

DISCUSSION GUIDE

· In The Waiting: An Advent Series ·



December 11, 2022

ADVENT: THE WAITING LOVE

Welcome to the Discussion Guide - designed to help you think more deeply about the sermon topic as you engage with others through thoughtful conversation, biblical exploration and real-life application.

➤ CONVERSATION STARTERS

Share about the best or most meaningful gift you have ever received. What made it so special?

➤ EXPLORATION

This week we move into week 3 of Advent and we turn our attention to the gift of **love**. This kind of love is radical, intentional and sacrificial, it is the love we celebrate all year round but especially at Christmas.

One of the beautiful practices of Advent is offering words of blessing to those around us. We invite you to practice that right now.

Turn to someone near you, look them in the eye and say:

“God’s HOPE be with you!”

Now do it again, but say this new statement to someone different:

“God’s PEACE be with you!”

One more time... find a final new person and say:

“God’s LOVE be with you!”

Words are powerful. Before you move on, take a moment to think about how it felt to offer and receive those words

of blessing. How has God’s hope, peace and love impacted your life? Just imagine where you would be if you had never experienced God’s love. How would your life be different? Don’t move too quickly past these questions. Take a minute or two of silence before you move on.

Share your thoughts with the group. What came up for you?

John 3:16-17 (read scriptures aloud)

A Gift GIVEN

This is a familiar passage that we often hear at Easter because it clearly reminds us of what Jesus did on the cross. But without Christmas, there would not have been a cross. The gift came when Jesus was born, a tiny, helpless, and vulnerable baby.

Read John 3:16-17 again, this time thinking of them in light of Christmas.

What do you notice about this passage when you consider it in light of Christmas?

In the book, *The Greatest Gift*, Author Ann Voskamp makes this statement,

“God gives God”

It is certainly an awkward phrase that provokes questions and thoughts. It makes us wonder about the true meaning of the gift. This is how much God loves us...he gives us himself. This gift is motivated by love in its highest form. It

is a sacrificial love that saves and restores completely all who choose to receive the gift.

For many of us, the Christmas story might be so familiar that we sometimes fail to recognize its value. It seems like old news and we wish to be inspired by a new version of the story. But we need to remember that there is no greater gift. Ever. Period. And there never will be a greater gift. God loved SO much that he GAVE himself to us so that we could live in the freedom of experiencing this love and sharing it with others around us.

Read these scriptures out loud as a reminder of the depth of God's love for us.

John 15:13
1 John 4:8-9

Share about a time when you felt deeply and truly loved.

God wasn't obligated to love the world and he wasn't trying to impress the world, so what was his motivation?

There is always a reason, a purpose or an intent behind a gift. Gift giving is not a "neutral" activity. So let's look at the following passages from the Old Testament Book of Isaiah which show God's motivations for offering the gift of salvation to his people.:

- **Isaiah 43:4** – Because God loves you!
- **Isaiah 43:19** – God is doing a new thing!
- **Isaiah 38:17** – God can keep us from destruction!
- **Isaiah 11:1** – God will bring fruit from destruction!
- **John 3:17** – God's plan is to save, not condemn!

God's MOTIVES for the Gift

To do a new thing in our lives
To do something out of nothing
To provide a lifesaving LOVE
To bring light into our darkness

Which of these do you need most in your life right now and why?

A Gift RECEIVED

God has offered this gift to the world, but each one of us has the choice to either receive or reject this gift.

"The Lord is coming, always coming. When you have ears to hear and eyes to see, you will recognize him at any moment of your life. Life is Advent; life is recognizing the coming of the Lord."

~Henri Nouwen

For a Christ follower, the meaning of life is found in recognizing and receiving God's radical, life changing gift of love. Imagine for a moment how this gift of love changed the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Luke 1:46-55

Mary's life was forever transformed through the gift of God as she became the mother of Jesus. We too become transformed through this amazing gift. Luke 2:19 tells us that "Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."

The season of Advent helps us do the same thing. It invites us to slow down and to contemplate the true meaning of Christmas. It is in that posture that we can truly appreciate and celebrate the greatest gift ever given.

> TAKE AWAY

Take some time to talk through the following question and commit to praying for one another throughout the week.

What are some ways you will be intentional this week to be open and ready to receive God's gift of love?

How will you be intentional to share God's love this week?

ADVENT PRAYER

God, we thank you for the extravagant, one of a kind gift of your son, and our savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. May we each receive your sacrificial gift and experience your love in new and refreshed ways during this season of Advent, and may we be people who share that love with others! AMEN