

Good evening. I know what half of you are thinking. "Who in the world is that guy?" You skip one weekend to watch the Super Bowl and some random guy shows up the next week, right? Well my name is Paul Matthies, and I have served as the membership pastor here several years ago and have actually preached on occasion. This last week, many of our pastors were away to the "Desiring God" conference, and some of them were overseas in Sudan. So they asked me to fill in this weekend, and I am honored and excited and feeling like when the varsity basketball players are away at other tournaments and they ask the freshman C team to fill in. That's kind of how I'm feeling. And the other half of you are thinking, "Where in the world have you been?" And as some of you know, I had moved overseas to China to live and serve with our team in February 2007, and I transitioned back to the states this past summer. And after returning home, I got a serious case of shingles across my face. And after I got better, I entered into a form of sabbatical also known as "unemployment." That's where I've been, in the wilderness. I had to laugh at some of the past speaker's updates, because Josh Patterson got up here and said, "We had a second child." And Afshin got up here and said, "I'm getting married." And I get up here today, and my update is like, "I'm broke. Will preach for food."

But the cool thing about the wilderness is that God honors His promise in Deuteronomy 8:2 where He says that in the wilderness, He humbles us and shows us what's in our hearts. And tonight the message I came prepared to bring really is something God has worked in me in this wilderness season. And in fact, I believe that God started working this in me as far back as when I first moved to China. And I can still remember one specific instance that really drives home the point I want to make I was at English Corner in our coffee shop in China. English Corner is an event where we would show up and all of these students would come and just want to practice their English. They just wanted to ask us questions and get better at speaking English. So they would ask anything. "What is your favorite food? Do you like China?" Some of them would ask the same question over and over, and the point was just for them to be able to practice their English. And I got a really great group one night that was just really bright and really excited to be there. Their English was great, and they were asking really good questions. And I was really excited in that particular night that the conversation was going to turn to where I could bring up spiritual things. One of the girls raised her hand and said, "I was wondering, are you a Christian?" I said, "Well yes, I am a Christian. Do any of you have any questions about that? Do you all know who Jesus is?" And they said, "Yes, we know who Jesus is. We've heard of Jesus. We've read about Him." The next girl raised her hand and said, "Well if you're a Christian, could you tell me what is the purpose of life?" So I sat there and thought and really wanted to make it sound really good, like I was that old wise Chinese man on the mountain. So I'm sitting there, and I'm thinking about this question. So I said, "You know what? The purpose of life is to love Jesus with all of your heart, to follow Him every day and to look like Him." And all the students had a hushed silence like I had read just a really profound fortune cookie...until I finally said, "Do any of you have questions about the purpose of life?" And one of the guys raised his hand and said, "I have a question. You said the purpose of life is to look like Jesus." I said, "Yes, that's right. What is your question?" He said, "Well, I think you look more like Buddha." And the next girl said, "Oh yes. No hair, big stomach." Needless to say, no one got converted that night.

But I was reminded of that story as I was leaving worship at the Denton campus one morning when I got behind one of the UNT students who used bumper stickers to advertise what they believe about life. This particular guy had a religion section. So I looked down and saw a bumper sticker that really impacted me. It was a quote from Gandhi that said this, "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. They are so unlike your Christ." It's funny to be mistaken for Buddha; it's not so funny when the world cannot see that the disciples of Christ are truly His disciples. And I did some more research

