

INTRO

- How do you define love?
- Why do you think we as people have a desire to love and be loved?

Advent is the season leading up to Christmas. It's an ancient liturgy designed to help us reflect on Jesus' 1st coming and anticipate his 2nd coming (advent = coming). This Advent we are focusing on the hope, peace, joy, and love found in the extraordinary story of Jesus.

READ

1 John 4:7-12

REFLECT

When scripture talks about love, it had different greek words to describe love in different ways. For example, there is the love of friendship, sexual love, affection towards loved ones, and then *agape-love* — the God-kind of love.

Qu: how would you describe agape-love? How is this different to what our culture might define love as?

In today's text, we see three truths about agape-love.

1. GOD IS LOVE

God defines love and God's agape-love is other-centred and sacrificial. It is a choice to seek the welfare of and work for the good of another. It also means that the very essence of God is this kind of love which means that every expression, everything God does, is loving.

Qu: Is it hard for you to believe that everything God does is out of love? Why or why not?

"God in his love always wills what is best for us. God in his wisdom always knows what is best."
— Jerry Bridges

2. JESUS IS LOVE EMBODIED

God's love is made manifest in Jesus. Jesus is the clearest picture of God's love for you.

Qu: Read v9-10. In which 2 specific ways is God's love for us made manifest through Jesus?

John tells us Jesus' incarnation and atonement are 2 vivid ways we see God's love for us through Jesus. Christmas is a reminder God loved us by sending Jesus to us.

3. OUR LOVE EMBODIES GOD TO OTHERS

Once we know and have personally received God's love through Jesus, we are enabled and instructed to give that kind of love to others, especially seen in how we treat those that are hard to love. When we love one another with this agape, other-centred kind of love, we embody what God is like to others.

Qu: In loving tough people like enemies, how does it help to remember we were enemies of God and still he chose to love us (Rom 5:8-10)?

Qu: Do you find it easy or difficult to really accept and say, like the apostle Paul, that "God loves me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20)?

God loves you because it is his nature to love, not because you have done something spectacular to gain his love. When in doubt, look to the birth, life and death of Jesus. Why is this such good news?

RESPOND & PRAY

- What challenged/encouraged you the most from today's discussion?
- Pray for one another to experience afresh God's love.
- Pray for those you find difficult to love—how might God be leading you to love them practically?