

Series: Advent 2025

**Love that Changes Everything**

Luke 2:1-7, Ephesians 3:17-19

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, December 21, 2025

As we enter the story of Advent today, we light a candle to represent the ultimate sacrifice and act of love, where God sent His only Son, Jesus, into the world to offer us the gift of salvation. May the gift of Jesus compel us to deepen our capacity to love others and remind us of God's never-ending, never-stopping love for the world. A reading from Luke 2:1-7: "In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to their own town to register, so Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in clothes and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them," the word of the Lord.

Paul: Hey, finally today, this is the fourth Sunday of Advent, and today we are focusing on love. It is a great way to end the Advent season. We have a story to tell you. It is a video. This is a story of Brad and Robin Heykoop and their story of how God called them into loving others. This is a beautiful story, a bit of a tragic story, but we want you to listen to Brad and Robin's story right now.

Video: Robin: Our story is very upside-down, often like the Bible characters. I think of the stories, they are all strange and weird, and so is this one. Why are you in our life? Why are we so connected? I would say, I don't know. It is just, it is an upside-down story that I believe that we met. I feel like God brought her into our lives.

Brad: Our son Jacob was dating Lulu at the time and brought her as his plus-one to our wedding, and it was just a small gathering, maybe thirty people, and then it is almost like she is metaphorically a blessing dropped into our laps. We did not know it at the time, when we were near our vows at Riverside, and she was there quietly in the shadows, and over the next year, we got to know her. Little did we know the impact she would have on our lives.

Robin: So, in that year, I would say a year's time, she and I would just contact each other. I don't know, it was just like this natural connection, and then even our son, Jacob, would encourage me to stay involved, because her situation was just difficult for her.

Brad: It should be stated they were no longer dating. They dated for a short period of time. Robin: Yeah, just a minute. Brad: and they were, but they remained friends. Robin: and so, I would go get her and bring her over here like every other weekend, and so we just got to know her. Her family wanted to move again, and they had moved a lot, and they had not even been here a year, and Lulu's desire was to just stay here and have some roots, and finish high school, and so at that time we had space and offered to let her stay here to finish school, and so she was excited about that idea.

Brad: About a month after she moved in, she gave us some news that she was pregnant. She was expecting. Robin: It was not from our son, so we were. Brad: It should be stated. Yeah. Robin: We were just, she was scared to death and just like, not sure what to do next.

Brad: Yeah. This was one where I actually got the news first, oddly. We went over to a coffee shop called Atlas. We sat there, and she said, "This is what's going on, and I don't know what to do," and I was taken back a little bit, and I think I learned from my father to say, "That's interesting," and I think very quickly we were on the like, "What do you need from us? We have room. Do you want to keep the baby? Do you want to put her up for adoption?" Him, her, we did not know at the time, and she said, "I don't know," and so we wrestled with that, with her for a month or so, and when she learned that it was a little girl, she said, "I want to keep it." I said, "Well, if you do, we will, we are in. We are with you," and like, "We will help," and I said, "I am sure time will play in this end, but we would love to help launch you into a family life, and we are sure good things are coming your way."

Robin: Yeah, a couple of things, that when we went to her ultrasound, when she found out that Chloe was a girl, that was huge, because we saw the baby and connected with that baby instantly. Gosh, that memory is a good one. Brad: Yeah, it was a snowy day in February, and so I got invited to go, to drive, and so we went over to Englewood by Swedish Hospital, and the doctor started doing the ultrasound, and I was just looking at the big screen, and the image popped up, and I think the first thing I said was, "Man, look at those big blue eyes." He said, "This is black and white. How could you tell that?" I don't know. I do not even know why I said it, but I looked at the screen, and I said, "but those are beautiful blue eyes," and Lulu just laughed at me, and Robin laughed at me.