to try to get some context of exactly what Gandhi was trying to say, and I found another quote from him in the same series of quotes where he says this, "When the missionary of another religion goes to [the Indian people], he goes like a vendor of goods. He has no special spiritual merit that will distinguish him from those to whom he goes. He does however possess material goods which he promises to those who will come to his fold." Did you hear that? He's saying that the church and its missionaries are like manipulative salesmen, but you can't tell the difference between them and the rest of the world. Now is that true? Did Jesus just say that you were just going to be like the light of the world, that it was going to be impossible to tell us apart, that we would have no special spiritual merit by which the world could tell we were His disciples? As I was thinking about this and meditating on this, I thought about the fact that not only do some people like Gandhi say that there is no difference between Christians and the rest of the world, if you ask some people, they would actually say Christians are worse than the rest of the world. I was thinking about when you talk to the typical waitress and you asked them what their least favorite day is, do you know which day they'll tell you? Sunday, because the people in the restaurant who are wearing the church clothes will be the rudest, most demanding people and will tip the least. I believe there are many people out there today who say, "I may like your Christ, but your Christians to me seem legalistic, hypocritical, arrogant, and condescending." Now some of this may very well fall on them and their misunderstanding what we Christians believe. We have never said that we are perfect people; we said we are people who are being perfected by the perfect Son of God. And they may misunderstand that and not realize that we are still a work in progress. Some of us however may feel like we've arrived and that we are better than other people. And some of us may indeed carry that attitude.

Is it true that there is no such special spiritual merit about us as Christians? Well, in a spirit of humility, I say we need to take some of the world's critiques very seriously. Yet at the same time, I believe that Jesus makes it very clear to His disciples that we do have special spiritual merit which distinguishes us from the rest of the world. And so He would disagree with Gandhi in that when a person is truly following Him, there is a way to tell that we are His disciples. And this is where we will go to John 13:34-35. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." This is so simple, yet it is so key. I really feel that sometimes as Christians the missing component that we have in our lives is a sincere love for God that expresses itself in a compassionate love for our neighbor and for the world. And I want to talk today about four ways that we often go wrong, and then I want to talk about four ways that we as Christians can make it right. And my point today is that sincere love of others is that missing component that can be seen in today's churches.

And I want to say that the first way we go wrong (and I see this very much in my own life) is that we have a tendency to compartmentalize our faith. We separate love for God from love for people. We think, "Okay, I'm cool with God. It's people that are the problem." Do any of you struggle with loving other people or am I the only one here? Are there times you think to yourself, "Church would be great if it weren't for people. Work would be great if it weren't for people. The world would be great if it weren't for people?" But God never intended this separation. He never intended us to separate our love for Him as it expresses itself in our love for others. In fact, I would say that the Scriptures are very clear that the litmus test of a sincere devotion to Him is: How much do we see ourselves growing in love for others? Where do I get this idea? Well, many of you are familiar with the story in Mark 12 where the Pharisee comes to Him and asks, "What is the greatest commandment?" And Jesus is going to respond not with a commandment, but really two sayings. He's going to say, "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." And before they can say anything more, He's going to say, "The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" And in Mark 12:31, He says, "There is no other commandment greater than these."

This idea is all over the Scriptures that God never intended for us to view our love for God and our love for people as two totally distinct, opposite ideas. In fact, we're going to see tonight, as I give you a feast of Scriptures, that this idea of

loving God and glorifying God expresses itself in us sincerely loving other people with the gospel love. It began in the ten commandments. When God came and gave the Israelites the ten commandments, the first four commandments are about our love for God, but the next six are about our relationship with people. Some of you may remember the story of Simon Peter in John 21 where, after Simon Peter said he was done with ministry, he was tired of being a fisher of men, he was very discouraged, Jesus came to him on the beach and asked him a question. He said, "Peter, do you love Me?" And three times Peter responded, "Yes, I do love You, Lord." But do you know what Jesus said each time? "Love My sheep...tend My sheep...shepherd My sheep." Do you see how Jesus was pointing Peter back? If you truly love Him, it will express itself in love and care for His sheep. John takes it even a step further in his letters. And he's going to say, "If we say that we love God yet we hate others, we are liars. Did you hear that? Some of us come into church and we say that we're having a spiritual experience, we raise our hands and say, "Oh, I love Jesus. I'm being filled with the Spirit. I'm saved and sanctified. I'm blessed and highly favored," and then as soon as we leave the building, we're different people. We've separated spiritual experience from truly encountering the living God who is a loving God. If you don't see yourself growing in love, you are not meeting with the living God, you are just having spiritual experiences that are no different than watching Oprah and Dr. Phil. Because really love for God is going to express itself in a gospel love for other people as soon as we encounter with God.

