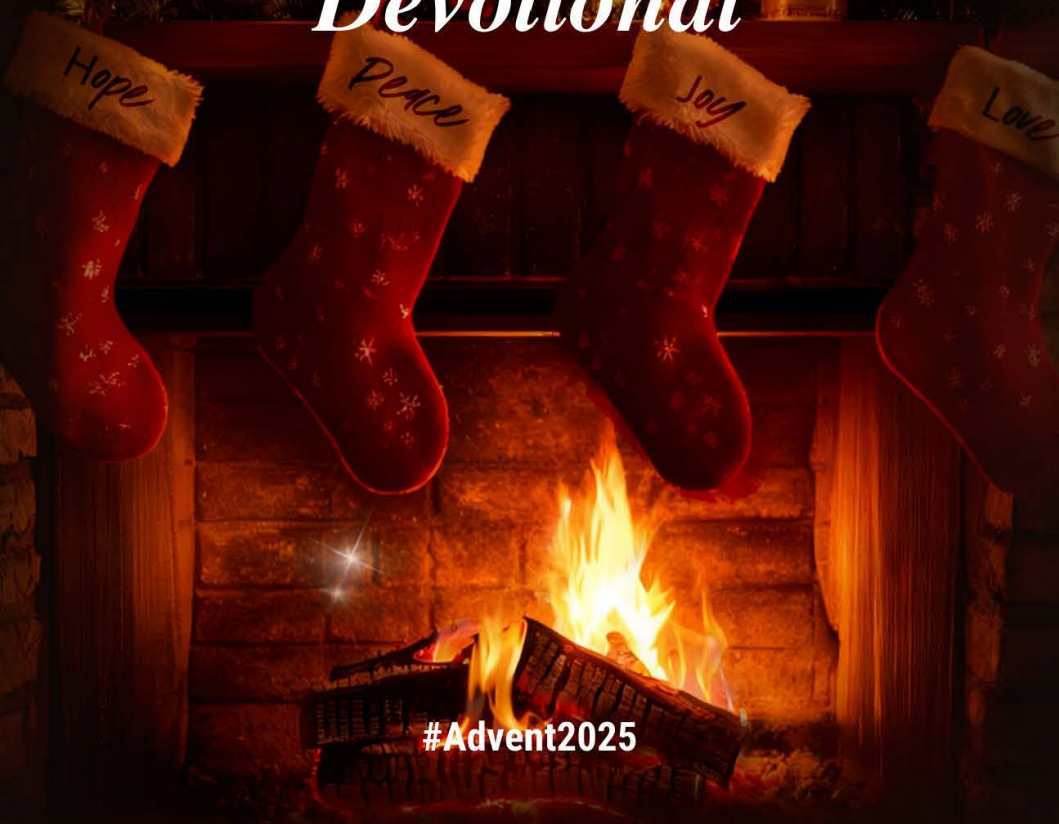


# Stocking Stuffers

GIFTING THE THEMES OF ADVENT

*Devotional*



#Advent2025

# Stocking Stuffers

GIFTING THE THEMES OF ADVENT

**Week 4**

*The Gift of Love*

# SERMON NOTES

*Scripture* Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18

*Title* THE GIFT OF LOVE

## NOTES

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# WHERE IS YOUR LOVE?

**Isaiah 7:10-16**

## DEVOTION

*Through Jesus Christ, God alone is the One who saves us from sin, sustains us in our suffering, and strengthens us to overcome whatever*

The reign of King Ahaz was not a faithful one.

He rejected God, embraced pagan practices, and placed his trust in idols instead of the Lord. Though he was warned, he refused to listen.

When God told Ahaz to ask for a sign, he declined—not out of humility, but because his heart was already set on trusting in Assyria. He believed that the strength of a foreign nation was greater than the protection of Almighty God.

But God gave a sign anyway—a sign far greater than Ahaz could imagine. He announced the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ.

This sign pointed to the greatest promise ever given: God's presence and protection through His Son. Only Jesus Christ can guard us from evil, shield us from danger, and keep us steady in an unstable world.

So, let me ask you: Where is your love? Where is your trust? Who do you lean on when trials press in?

Remember, **through Jesus Christ, God alone is the One who saves us from sin, sustains us in our suffering, and strengthens us to overcome whatever we face.**

And we can testify with the words of the hymn:

Love lifted me,

Love lifted me,

When nothing else could help,

Love lifted me.

## Prayer

Lord, when life gets hard, please don't let my love and trust waver from You. You are the only One who can save me, protect me and sustain me. Please don't allow me to put my trust in anyone or anything in this world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# SET APART FOR THE GOSPEL

## *Romans 1:1-7*

### DEVOTION

*Advent is a perfect time to realign our identity around the gospel - the good news that God has kept His promises in Christ and continues to call us to participate in His redemptive work.*

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, set a foundation that reveals his entire identity: he is a servant of Christ, called as an apostle, and set apart for the gospel of God. Every word is packed with mission and humility.