Robin: Chloe has blue eyes, by the way. Brad: She has a Brazilian mom and a Hispanic dad, and she's got blue eyes. Robin: So that is, it just kept growing, that relationship and that connection. I got to be in the delivery room. This was a big deal for me to be a part of that with her. About a month old, and Chloe was about a month old, I think, and she was so scared. Lulu was just of what it looked like moving out of here and being alone, and the three of us sat. Lulu, I, and Brad sat together, and that was where we started the term, "Team Chloe." We said, "You are not ever going to have to do this alone. We are here with you." Brad: She is, yeah, we had so many joyful moments in this household. Robin: They lived here until she was about six, and they moved out.

Brad: She got engaged, and they moved out with fiancé Nick and his two children, and then I think Nick lost a job or something, and they could not make rent, and so Nick and his kids moved back in with his folks, and Lulu and Chloe moved back in with us so they could regather themselves a little bit.

Robin: This is the hard part. Brad: It is. About six months later, we got a call. We were on a hike up at Jones Pass, and she said, "I was in the hospital, they did an MRI," some sort of scan. Yeah, some kind of scan, and she said, "I have cancer. My body is filled with cancer, and it looks bad." Long story short, October 15th of 2024, she was diagnosed with stage four esophageal cancer that had spread to her liver and her kidneys.

Robin: For two and half months, she was probably in the hospital more than home. Brad: Yeah. Robin: But we were able to be here and take her, and I had Chloe. It was just. Brad: We tag-teamed the care. Robin: Yeah, and then I went to the hospital and said, "You need to go see her." That's when it was.

Brad: That was like the 11th or 12th of September, and she passed away on September 14th in hospice. You know that moment in time when you fall in love, and I do not mean the infatuation, the attraction kind of falling in love. I mean the moment when you feel like, “I am all in,” and that moment in the gynecologist’s office when they were, when I saw her blue eyes, I said, I just, that was the moment I said, “I am all in. I think this is my, this is a big part of my future, and I am, I am excited about it.”

Robin: So it has been such a blessing, like even though all the story is hard, and it brings tears, I look at Chloe, I could not imagine life without her, and we had a little minute there that we thought that might happen when we had to prove that we were relevant in Chloe’s life. Brad: and the right fit for her. Robin: to the courts. So that was sketchy and scary, but because Chloe is just part of us. Brad: Yeah, very much.

Paul: Can we just thank Brad and Robin for their story and for sharing with us? It is a story of an immense tragedy, but there is so much redemption and beauty in that story too, and Brad and Robin, we cannot thank you enough for sharing your story, but more than that, for living the story of the gospel of love, and you may have missed it there, but after Lulu passed, Brad and Robin have become the full-time caretakers for Chloe, and they have just stepped into parenting her and loving her. All of their kids were out of the home, and now they are back with an elementary school kid, and they are just doing such a beautiful job, and we are so, thankful for them and just a beautiful picture of love.

I have watched this video like ten times, and I get emotional every time I watch it, but there is this line at the end that Brad says so eloquently, where he says that there is that moment when you fall in love, and I do not mean infatuation or the attraction kind of falling in love. I mean the moment where you feel like I am all in, and I think that is such a poignant statement, because I think so much of the love that we see in the world is that an infatuation or attraction-based love. It is a kind of love that is based on chemistry or a spark where you feel something, and there is the rush of emotion that brings you into a place where you feel chosen, accepted, loved, valued. You see somebody else that you want, and there is just this infatuation where you feel like you are just in this place of levity and beauty, and you are infatuated with a person, and that is the kind of love that you see in all the greetings cards that we sell. It is in all the movies. It is all over our culture, and what we come to believe is that love is based on a feeling of infatuation or this feeling where you are just so overcome with feelings for this person, that that is love.