The second way I think we go wrong is we become judgmental very quickly in our lives, forgetting where we ourselves came from. You know how, when you first become a believer, you get really excited about your faith. So instead of honoring the same process by which people won you to Christ, you get a little overly zealous and you go, "I know that I got drunk with you last week, but you need to put your beer down and get saved, buddy. You need to come into the light." Sometimes as Christians we get that way where we're very much gracious with ourselves, but when it comes to other people, we're like, "Get your act together, buddy. It's time for you to come out of the darkness and into the light." And we forget ourselves where we came from in the process that God used to woo us to Himself. James says that when we hear the word of God but we do not do it, we are like people who look into a mirror and, as soon as we walk away from the mirror, we forget who we are. Do any of you have short-term memory when it comes to loving other people in your Christian walk? Do you know when I most often forget who I am? In my car. Do you know what I'm saying? One time someone tried to give me one of those fishes to put on my car. I do not want people to know. I'm going to get behind that wheel and I'm going to act the fool every time. And I don't know if you're like me, but you have the best of intentions and you start off by getting in your car and turning on 94.9 "Family Friendly Radio." And so you're just trying to be family friendly on the road, singing "Open the eyes of my heart, Lord..." You're just trying to get into it, and with the first person that cuts you off, you're like, "Oh no, you didn't." And you start talking to them. "There's a reason there's lines there, buddy. Oh you did not just cut me off to pull into Taco Bell. That drive-thru is open 24 hours. You couldn't wait ten seconds to go to Taco Bell?" And the next thing you know, you've turned into 104.5 and you're rapping with Ludacris. "Move!...get out da way...get out da way..." Forget 94.9.

On a serious note, we can turn to Jonah 2, and you will see a really interesting dynamic happening. And in that chapter, Jonah has decided to run from God, and he gets on a ship to run away from the Lord. And the Lord sends a great storm upon that ship. And we often use that passage in Jonah 2 to talk about, "Wow, look at Jonah's disobedience and how he's running away from God." But do you know what we often forget about? There is a whole group of sailors on the top of this ship in the middle of chaos, in the middle of destruction, in the middle of the storm working to save the ship, and Jonah is at the bottom of the boat asleep. Isn't it sad that the servant of God is so out of touch with his surroundings that, in the middle of chaos and destruction, he finds himself sleeping on the boat. And the question I have to ask myself and that we have to ask ourselves tonight is: How many of us separate our love for God and our love for people in such a way that when we're running from God, we don't even care about the impact it has on people? Because we're asleep on the boat.

About three months ago, there was a fire at my apartment complex, and I was awoken by a kid yelling, "Fire! Fire! Fire!" I ran outside to a very chaotic scene of firefighters trying to save Building 1. I was in Building 5. All the neighbors were outside, and there was smoke everywhere, there were helicopters, people were crying and screaming. I saw people hugging on another, comforting one another. And I just kind of took a step back and watched what was happening and took a look at what was taking place. And as soon as I could I found a neighbor that I knew and asked her, "Hey, what's happening here?" She said, "Oh, our building is going to be okay. It seems that they've contained it." And do you know what I did? I went back to Building 5, I laid back down in my bed and I went back to sleep. Now as soon as I woke up, I felt the Spirit of God putting on my heart, "Jonah, you are so out of touch with your surroundings that you can't even see that there are people around you who are struggling." And I don't know the spiritual state of those firefighters and the people who are counseling, but I do know some of them and I know that I left what should have been the work of a servant of God to people who don't even know the Lord. I bet some of us can list lost people in our lives who are doing a better job of loving their neighbors than we are because we're asleep on the boat.

