



*Waiting For
the King*

21 DAILY ADVENT MEDITATIONS

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*Week 3:
Amazing Love,
How Can It Be?*

Day 15 of Advent

Amazing Love In Action

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13: 34-35

A dentist's office may not be the first place that comes to mind when thinking of spiritually uplifting experiences. But it so happens that our family dentist is a believer, and visiting his clinic (at least the waiting room) can be a little like going to church.

With two kids needing braces, we spend long hours at the dentist's. But as we wait, I'm often struck by God's love made evident in the unlikeliest places. The office is nothing spectacular. In fact, it's quite the opposite.

On the wall are the words, "We treat, God heals." Okay, maybe that sounds corny to some, but I find the words comforting. Old-school worship music plays on the speakers. The dentist himself does what he does because it is a calling, and not merely a commercial pursuit. In our years of visiting him, he has barely mentioned a fee—even for braces, he doesn't insist on an upfront payment. His clinic is filled with people from all faiths and socio-economic backgrounds because his work is excellent and his work ethic is exceptional.

As people of God, we too are called to live exceptional lives. God loves us with a love so amazing that we fall to our knees and say, "How can it be?" It is a mysterious, baffling, overwhelming love. **But I wouldn't say we're baffled or confounded about what to do with that love.**

We are clearly instructed to share that love in every area of our lives—in our homes, workplaces, and communities.

This Christmas, may we share the love of Jesus in whatever way we can. When people meet us, it should feel a little bit like going to church. We can be conduits of God's grace and love so much so that people will want to know the reason for our hope and joy.

Lean In

Heavenly Father, This Christmas, help me to share Your love, not just with people in my immediate circle, but also with those who can give me absolutely nothing in return. In the power of Your Holy Spirit, help me to pass Your love on in tangible ways. In Jesus' name.

Amen

Day 16 of Advent

Amazing Love Seen In Sacrifice

*After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
Matthew 2:11*

One of the worship songs that has been making the rounds recently strikes me as a little odd. Now, I'm not going to raise a hue and cry over it. We have enough division in the church already. I don't need to add to the skirmishes over songs.

Okay, I'll just go ahead and quote it. It goes:
"But I've nothing else fit for a King, Except for a heart singing hallelujah."

The point the songwriter is making is that all that we bring to the Lord is but a paltry offering compared to what He gives us (life itself). But at the same time, I feel like maybe we do have more than "just one move" of throwing our hands up in praise and singing "Hallelujah." **Friend, don't we also have the option of obeying Him and giving Him our very best in everything?**

When the wise men in the Nativity story saw the newborn King, they fell to their knees in worship. But it didn't start there or end there. They had followed the star because they wanted to obey their calling. They presented their valuable gifts to the King because they knew He was worthy.

What do we give the King in response to His love for us? He left His throneroom behind to be laid in a trough in a stable. His sacrifice was borne out of His love for us.

What about ours? Are we content to just sing worship songs in church, lift our hands, and call it good? Or do we truly want to bring our hearts of worship and obedience? Do we offer Him our very best in terms of our time, talents, and treasures? This Advent, may we not just give Him our words but our very lives.

Lean In

Heavenly Father, I pray that I would not fall into the trap of being content to simply give you the offering of my lips. Instead, Lord, help me to offer my life as a sacrifice to You. In Jesus' name, Amen

Then it tells us what love *is*—it is that God sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

We love because He first loved us. (1_John 4:19)

Christmas is God saying, "I love you." He loved us so much that He did not wait for us to clean up our act. He knew we would never be able to live a perfect enough life to have a relationship with a Holy God. And so He sent His Son so we might "live through Him." *That is love.*

We respond to that amazing, humbling love by saying, "I love You too." In recognizing that we bring nothing to the table, in acknowledging our helplessness and our inability to even generate love on our own, we come before God in awe and surrender.

Lean In

Father God, I just want to come before You and say, "I love You too." I love You because You first loved me. Thank You for Christmas— You sent Your Son to be born in human form so I could have life abundant and eternal. I long to grow in intimacy with You. In Jesus' name. Amen

Day 18 of Advent

Amazing Love Brings Us To Repentance

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. Ephesians 2:4-5

Decades ago, a book called *Love Story* became a cultural phenomenon. It was later made into a movie with the same title. Even though both the movie and the book were before “my time,” I was familiar with a catchphrase from the movie which went: “Love means never having to say you’re sorry.”

Even as a teenager, when I first chanced on that line, I sensed that this catchphrase (as with many other catchphrases) sounded good but lacked truth.

The thing is all of us love imperfectly and live imperfectly. That's because we are a fallen people. If we could earn our place in heaven with a perfect track record then God would not have had to send His only Son into the world.

But Christmas is God's rescue plan for a fallen humanity, broken people like you and me. When we encounter God's amazing, stunning love and grace through the story of Christmas, it reveals our brokenness and our need to be pulled out of the muck and mire. Repenting of our sin, and saying we're "sorry" to the Lord is a good and right response.

Love for God means having to say you're sorry and living in a right relationship with Him through the gift of repentance.

Friend, the good news of the gospel is that no matter how much we've fallen short, when we repent of our sins and accept His gift of forgiveness, we become part of God's family.

We were dead in our transgression but He made us alive! God continues to sanctify us through and through so we can be conformed to the image of Christ.