The problem with that idea, though, is that that works really well when things are going well, when things are aligned, when you are in sync with that person, but when things get hard, or when stresses come, when suddenly things do not feel as romantic and beautiful as they did at the beginning, if that is our definition of love, then it is very easy to fall out of love, because it is just something you fell into. So, we can live in this place where we come to talk about Advent, and we light the love candle at the end of the year, and we talk about God’s love, and my fear is that sometimes we have a misunderstanding of what God’s love is for us. God’s love for us is not infatuation. It is not God looking at us from heaven and saying, “Oh my goodness, I am just so overwhelmed with who they are that I want to be with them.” It is actually something much, much deeper than that, and that is a good thing, because infatuation, love that rises and falls with chemistry or attraction or that spark often becomes cautious and conditional, it leans in when life is easy, but it pulls back when things become complicated.

We live in a world where we love as long as it does not cost us too much or take too long or ask more of us than we planned to give. I think most of us have learned this very painfully, that love can retreat, that when we disappoint someone, or we struggle, or when we fail, or when we fall apart, there is this distance that can grow. Love seems to become quieter, and so we learn from a young age that we have to hide parts of ourselves, that we have to pretend that the broken parts of us, the needy parts of us, that in order for them not to be too much, we withdraw. Some of you are walking into this room this morning, and you know what I am talking about. You loved, and that love was not returned. You trusted someone deeply with your whole heart, and they broke that trust. I mean, some of you have had those experiences, whether it was with a parent or a child or a spouse or a friend, where you gave your whole self, and for some reason, that love retreated. It became conditional and cautious, and people stayed in a relationship, but they created boundaries or separation, and you know that pain of that kind of conditional love.

I think what happens to many of us is because we experience that pain in our relationship with one another, is that that informs, it shapes our view of God's love for us, and so we get to this place where we think, we believe that God's view of love towards us is as unpredictable, as temporary, and as tied to performance as our love for each other is, because if that is how love works with us, why wouldn't it work that way with God? So, we fall into this place where God's love is strong while we stay strong. God's love is steady while we stay steady. God's love is unconditional for us as long as we do all of the right things, which inherently means it is not unconditional, and so many of us, we come, and we light the love candle, and we begin to ask the question that we have been asking throughout the whole series, we have been asking for each of these words. What is hope? What is peace? What is joy? What is love? It is a question people have been asking at least since the 80s. "What is love?" What is love?

Do we have the cue? There we go. We mis-timed that a little bit. Last night it was a surprise to me. I did not know they were going to do that, and it caught me off guard. I was like, "yeah, let's do that again," but now we missed the cue, so that's my bad. All right. So, we ask this question, "What is love?" and here is what I think each and every one of us is coming into the room with today. We do not need that kind of love from that song. We do not need more sentimental love. We do not need more slogans about love. We do not need sayings like, "Love always wins," or "Love is all you need." What I think many of us coming into this room today understand and feel at a deep level that we need a love that does not disappear when things get hard. That we need a love that doesn't flinch at our brokenness, a love that doesn't remain abstract or distant or theoretical, but that steps into the mess of our real lives and says, "I am not going anywhere." That is the beauty of the story that Brad and Robin shared, because it is that kind of love. It is that phrase, "I am all in." It does not deny the cost, but it embraces it. It does not step away from the uncertainty, but it commits anyway. That is the kind of love that we need to experience, that we need to know.

So, when we talk about love of Advent, what we have to do is we have to redefine our understanding of what love is, because I think we come in with this understanding of infatuation or feeling or this kind of thing that we fall into, but the love of Advent is very different. The love that we see in scripture is very, very different than the love many of us experience, and so what I want to do with you today is I want to take some time to ask this question. We are going to do something that many of you are going to roll your

eyes at and fall asleep at if I do not keep you entertained, and that is we are going to do, a word study of two Hebrew words and a Greek word on love, okay?