Another thing we do is we try to change people instead of just loving them with God's love in such a way that He changes them. Do you see the difference? Sometimes we make people our projects. We set out to change them instead of realizing that if we would just humble ourselves before the Lord and become conduits of His love, He does the saving, not us. Another way to put this is God did not call us to salesmen, He called us to be servants. He's called us to be conduits of His love. And what we really should be applying ourselves toward is not necessarily better strategies of evangelism, but a deeper love and compassion for the people around us, both our neighbors and our enemies. What a challenging statement, that those who are far from Him and haters of us, we should be working on a love that is so deep and so profound that we're even willing to extend love to them. And so we're not supposed to be working on these people as projects, we're supposed to be working on our hearts in such a way that we become conduits, free-flowing conduits, healthy flowing rivers of God's love in such a way that they encounter His love, and His love will be the agent that changes them. If any of you are like me in here, you might be type A and you think that you can out argue someone into the kingdom of God. You kind of make it your goal to make a better argument and trump them like you're playing chess in some sort of spiritual game. And if any of you are like that, I would encourage you to read 2 Timothy 2 where He says, "the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will."

I think that the final thing that is one of the most important points that we can understand is that often times in our lives, we pursue the knowledge of God and the holiness of God without also making the love of God our spiritual aim. Sometimes we try to pursue knowledge, we try to pursue holiness but we don't take the time to pursue love in our lives. We often like to quote 1 Corinthians 10:31 that says, "So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." But I think there's another Scripture that we need to do a better job of preaching over our lives, and that Scripture is 1 Corinthians 16:14 that says this, "Let all that you do be done in love." Do you see how those are tied together? Glorifying God, doing all things to the glory of God is in its essence doing all things from a place of love. And this is all throughout the Scriptures in such a way that we have to ask ourselves: Do we often see the glory of God and the love of God as mutually exclusive ideas? I hear a lot of people, especially in reformed circles like ours, who will say things like, "You don't want to talk too much about the love of God, because people will start thinking that it's all about them." News flash – people already think it's all about them. We all come to church as spiritually selfish people. We think that life is all about us, and what God is saying is the only hope that people really have to realize that life isn't about them is to live in such a way that they are captured by the glory of God through the gospel of Christ, through an army of loving, selfless, gospel inspired servants.

I think this point is driven even further in the next series of Scriptures I want to give you. I'm just going to read you one of them to you, but 1 Timothy 1:5, James 2:8 and 1 Peter 4:8 are all going to say things about how the goal of our faith is love. It's going to say that "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" is the royal law. Peter's going to say, "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins." But the one I really wanted to expound upon is Galatians 5:14, and it says this, "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The whole Law, the whole of the Scriptures is summed up in this one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Isn't it interesting that he picked that particular command to emphasize the word "love?" It's almost as to say, "Be careful not to separate your love for the glory of God and the love of God in your lives, because this is the hope that we bring to people. This is that special spiritual merit that people are going to look at your life and realize that they have truly encountered the love of God through one of His servants."

Well I'm going to talk about four ways that we obey Christ's command to love others. The first way that we obey Christ's command to love others I think is pretty simple but we often neglect, and that is to see the love of God. In 1 John 3:1, the apostle John says, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are," so that the world does not recognize us. He's saying, "See the love of God, look at it, dwell on it, go to the Scriptures and see it, appreciate it, love it, glory in it, revel in it. Because the love of God in the Scriptures is something like the world has never seen." See what type of love God has given us. It's not romantic love, it's not patriotic love, it's not activist love, it's not fanatical love; what it is is gospel love, it's miraculous love, it's supernatural love, it's love that is so distinct that people will look at your lives, the way you love one another and the way you love them and they will say, "They could only love that way if there really is a God." It's amazing to me. It's not to say that we shouldn't be good at romantic love and good at patriotic love and good at activist love and helping others. It's not to say that those things aren't good types of love that Christians should also be leaders on, but the fact of the matter is the love of God is distinct. It's different. It is a special spiritual merit. And the question is: Are people looking at your life and seeing these things? And the even deeper question is: Are you taking the time to see it so that you can become like the love you're seeing? It's also amazing that John also says that we should be called children of God. He's amazed. "Look at this love that we should be called children of God." As if to say, "If anyone shouldn't be called children of God, it's us." Isn't it amazing how God's love becomes much more amazing in light of our sinfulness? Whenever you take the time to see how you've fallen short of the glory of God in your life, it makes the love of God that much more magnificent and that much more amazing that we should be called children of God. And my first point is that the love of God is mind-blowing. When is the last time you've come to church and have been blown away by the love of God in your life?

