second, when the Bible tells us that followers of Jesus will dwell with Him and that "There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light" (Revelation 22). The source is the glory of God; Jesus is the lamp. He is the great light of the world. (Revelation 21). Even now, that light "shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5).

So Merry Christmas, Cross Point Church! Rejoice! Rejoice in your salvation. Rejoice that this present darkness is not the end of the story. Rejoice that Jesus is the light of the world. Receive His light and then carry it to others, as we await His arrival yet again.

MEDITATION FOR THE DAY



"And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light."

ROMANS 13:11-12 NIV

NOTES

MERRY CHRISTMAS