Yeah, all right, we got one Hebrew scholar that's like, "Let's go," and then the rest of you are like, "Okay, this is the part where I'm just going to rest up for the Broncos game this afternoon and get a little sleep." No, here's my goal. It is I am going to make this more engaging than my Hebrew professor did for me in seminary, okay? All right, so I will try to keep you with me, but there are three words that we are going to look at. The first is this word ahavah. Can everybody say ahavah? Ahavah. Beautiful. All right, you are already on your way, and this is the primary word in the Old Testament for the word love, ahavah, and this is what is important. Ahavah describes God's deliberate choice to bind Himself to a people. So, there's this fascinating story in Deuteronomy 7, and that is the place that many of you go in your Bible and your reading plan, and you begin to say like, "I am out." Deuteronomy, that is as far as you get, so you miss this beautiful story in Deuteronomy 7, where God comes to the people of Israel, and He says, "I have chosen you," and it is actually a bit comical. He says, "Not because you are impressive, not because you're mighty, not because you have it all together, not even because you are spiritually elite in some sort of way, not because you are numerous, not because you have great armies. I choose you because I ahava you. I simply choose you because I have chosen you. I love you, and that is why you will be my people." It is not based on performance or merit. It is simply God saying, "I will choose to love you."

Now I want you to think about our world, because I think this kind of love that says, "I choose you," is a little foreign to us. It is a type of love that is a little challenging for us. I want you to think back, for some of you this will take a little more memory than others. I want you to think back to middle school crushes, the first crush you had on that girl or that boy, and you are like, "Oh my goodness." It is that infatuation moment where you get the butterflies and the swirls in your tummy, and you are like, "Oh my gosh, I did not even know I could feel this way about another person. I am in love. I am going to marry them," and you are twelve years old, and your parents are like, "Get real. This is crazy," but it is that moment when you begin to have this awareness that people are judging you based on how interesting you are, what you look like, for some of us, what you smell like in middle school, that is a real thing. It is a consideration, and you have this moment where let's say there is the girl you like, and you are walking into the lunchroom, and she is talking with all her friends, and they are all looking at you, and they are laughing because you just wrote her the note that says, "Hey, I like you, and I want to date you," or something, and suddenly you realize they are evaluating you, and you need to make sure you measure up in some sort of way. It is that experience, whether it is middle school crushes, high school hallways, or dating apps, where you are trying to prove to someone else, all of dating really comes down to trying to prove to someone else that you are worthy of their love. So you take them on the date, and you make sure your car is really clean, and you bring flowers, and you spend a lot of money on the restaurant, and you try to make it really special to try to help them understand not only that you are interested in them, but that you are an interesting person to be with. Then what happens is you get married, and the car is always a mess, and the nice dinners at the restaurant never happen anymore, and I am not speaking from experience at all on that, right? But love is something that we try to prove that we are worthy of.

It is the same thing, that is dating, but there is also like the elementary school playground, right? Has anybody ever been chosen for a team? So, you've got the basketball team, the dodgeball, the kickball,

and you are playing during recess, and what happens? Everybody lines up in a line, and the two best players are, for some reason, always the captains, right? They are the ones, well, not always. Sometimes the loudest person gets to be the captain too, but for the most part, the best people are the captains. Everybody lines up, and then they do this thing that causes all of us childhood trauma, where you just look at everyone, and you are like, “Okay, you are good enough to be on my team,” and then “I want you,” and then, “I want you,” and then, “Oh, is this all that’s left?” “I have to have this.” “Okay, if I take him, then you take that person, and then it will be even,” because they are not very good, and they are the last person chosen. It is this moment where you understand very quickly what the pecking order is, the social construct of who is good enough to be on the kickball team first, and who is bad enough that they are just the leftovers.

I think we carry that kind of mentality into our relationship with God, where we think we have to prove to God, like a dating app, that we are worthy of love. We somehow think that in God’s relationship with us, that everybody just lined up, and God was like, “If this is the best that is left, then I guess I will take them,” and we can have this view that God does not actually choose us. He just reluctantly settles for us. Has anyone ever felt like that before? But this ahava love says that it is not based on our failures, our fears, or our inconsistencies. It is not based on where we fall in the line. When God says, “I love you,” He is saying, “I choose you.” “I choose you, not because you have proven yourself, not because of some achievement that you have had.” He simply chooses you because He loves you, and He wants to be in a relationship with you. God did not look at you and evaluate all the other options and say, “I guess this is the best one left.” God has chosen you because He loves you.