The second point is that God's love is God-given. And I would encourage you to take the time this week to study 1 John 4 and take some time to look at the love of God in 1 John 4. Because one of the things he's going to say is love is God-given. Why is this important? Love is a fruit of the Spirit; it's not our love. We're not called to manufacture love. It's a love that is not our own that lives and dwells in us. It's God-given. He says, "We have been given the Spirit so that we may love." You know what? You are incapable of truly loving your neighbor unless God gives you this type of love. It is God-given. Not only that, it's gospel-centered. It is given by God, for God. And it is gospel-centered because John is going to say that the love that we have is like the love of Christ upon the cross. It is a self-sacrificing love. People should look at our love and say, "Wow, they're willing to die to self for something greater than themselves, for my good and the glory of their cause, which is the gospel."

This is an even more important point. The love of God confesses Jesus. Do any of you have fear when it comes to sharing your faith and evangelism? I do. I can stand in front of the people this weekend and have less nervousness than when I'm having a one on one conversation with someone about Christ. But what's amazing to me is that the Scriptures are going to say that if you truly love like God, the love of God is only truly love if it can be traced back to God's saving plan in the cross of Christ. This is really important because it distinguishes it from humanitarian aid or just doing good for

others. Because at the end of the day, if we're truly loving people, it's being traced back and people are making the connection that the reason why we are the way we are and do the things we do and say the things we say is because our hearts have so been changed by the love of Jesus Christ. And the love of God confesses Jesus. I want to be filled with the love of God in such a way that it rolls off my tongue, that people understand that the way I do things and the reason why I live is because I'm so filled with the love of God that I can't help but sing the praises of Jesus Christ.

It's also heaven perfected. Thank goodness for this one, right? The love of God is heaven perfected. Why is this one important? Well, because we as Christians should not be afraid of being misunderstood. Because you're going to go out there, and you're going to fail. You're going to go out there, you're going to try to love people, you're going to try to do the right thing, you're going to try to be obedient and you're not going to do it successfully all the time because you are in the process of being perfected. But that shouldn't bring you fear. Because it says the love of God casts out fear. You're not afraid of judgment, you're not afraid of God being angry because he knows that you are being perfected, and you won't be totally perfected until heaven. And this is awesome news for most of us who are like me who thinks that you have to have all of the answers before you go out and do something. Are you like that? Have you ever told God, "Well, I'll start loving people when You explain everything of what it truly means to love people?" And we have to realize that it starts today, because our love is heaven perfected.

And finally, it is focused on others. And that's so important because the love of God does not terminate on us. In 1 John 4, John is going to put it like this, "If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." Wow. Did you follow his reasoning? How can you say you love God whom you've never seen but then not love the person sitting next to you. He's basically saying, "If you're living this type of life, God is like your imaginary friend." Nobody even knows why you say you believe in Him, because they're not seeing any difference. If anything you hate people. You're always saying you love God, but nobody sees that special spiritual merit, no one sees that love flowing through you, so you're a liar. You may be having spiritual experiences, but you're not encountering the living God. Because if we're encountering the living God, we should be growing in a love for our neighbor.

