

A 27-Day Devotional Reflections from Leaders Across the Asia-Pacific Region





DAY 15 LOVE by Dr. David Graves - General Superintendent

One year during a children's Christmas play, the children were going to sing some songs. The first song was entitled, Christmas Love. As they sang the song, each child held up a letter to spell out the title of the song. But a little girl in the middle of the front row got confused and held her letter upside down.

Her M letter in Christmas became a W letter. Well, warm sighs and smiles flowed through the audience as they read the children's message. Instead of Christmas Love, the upside-down M changed the message to: Christ was love. And that's true, Christ was love. And this is a message of Christmas. However, I think we need to state it in the present tense. Christ is love. John 3:16 reads: "For God so loved the world, that He sent His only son..."

Ron Mill tells the story of a grandfather who is trying to comfort his little grandson, Jeffrey. Jeffrey had done something wrong and his mother had put him in his playpen for a "time out". And when his mother left the room, Jeffrey begins to cry and beg his grandfather to get him out. The grandfather knows that Jeffrey's punishment is just, and he also knew that he would be in big trouble with his daughter if he took him out of the playpen. But because of his love for Jeffrey, he couldn't just stand by and do nothing. So he came to this conclusion; he couldn't get Jeffrey out. So he chose to climb into the playpen with Jeffrey.

Christmas is about love. God's love for us. That God so loved us that He came and He climbed into life with us through his son, Jesus Christ. He sent his one and only beloved son to leave his throne to humble himself and become a baby in a manger. To come to a land without a home, where the king wanted to kill him, where the people didn't understand him. And eventually, he gave his life on calvary's cross for all of us. He came into our human world in the midst of sin and squalor not just to live there, but to die for your sins and my sins.

We live in a God-invaded world because we could not go to Him, He came to us. And because of that, everything is changed. This Christmas, I pray that you will enjoy His presence, and be thankful for His great love. Because Christmas is all about God's love for us.

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. John 3:16 NIV

DAY 16

by John Watton - Regional Nazarene Compassionate Ministries Coordinator

In Romans 5:8 we read, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." This verse is perhaps one of the most profound verses in the Bible. It speaks from the deepest of deep.

We are given a peek behind the curtains of heaven to catch a glimpse of what fuels the Kingdom. Love. Love fuels God's Kingdom. Love trumps. Love transforms. God's essential nature set events in motion in heaven and on earth – these events clearly demonstrate his love.

From way back in Eden, God initiated his plan; the heavenly One would be coming who would crush the head of the deceiver. That heavenly One did come. He bore the fragrance of heaven as his words wafted and as his hand moved. That fragrant One finished what He came to do – by dying for us, saving us, He demonstrated his Father's love. The amazing thing is that Christ did so even while we were yet at odds with Him. This changes everything. The deceiver is left without a case; his legitimate charges against us were nailed to the cross. Love won. Love continues to win, as we love as he loved. Imagine!

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8 NIV

DAY 17 **THE GIFT OF LOVE** by Kafoa Muaror - Melanesia/South Pacific Field Strategy Coordinator

As I was growing up on a small island in the South Pacific called Rotuma, I remember clearly how we used to celebrate Christmas and express our love and appreciation of one another in the village. The celebration activities centered on the abundance of food being prepared and shared with our neighbors, families, and friends. It was not uncommon to witness extended families sharing meals together, attending church services, singing and dancing in the village.

Many years later, having traveled to many countries and experienced many different cultures, I realize that the Christmas Season is celebrated in many different yet beautiful ways. In some cultures, it's the financial value of the gift, in others, it's the quantity or size of the gift, yet in others, it is the physical presence and celebration with one another. What is important in all these different celebrations are people trying to express how much they love and appreciate one another.

The Advent season helps us to reflect and celebrate a very special gift from God to mankind. A gift in the person of Jesus Christ to this world that brings peace, joy, hope, and love. A gift that was not only alive and relevant to the world then but to our world today and forevermore.

As we celebrate the Advent season today, may we be reminded that the gift of Jesus Christ was because God first loved us. That as we receive and embrace the gift of Jesus Christ into our lives, we will not only experience the fruit of the gift but be positioned to share the fruit of the gift with one another.

The gift of Jesus Christ is sufficient to our needs irrespective of how we find ourselves today.

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

1 John 4:9-10 NIV

DAY 18 LOVE INCARNATED by David Ackerman - Regional Course of Study Advisory Council Chairman

God created us with the special ability to love. Yet, selfishness often influences the love we attempt to show others. We like to leave out most of what Jesus says in these verses and go to the end and love just ourselves.

God gave us the answer to the dilemma of selfish love by becoming one with us through Jesus. Jesus showed us what love can really be like. On the cross, he reversed the problem of self. It is also on the cross where our crucified love is transformed from focusing on self to centering on God.

When our love comes through the crucified self, we see ourselves differently. No longer does the world revolve around us. The seed of love planted in our hearts by faith begins to blossom and bear fruit. The people we once viewed as objects to satisfy our purposes now become the joy of our life as we invest ourselves in them.