Closely related to that Hebrew word, “ahava,” is the word “hesed.” This is Bible word number two. Now, hesed, some of you are probably pretty familiar with. If ahava is God’s choosing love, it is His choice to love you, then hesed is God’s refusal to abandon that choice when things get difficult. I think some of us, we have this understanding that, yeah, God loves me, He saved me, but then we absorb this guilt, this shame that we think, “Oh, but I am still living in this place where I am struggling, I am still not enough. If I go into church today, I might be struck down dead, because God is so disappointed with me. God is going to leave me because of my sin and my brokenness and the things that I have done in our relationship together,” and what hesed says is that it is actually God not just choosing you, but also, He will stay with you, no matter what happens. No matter what you face, no matter what choices you make, no matter what you struggle with, hesed says, “I will stay with you.”

I want you to think for a moment about gravity. When was the last time anyone thought about gravity? Probably never, right? That is not something we think about. It is just this thing that exists in our reality, and it holds all things together. It is just this steady presence. Gravity does not work more or less based on how gifted you are or how important you are, although I think as I am getting a little older, I feel like gravity works a little more in my life. I play basketball now, and it feels like gravity is stronger than it was when I was in high school for some reason. I can’t quite jump as high, but it is just steady. It does not change. There is nothing you could do to change gravity in your life. That is hesed.

It is that it does not matter what you do. It does not matter how active you are or how inactive you are or what you are doing for the faith. Hesed just stays. It is this steady presence, like gravity, that just simply holds all things together, which means that God’s love is not reactive. God’s love simply holds things together, that it does not surge or recede based on your faithfulness. It is just this steady underlying

reality in a relationship with Him. Now, this is important. Heseed does not say that because God loves you, He supports everything you do, or that He agrees with everything you do, or even that He loves everything you do. You can be in a heseed relationship with God, and what that is saying is that your sin, your shame, your guilt, it does not push God away, that God chooses to stay and not retreat, even when we fail.

Now the last word in the New Testament, these two words take on this new shape, this love that takes the form of “agape,” and again, this is probably a word that many of you are familiar with, but I want to paint a picture for you and try to illustrate what agape love is. Agape love, I think it is helpful to think about children and a parent’s relationship with a child, because there is a moment in parenting where you start offering your children advice. They are doing certain things that you know are not good for them, and so you have to shout advice, and maybe that advice sounds like my parents’ advice to me, which was like, “Hey, don’t jump off the house.” Like, that’s not good for you, right? Or “Don’t jump off the moving car.” Or “Don’t jump out of the tree.” I jumped out of a lot of things when I was growing up and broke a lot of bones, and it is this advice that my parents would shout at me when I was in a place of danger, and they would say essentially like, “Don’t do that, because that is not safe.”

Love looks like advice, but love also looks like interceding, and so the difference between the love that many of us experience and this agape love is not that it is just God shouting advice to us from a safe distance, but God actually climbing onto the roof and making sure we are okay. Or it is the moment where He catches us when we fall. Agape love says that God will intercede, that He will give Himself on your behalf. When God says He loves you in this agape sense, He is saying, “I will give myself for you,” and this is so important to the definition of agape. It is that it is this outward-facing, costly love, and inherent in the definition of this type of love is that it cannot and does not wait to be deserved, to be reciprocated or appreciated. Agape simply gives of itself in personal sacrifice, because that is what love does, so this is not God being sentimental. This is a picture of this costly love that says, “Even though you may not love me back, I will choose to sacrifice myself on your behalf.” You can see why the authors of scripture in the New Testament picked up this definition of love. It is not talking about love as mere emotion. The Biblical definition of love is not primarily about how someone feels towards you, but it is a love that is committed and expressed through costly action and the commitment. It is the kind of love that says, “I am all in.”