When you look at your life, whose identity does it reflect? Does your identity reflect culture? Does your identity reflect your family? Does your identity reflect Christ?

When we consider the gospel, it is not just about personal salvation—it is God's gospel, rooted in promises, revealed in Jesus, and intended for all nations. Paul was called to lead others to the "obedience of faith," a calling that requires both belief and a surrendered life.

In a culture that often urges us to define ourselves by what we do or what we own, Paul shows us what it means to be defined by who we serve and what we're called to.

**Advent is a perfect time to realign our identity around the gospel - the good news that God has kept His promises in Christ and continues to call us to participate in His redemptive work.**

"The obedience of faith is not merely obedience that flows from faith, but a faith that obeys; it involves a personal submission to the risen Christ as Lord."

— Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*

Paul's vision for the church is active allegiance, not one of passivity. This call to obedience is an act of worship. When we believe the gospel, we are surrendered to obey its call.

### Prayer

Lord, as Paul was set apart for Your gospel, set my heart apart too. Let me live as one who belongs to You, shaped by the obedience of faith and committed to the mission of Christ. May this Advent season draw me deeper into Your calling and send me out with gospel purpose. In Jesus' name, Amen.



# MUST BE LOVE

## Matthew 1:18-25

### DEVOTION

*Love should not limit our expectations; rather, it should expand our capacity to dream for the impossible.*

Why would God send a sinless Christ into a sin-filled world? It must be love. Why would it be required for Christ to be conceived and born of a virgin? It must be love. Why would Joseph agree to such an arrangement? It must be love. The circumstances surrounding the birth of Christ are centered on the ethic of love.

When we use love as the guiding principle in our daily interactions, commitments, and relationships, we embrace the intentionality of a love ethic. Matthew's Gospel highlights this love in the way Christ entered the world. Joseph demonstrated his love for God and Mary by honoring her with respect, even while wrestling with his doubts. His love for Mary outweighed his questions about her conception of Christ. At the same time, God revealed His love for humanity by entrusting Joseph and Mary to cling to each other, despite the uncertain circumstances they would face. Matthew shows us that Christ was born out of love, to show us love, before ultimately being crucified for love.

Though the word love may seem to have lost its depth in a world dominated by selfish individualism, Scripture reminds us otherwise: "Love never fails" (1 Cor. 13:8). The conception and birth of Christ prove that when we lead with love, we can reveal a greater reality and produce extraordinary outcomes. **Love should not limit our expectations; rather, it should expand our capacity to dream for the impossible.** Love should rise above political and social divisions, calling us to be more like Christ—even if, like Joseph, it means walking forward solely on the word of God, trusting that He will never let us down.

Through love, we live with the expectation that in this season, and in many more to come, if we commit ourselves to a life of love, then even amid life's ambiguities, God's will for us will always prevail.

## Prayer

God please reaffirm your love for us during this time. Show us that if we follow your lead, it will always lead us back to your love even if we are uncertain of the direction we are traveling. Allow our doubts to be turned to commitment and our hearts to be unfazed by secular expectations. Remind us that your promises are never broken and that our love is never yielding. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# GOD'S LOVE LANGUAGE

**1 John 4:9-11**

## DEVOTION

*The Bible says, that while we were sinners Christ died for us. The text tells us that God initiated this love.*

Everyone who is in love shows their love in some type of way. In his best-selling book, *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman, he gives us five distinct ways people express and receive love. He states they are 1) words of affirmation, 2) quality time, 3) receiving gifts, 4) acts of service, and 5) physical touch. One of these categories speaks to your love language and touches your heart in a special way. You feel blessed when your significant other speaks your love language.

In today's scripture, the Apostle John tells us that God has a love language. He shows his love to a sinful and dying world by giving us His only Son Jesus. Imagine the creator of the universe humbling Himself to be born in a stable. This is exactly what Jesus did. He allowed himself to be born of a virgin, live the life of a servant, and die a sacrificial death on the cross.

This would be a great act of love if we were good, holy and deserved it. But we did not deserve this extreme measure of love. **The Bible says, that while we were sinners Christ died for us. The text tells us that God initiated this love.** True love does not wait for permission but initiates the action.

You and I are commanded to love others the same way God loves us. God loves everyone regardless of their faults and failures. Don't waste time trying to figure out if people are worthy of being loved. We are not worthy of God's love, but He loves us any way. Secondly, love others without being asked. When you see people in need, when possible, meet that need. Finally, love sacrificially. Love until it hurts. Real love will always cost you something. Jesus loved us so much he died for us on Calvary.

## Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for loving me enough to send Jesus into the world. Give me the courage and wisdom to love others the same way you love me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# HE LOVED US FIRST AND MOST

***Hosea 11:1-4***

## DEVOTION

*True love is found in the One who loved us first and most. His love existed before the world was formed and will continue after this world exist no more.*

The soundtrack to the 1980 film Urban Cowboy had a song that has stuck in my mind for decades because of the humorous and catchy title. The song, written by Johnny Lee, was entitled Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places. Ole Johnny sounded more like he was teaching today's text, not singing a country song.