But often that looks like us having to come before Him in repentance.

Lean In

Heavenly Father, Thank You for Christmas where You put Your rescue plan into motion so that I could have a relationship with You. Help me to come before Your Throne of Grace in repentance when I sin against You. Thank You for discipling me in Your love. In Jesus' name.

Amen

Day 19 of Advent

Advent Love Gives Us Our Identity.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! 1 John 3:1

Some women like to peck on their food, pass up dessert, and skip meals. I have great respect for their self-control, but I am not one of those women. Show me a buffet that's longer than a 200-meter relay, and I'm all in. The more lavish the spread, the wider my grin (and I guess my waistline too—but that's a topic for another time).

I've had the privilege of eating at some extravagant buffets, including the one at the Bellagio in Las Vegas which was almost paralyzing in its vastness.

But none of those extravagant buffets are even an iota of the banqueting table that the Lord has set before us in love. The Lord lavishes His love over us. He drenches us in wave after wave of unending love. His love is our safe place, our solace, and our hope.

And here's another extraordinary thing: **God's love gives us our identity.** Today's verse says that we are called "the children of God." And then it goes on to reiterate it: "That is what we are."

Friend, if you've given your life to Christ as your Lord and Savior, here's the surest thing about you: you are a child of God.

In 1 John we are reminded that "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

Love came down at Christmas.

“Jesus came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”

This Christmas, remember who you are because of Whose you are.

Lean In

Father God, This Christmas I’m once again in awe of Your stunning love and magnificent grace. Thank You that because of the love You lavish on me I have the unspeakable privilege of being a child of God. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Day 20 of Advent

Advent Love Rewrites The Questions

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. 1 John 4: 18

The “what ifs?” of life can often feel like a week’s worth of laundry toppling over your head. (And it’s one of those weeks where you decided it would be a good idea to wash the curtains and all the sheets as well, just for kicks.)

To continue the laundry analogy, just like you have no clue how you’re going to begin to tackle the laundry, questions about the future can leave you frazzled, overwhelmed, and in a panic. Fear can be a very real response to life’s “what ifs?”

Think back to those in the nativity story. The main characters in the narrative had no idea what was coming up.

Did Mary know how her fiancé Joseph would react to the news of her pregnancy? If I were her, my question would be, "What if I have to do this alone as a single mom?"

Did Joseph know how he would live in a society that would never believe the story of his wife's pregnancy? If I were him, my question would be, "What if I can't ever show my face in the synagogue or even sell my furniture in the market? What if I can't provide for my family?"

Did the shepherds know what was up ahead when they saw a host of angels in that dark night sky? If I were them, my question would be, "What if we are dreaming this up and become the laughingstock of the entire countryside?"

Did the wise men know what or who they would find when they followed the star? If I were them, my question would be, "What if after this long, arduous journey, there's nothing to see?"

You see, friend, the worries of life have schooled me into becoming negative, fearful, and anxious.

But what if, like Mary, I simply took God at His Word and praised Him for His miraculous works? What if, like Joseph, I simply trusted that God would work all things out for my good and His glory? What if, like the shepherds, I run to the Lord in excitement to simply worship Him? What if, like the wise men, I followed the leading of the Lord even through the unknown?

We don't have to live in fear but we can live out of a place of love.

This Christmas, may we receive the perfect love of God which frees us from every trap of fear that the enemy lays out for us.

Lean In

Heavenly Father, Thank You that Your perfect love drives out all fear. Lord, I tend to let the "what ifs?" of life choke me of joy and peace. Instead, Father, would help me love and trust you through all of life's unknowns. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 21 of Advent

Amazing Love Compels Thanksgiving

Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love endures forever. Psalm 136: 26

As you think about Christmas, what's the first emotion that springs to mind?

Honestly for me, quite often, it's the sense of being overwhelmed.

I don't know where to begin to tackle my to-do list. While the rest of the year has its share of busyness, Christmas often feels like Busy drowned an energy drink and started bouncing around the house.

But, friends, we all know that's not what Christmas is about. While the bustle can be fun at times, it can also lead to burnout. And Jesus came to give us life!

The last three weeks, we've stilled ourselves to dwell on the hope, peace, joy, and love that Jesus brings us. Today, as we end this devotional, may we truly grasp the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is not a love that we can fully wrap our minds around because it is an infinite and eternal love. But here's what we can do: **We can simply thank God for this amazing love.**

That God would send His Only Son to this earth because that was the only way out for us. *That is Amazing Love.*

That Jesus would leave His Throne room and be laid in a trough in a stable to be born in the lowliest of circumstances. *That is Amazing Love.*

That Jesus would live a sinless life but choose to take our punishment so we can have eternal life. *That is Amazing Love.*

That the Lord would persist in His love for us, would sanctify us, and would be our Emmanuel in every situation. *That is Amazing Love.*

Friend, can we take a few minutes—or even a few hours—to be still before the Lord. As we dwell in His presence, may the wonder of that first Christmas morning capture us. As we dwell on His love, may our hearts fill with gratitude. May we express our thanks to the Lord for His love endures forever

Lean In

Father God, As I quiet myself before You, the beauty of that first Christmas takes hold of me. Love so amazing, so divine demands my life, my soul, my all. Thank You for the precious gift of Your Son. In Jesus' name. Amen



Merry Christmas

AND A BLESSED 2024