

A Season Of Wonder
Open Your Heart's Door To God's Love For You
Revelation 3:20; John 3:16-17

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Introduction: Love That Keeps On Giving

It's Christmas Eve—the most wonderful night of the year. On this night we celebrate, like no other night of the year, the incredible gift of love God gave us—His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. It's hard in many ways to believe it's already Christmas Eve. Hopefully the intentional way many of us have been moving toward Christmas this year has helped us to savor this season with new-found wonder and amazing joy.

As you gather together with family and friends there may be reasons for joy and there may also be reasons for unavoidable pain. Those extremes remind us of the very reason Jesus stepped into the world at our level. He came so we could know that God knows and cares about the painful realities of our lives. For some of you the pain may be especially intense this year. You are here tonight, hoping against all hope, that God really does care and can help. I hope this service of candles, carols, and scripture will be a sacred space in which our loving, stable-born King will be pleased to enter and make His holy presence known to you.

As you answer the knocks on your front door to greet your guests this Christmas, I want to encourage you to listen for the one knock you really don't want to miss. While there may be some family members who won't be with you this year, there is one guest who promises to show up every year. I'm referring to the Lord Himself. Even though you can't see Him physically, He is there. He stands at the door of your home on this, His birthday, hoping you'll invite Him in to be part of your celebration. And He doesn't come empty-handed. He comes with open arms and the assurance of the Father's everlasting love—not just for tonight and tomorrow. His love, once cultivated in our hearts, grows and grows. He comes with a love that keeps on giving.

Speaking of love that keeps on giving, I recently read an article about a hunch-backed Norwegian grandpa who arrived at the family Christmas celebration each year laden with gifts and a kettle of lutefisk. Gunder Birkeland was a polio survivor who had not been expected to live through childhood. Not only did he prove his doctors wrong, he immigrated to America as a teenager. What's more, he achieved financial success starting his own business. He was a model of perseverance to his family.

Every Christmas it was Mr. Birkeland's tradition to give a generous check to each of his three children and nine grandchildren. It was also the time the mischievous grandfather tried out his latest gadget or prank on some unsuspecting family member. One Christmas, however, he was the one who was caught by surprise. And what a surprise it was!

Attempting to demonstrate gratitude for the endless expressions of his generosity, Mr. Birkeland's son purchased a brand-spanking-new luxury car for his aging father and hid it in the garage with a bright red bow wrapped around it. The expression on Mr. Birkeland's wrinkled, mustached face was priceless as he pulled open the garage door and saw the car. The author of the article went on to say, "From that day on, every time the old man unlocked the door and sat down behind the steering wheel of that new car, he was reminded of a family who loved him so much that they gave him a gift beyond his wildest imagination. It was a gift that kept on giving."