Hosea talks, in detail, about God's love for His children. He states that God loved them, trained them, healed them, fed them and lovingly lifted them to be close to Him. The very sad commentary in Hosea is found in verse 2. It reads, "But the more they were called, they more they went away from Me."

So often, we search for love using worldly standards - physical beauty, financial wealth, social status. But love based on secular standards is fleeting at best. Physical attributes change, economic situations fluctuate and any of us can be popular today and despised tomorrow.

**True love is found in the One who loved us first and most. His love existed before the world was formed and will continue after this world exist no more.** What's more, He loved us before we ever thought of loving Him in return. Romans 5:8 reads, "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Tragically and beautifully, the love of God was on full display while He suffered and died for a rebellious wretch like you and me.

This season, let us not spurn the love of God by sacrificing to Baals. May we reaffirm our recognition that no love in this world will ever compare to the love of God expressed through the sacrifice of Christ Jesus.

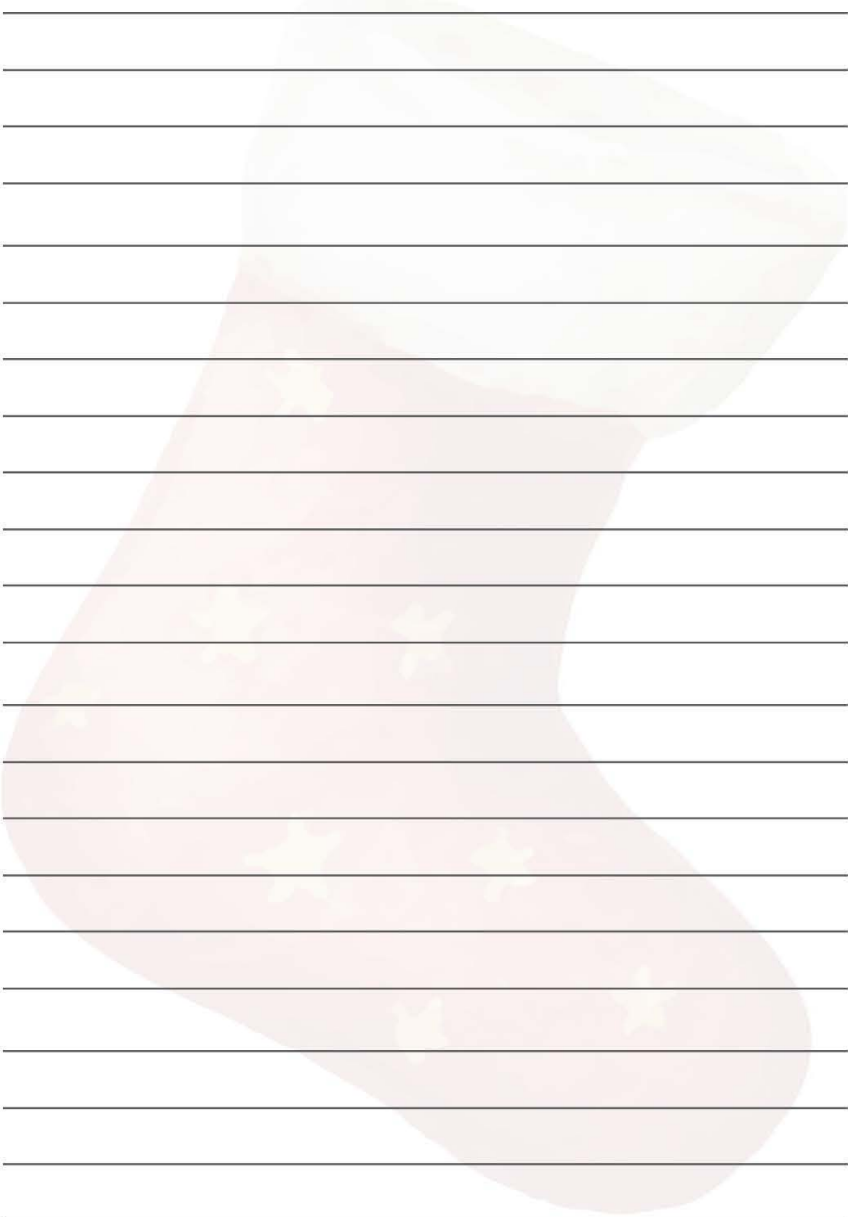
## Prayer

Father, remind me afresh of the depths of Your love for me displayed in time and realized throughout eternity. Forgive me for the instances that I have strayed and sought love in all the wrong places. I pray that Your love shown toward me, will leak out and be evident to all. In Jesus' name, Amen.



## REFLECTIONS

# REFLECTIONS



A series of horizontal lines for writing reflections, overlaid on a large, faint, stylized illustration of a person in a dynamic pose, possibly a dancer or athlete, with a pink and yellow color scheme and star patterns.