Now what I want to do, now that we have a better understanding of the word “love,” in scripture, is I want to go to a story that many of you have heard probably a thousand times. Maybe not all of you, but if you have ever watched “A Charlie Brown Christmas” and listened to Linus recite the Christmas story, you have heard these words before, and the fear I have with that is the familiarity of the story sometimes loses its impact and its power, because it is, “Yeah, Jesus was born. Great. I get it. That is what Christmas is all about. That is your job, to tell us that and remind us that every year,” but I think when we understand this type of love, and we come to this story, and we learn of how Christ chose to be born, then that story will come alive for many of us in a way that I hope is very refreshing, so I just want to read the words that Ashley read to us earlier today, all seven verses. Then I want to take five minutes to unpack the beauty of them, and then we are going to wrap up with a moment of worship and reflection.

Luke chapter 2, verse 1: “In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to their own town to register, and so Joseph, who was the father of Jesus, also

went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, to the town of David.” Now that sentence is one really long way of saying that they went from Nowheresville to Nothingsville. These are small, insignificant towns, “and he went there to register with Mary, whom he was pledged to be married to.” So, they were pledged to be married, they were not yet married, “and she was expecting a child.” You know the story, but we sometimes miss the gravity of that statement and the shame that they were living in. “While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son, and she wrapped him in clothes and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.” Now, you know the story. No room in the inn, so they have to stay in the stables, which was likely the room beneath the house, where all of the donkeys and the sheep and the goats and the chickens would live, and it is in that space, with all of the mud and the hay and the animal breath, that the creator of the universe is born, and I want to say that again, that the creator of the universe was born in that space.

I do not want to reduce that idea to sentimentality, because there is power in that statement, that understanding that the creator of the universe was laid into a manger among donkeys and sheep and goats. It is the moment when infinity folds into infancy. It is the moment when the uncontainable becomes confined, where the maker of all things, the one who shouted stars into being and who carved mountains with his words, who holds galaxies like grains of sand in the palm of his hand, became a newborn baby. It is the moment where the God who thundered from Sinai suddenly is cooing and whimpering in a feeding trough. It is the moment when the hands that flung the rings around Saturn into orbit flail as an infant in the air, searching for his mother’s embrace. It is the voice that we were told that is able to command legions of angels, that is no longer able to speak, because it doesn’t know words. It can simply utter one cry at a time. It is the moment, can you see it, where the creator of the universe becomes a baby. The God who holds quarks and atoms in His hands is being held together by a teenage girl, where the God of the universe needs to be nursed and cleaned and needs to be carried and comforted. The God of the universe, who spoke everything into existence with the power of His words, is now comforted by the songs of lullabies of his mother. It is the moment the God of heaven stepped down low enough to be held, and the God who every single person, their breath is dependent on Him, now has the humility to be dependent on those who depend on Him for breath. He is laid in a manger, in a feeding trough.

There is no throne. There is no cradle. There is no gold. There are no royal guards. There is no halo hovering over his head in the air. It is just a simple infant with a blue-collar father and an unwed, pregnant teenager for a mother, in the middle of nowhere, in the backwaters of the empire that God chose to be born. The manger is the expression of divine love. When we understand the manger, it is not God’s infatuation with us. It is the kind of love that says, “I am all in with you. Humanity, despite your failings, despite your brokenness, despite the sin, despite the rebellion against me, I am all in with you,” and that line about the manger and there being no room for God is the moment where we see in the manger God’s ahava love, God’s choosing love. That He enters into the world simply because He decided to, because He decided to express his love to us. Not because we belong, not because of our performance, not because we deserve it, but because when He says, “I love you,” when He says, “I ahava you,” He is saying, “I choose you.” It is the moment we see God’s hesed love come into reality. The manger is the place where we see God saying, “I will stay with you. I am with you no matter what.” It is the moment that God comes near, where He

enters into human weakness and does not turn away. The manger is the moment when all of our sin, all of our shame, all of the things that we think will drive God away from us, God says, “I am with you.”