The next thing that we do is we seek the love of God. 1 Corinthians 14:1 says, "Pursue love." Do you know why we have to pursue love? It's just what we were talking about. This love does not come naturally. Have any of you read that verse where Paul says, "Put on a heart of compassion?" It's the same phrase used as in putting on clothes. Every morning, I wake up and I'm cranky. And so I have to go and put on my love pants, because to be honest with you, if I don't, I'm going to walk outside and I'm going to be wearing my angry pants. And nobody loves you when you're wearing your angry pants. You have to put this on, you have to pursue it. This does not come naturally to us. We have to understand that this is a supernatural thing, and in order to have a supernatural thing, we have to ask God for it. But isn't it amazing that God says, "You have not because you ask not?" But guess what happens when we ask according to His will. He gives it to us. So the question you really need to ask yourself is: Why do you come to church? For what reason are you coming to church? Is it to seek the love of God or do you have other motives?

I'm going to give six other motives that people come to church. The first is self-help. "I want to fix my issues. I have things in my life that I want fixed, and I want Jesus to fix them. So I come to church for self-help." Another reason we come to church is for spiritual experience. "I want to come, I want to listen to the music, I want to sway and open up my cell phone with the light and I want to enjoy the music here at the Village Church and I want to really get into it so I can feel better about myself by the time I leave. I want to feel better about my life." Another reason people come to church is for social networking. "I want to meet some good people (ie. I want to hook up)." And so some of us come because we think, "Wow, I really want to be around some good influences. In order to be a good businessman, I want to be able to say that I own a Christian business so I go to church." It's really about social networking. And you know

what? As we mature in our faith, we come to understand these terms in different ways. We come to see that it's really not about self-help, it's about sanctification. It's about God changing our hearts and making us more holy. It's also not so much about social networking, it's about fellowship. It's about having a sincere love for the other children of God. It's not so much about spiritual experiences as it is intimacy with Christ. But you can pursue sanctification, you can pursue intimacy, you can pursue fellowship, but all that while, you can also not make love your spiritual aim. There are lots of people out there who think that they're going to win the world by being really good people who are involved in a lot of church activities and that their coworkers are going to look at them and say, "Wow, I love the fact that you're so holy and you're so busy all the time with your church friends. I want to be that way too." And Jesus is saying, "It's love that's the difference." When we come together in fellowship, the goal is to stir up one another in good works and love. When we have intimacy with Christ, we are to love Him in such a way that it becomes love for our neighbor. When we have sanctification, what we need to understand is that becoming a holier person doesn't terminate on us. It's not so that we can feel better about ourselves, it's so there's less junk in our lives that's clogging the love of God from extending out of us to our neighbor. And so we have to understand that love must be one of our spiritual aims.

People have other reasons they come to church. One of them is strong faith. They say, "I want to have a strong faith so that no matter what hardships I have in life, I'm going to persevere and I'm going to make it." Another reason people come to church is for sermons and study. They like to come so that they can learn more theology and know more about the Bible. Other people come for service. And this one is a really tricky one, because it really can be done from love Galatians tells us. But have you ever been around people who introduce themselves and tell you how many ministries they're involved in, like they're Boy Scout badges. It's like, "I'm involved in the Connections Ministry and Children's Ministry and Pre-School Ministry. Look how holy I am. Want to hook up?" But 1 Corinthians 13 is really going to tell us that you can have all faith, you can have all knowledge, you can give your body to be burned, but if you have not love, you are nothing.

So what should be our goal in coming to church? Sincere love. When is the last time you have been broken for your neighbor? When is the last time you have been broken by the situation of people in the world? When is the last time you've been broken by the situation of the person sitting next to you in church? When is the last time you asked how the life of the person is sitting next to you? Why are you coming? Is it because you want to be holy, saved and sanctified? Or is it because you want to be a sincere lover of God and a sincere lover of others?

The next thing is to experience the love of God. In John 15:12, Jesus says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." Do you know what's so amazing about this? It's that God wants to show us how to love other people. He wants to display His love in our lives so that we can display His love to others. It's about experiencing the love of God as well. I have a feeling that there's some of you here tonight that have never experienced the love of God in that way. And the reason why you're unable to find yourself loving others is because you've never really had an opportunity to experience the love of God. Because elsewhere in Thessalonians, Paul says that we are taught by God to love one another. 1 John 4:19 says, "We love because he first loved us." And here is the important thing. You will never be able to be an effective lover of God in others unless you understand what it means to be loved by God. And so God says, "I want you to experience My love. I want to teach you, I want to show you what it means to love so that you can love others for the sake of My glory."