As a result, we now view ourselves differently. We know we are loved by God and want to love him back with all our being. This is a daily commitment we must make as we walk in the footsteps of Love Incarnated.

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Matthew 22:37-39 (NIV)

DAY 19 LOVE ONE ANOTHER

by Lynn Bollinger - Regional Women Clergy Coordinator

Warning: Sentimental words ahead!

My husband Larry will often show me the extent of his love for me by letting me choose my favorite place to eat out or by letting me take more of the bed cover to stay warm at night or by dancing and jumping up and down with me to a fun song on iTunes (I hope you are smiling as you picture this in your mind). I wish I could say that I show him the same amount of sacrificial love, but I think he does a better job at this than I do.

"Love is such an easy word to say and such a hard thing to do. Ultimately love shows itself not by declarations of affection but by the service we render to the one we profess to love, especially service that inconveniences us or that calls for sacrifice...this is the kind of practical Christianity that characterizes the Wesleyan tradition at its best."

During Advent, our minds are captivated by the image of God in a manger. It was the first expression of God in Christ saying to us in more than words, "This is how much I love you..." As a way of internalizing the scripture for today from John 13:34-35, would you consider doing the following exercise with me this week as a way of knowing, being, and doing (or enacting) the love of God in the Spirit of Christ?

- 1. Take a few minutes to read John 13:34-35 and consider how has God loved you?
- 2. Write down or name a Christian brother or sister that you need to express God's love to in a more significant wav.
- 3. Ask God's Spirit to empower you to be loving as you find a way to say to this person in more than words, "...I love you in the Spirit of Christ."
- 4. Decide what embodied action you will do to participate in a Wesleyan spirit of loving this person. This may inconvenience your schedule or call for a sacrifice of your opinion of them, or a sacrifice of your fear or apprehension, or may ask you to surrender your human inclination to not want to embody God's love. Acknowledge that your sacrifice or inconvenience is a surrender to knowing the divine love of God at work in you as you enact God's love in the Spirit of Christ.
- 5. Spend a moment later this week in a prayer of gratitude for the love of God shown to you in the Christ child, and how that love has transformed you to love another Christian brother or sister as one way of bearing witness to Christ's presence in the world.

"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 NIV

DAY 20

UNHYPOCRITICAL BROTHERLY LOVE

by Jason Hallig - Philippines-Micronesia Field Literature Coordinator

Christmas is a demonstration of God's love for humanity: "For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son..." (John 3:16). Indeed, love is what Christmas is all about. We are reminded year after year of the greatest love humanity has ever experienced in the birth of Jesus Christ. Yet, love is not just a message of divine love; it is the good news of love—a proclamation of divine love. Hence, love is a call.

Men and women come to experience God's love when they respond to its call to faithfulness [faith]. It is only in faithfulness that we respond to God's faithfulness to us in and through His love for us. This is what Peter talks about in his letter: "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart." (1:22) Obedience is that active expression of faithfulness in response to the truth of divine love in Jesus.

Faithfulness begets love not only toward God but also toward others especially to those who belong to the family of God—the church: "… love for each other." No one can be faithful to God without becoming faithful to the brothers and sisters in the faith. This is another way of saying that we cannot love God without loving others, or more specifically loving one another.

This season of advent calls the church to not only remember God's love for us but also to remember how we ought to love one another as Christ loved us. In fact, Peter calls us all to deeply love one another. The word ektenos literally means "to stretch out one's hand" to another. In other words, one is willing to extend oneself to another in love.

Love begets love. As God loved us in Christ so we ought to love one another. And since God's love is holy love — 'it' being God's, love toward our brothers must likewise be a demonstration of that holy love. This holy love calls us to 'unhypocritical' brotherly love. The Greek word anupokriton conveys genuine love. It is not just an acted-out love, but an embodied genuine love. God's love is embodied in Jesus—love made flesh and blood.

Love is personal, that is, a giving of one's personhood. To love personally is to love wholeheartedly. There is no reservation in love. It is totally giving oneself to another. But such is only possible when we have the love of God poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Our love toward one another is grounded in God's love for us. Without God's love, it is impossible for us to love one another. The command to love one another is grounded in God's covenant of love for us.

Let this season be a season of unhypocritical brotherly love.

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.

1 Peter 1:22 NIV

DAY 21 LOVE IS A VERB by Jordan Escusa - Pastor, Taytay First Church of the Nazarene

I received a "pass it on message" on social media that said something like "I love you Jesus. If you really love Him and if you want to be blessed, pass this to 20 friends". I don't know about you but these types of mail annoy me especially if they came from a supposed Christian!

When I saw it, I did not follow the senders instruction at all. That's because I cannot recall The Bible ever teaching something like it and my love for Jesus doesn't have to be shown by forwarding one of these already forwarded messages. I've also noticed that The Bible never taught us to say "I love you" to God but it does teach us to love Him with all our heart, soul and strength(Matthew 22:37).

Although those three words are sure nice to say or hear from someone, there is something far more important: showing it. Saying it is simply not enough. Anyone can forward or copy paste a message. Maybe saying the words are only part but to really find out what is in the heart, those words need to be proven in action.

Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

1 John 3:18 NIV