It is the moment we see in the manger God’s agape love, his self-giving love, where God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves, where He does not just shout advice to us about how we should live in this world, where He steps into the mess of our lives and says, “I will give myself for you.” That is a love that changes everything, and the invitation of Christmas is to come as we are, to understand that God has chosen us, that God says He will be with us, and that God says He will give Himself for us. No matter how weary, no matter how uncertain, no matter how imperfect we feel, it is the moment when we see the manger that we discover God has already come for us,

So, as we close today, I want to let us have a moment in the middle of Christmas, in the middle of the busyness, in the middle of the chaos, to just pause and to understand that love of God, because it is a type of love, and the song we are about to listen to together, and I would encourage you to pray, to listen to the words, but it is a song that is a play on the old hymn, “O Come All Ye Faithful,” and the song is “O Come All Ye Unfaithful,” because that is the good news. The manger tells us that we have been unfaithful. You have been unfaithful, and God chose you anyway. You have been stuck in sin, and God has said, “I am with you,” and you have rebelled against God, and God has said, “I will give myself for you,” and so I want us to hear these words and sit in the beauty of this story that we have heard, not because we are worthy, but because He chose us, because He is with us, and because He has given himself for us, and that is what we mean when we celebrate love during Advent. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, God, I pray as we enter into this moment, God, I pray as we have an opportunity to reflect on the beauty of your gospel, when we have a moment to reflect on the beauty of a love that says, “I am all in,” whether we deserve it, whether we have earned it, whether we have tried hard enough to obtain it, whether we have cleaned ourselves up enough to feel like we are worthy. The love of Advent simply says, “I am all in.” It is God coming to us in a manger to show us the depths of that love. God, I pray for each and every person here today, in the places of shame in their life, that you would speak that love to them now. The places of the guilt they carry, that your love would say, “I choose you.” God, the places where they feel like they have pushed you away, where they have lived in rebellion, where they have ignored your call on their life, I pray that your love in this moment, by the power of your Spirit, would say, “I choose you.” God, for any of us who feel like we are unworthy, that we have been too unfaithful, I pray in this moment that your love would speak to us, that love that the manger and the cross show us, that God says, “I will give myself for you.” God, may we understand the depth and the beauty of that love, and every time we look at the manger, may we understand that God has spoken over us those words, “ahava,” “I choose you,” “hesed,” “I will be with you,” “agape,” “I will give myself for you.” It is in the name of Christ that we pray, amen.

My prayer for you today is that you have experienced the love of God. My prayer for you this week is that God would bring someone to your mind to invite to our Christmas Eve services, someone that you know in your life who has not yet experienced the love of God that we talked about today, but that needs to know that God has chosen them, that God is with them, and that God gave Himself for them. So, in a moment, I am going to ask you to actually just pray quietly before we release, to ask the Spirit to bring

someone to your mind, a person's name, and when that name comes to your mind, I want you to hear these two numbers.

Barna did some research this year that eighty percent of people they interviewed said that they would be somewhat likely to attend a church service if they were invited. During the same survey, they found that two percent of the people who attend church regularly invite someone to church annually. That means that people are willing to come, and we are not inviting them, and so my prayer for you this week is that if you have experienced the love of God today, that you would be bold in inviting someone to hear the story of that love this coming Wednesday. We have services at 1:00, 3:00, and 5:00 p.m., and we are going to be celebrating the goodness of God and his love for us that day as we celebrate Christmas Eve. Invite someone to come with you. Ask them to sit with you. Let's take a moment now and pray.

I am going to just ask simply, Holy Spirit, as we pray at this moment, I pray that you would bring someone's name to mind. Put them on our hearts, God, me included, someone that we know, a family member, a friend, a coworker, the person who lives across the street from us, who does not know the story of your love, and desperately needs to know that you have chosen them, that you are with them, and that you gave yourself for them.

Father, our closing prayer today comes from Ephesians chapter 3, and "I pray that you," Waterstone, "being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all of the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus Christ, and to know his love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God," amen. You may go in peace.

43:40 minutes

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Edited by Tom Kenaston

Message #907