Which leads us to the last point. We are called to exhibit the love of God. After we see the love of God, seek the love of God and experience the love of God, we are then called to exhibit the love of God, to put the love of God on display for others to see so that they may enjoy it, love it, desire it, follow it.

But I know, I could tell you twenty different things of ways that you could show your love for your neighbor. You could pray for them, you could give to them, you could correct your neighbor because Hebrews 12 says that God loves those whom He disciplines. There's many ways in which we are supposed to display the love of God. But some of you are going to leave here tonight and go, "I have so many questions about what it means to love others, and he didn't even answer those questions." Like what about tough love? That's our favorite one. What's it look like to give people tough love? "I heard on Dr. Phil that we're supposed to give tough love. So what how do I give tough love?" Another thing we worry about is healthy boundaries. "So are you saying that if I start loving people I have to start saying yes to everything they ask from me? Do I just have to love everybody in such a way that I don't have healthy boundaries in my life?" Another one is loving enemies. "What does it mean to love my enemies? What does it mean to love Osama Bin Laden and pray for him? I don't understand that. What about becoming all things to all people? I don't understand what that means. If my friend goes to bars, does that mean that if I love him, I would go to bars with him?" There's all these questions we're going to ask ourselves, but this is what I want to say to you. On that last point I want to say that some of us concern ourselves with the lies of relevance, but something God has taught me is that I am the most relevant when I am the most loving. And some of us think that in order to reach the bikers, we need to put on the biker gear and get on a bike. I'm never going to get on a bike. I'm wearing sandals. But I'm the most relevant when I'm the most loving, and so are you. But on that point, I want to just challenge you – don't wait for all your questions to be answered before you start loving people. Some of you say, "I'm going to start that as soon as you answer all my questions about it biblically." And some people are going to be like, "Well, I can't love all ten people. That's impossible. I've got all these people demanding my time." Are you giving anyone your time? That's the question you need to be asking yourself. "I can't love everyone." Do you love anyone? "I don't know what it means to love my neighbor." Do you have a neighbor that you're trying to love? Don't wait for all of your questions to be answered before you start loving.

Instead, there are two questions that we can ask ourselves and one promise that we can walk in tonight. The first question you need to be asking yourself is, "Am I growing in love daily? Can I see that I am more loving now than I was a week ago, a year ago, ten years ago?" That's a measurable thing you should be able to see a change in your life in your love towards people. The second question, the more important question is, "Am I making time to see, seek and experience the love of God?" I think a lot of times people hear this concept of quiet time, spending time with God each day and they hear it taught in a legalistic setting, so it gets a really bad rap. But let me tell you something. In John 15, Jesus says, "Apart from me, you can do nothing." So you know what that means? I may have a million meetings today, but there is one meeting I must go to, and that's to be at the feet of the cross of Christ. Because apart from Him I can't do this. I'm making time to be loved by God in such a way that I may be able to put the love of God on display. And here's the promise for us tonight before we transition to prayer. John 7 says that the love of God, the Holy Spirit is going to flow out of us like a river. And I think there's a myth that's being taught out there that we're like a bucket, in that we have to be filled with the love of God like a bucket until we overflow and then we start loving other people. Have you heard this? Like, "Pray that God fills you so much that you overflow." How many times in your life are you going to feel like you're overflowing with the love of God? The truth is that through one drop of the love of God, God can miraculously turn into a flowing river of love for others. That's His promise to us. Some of us are waiting around until we feel like our buckets are full and overflowing before we're going to go out and love our neighbors, but the truth of Scripture is that if you would take the time just to experience a drop of God's love, He will miraculously and supernaturally turn that into a mighty flowing river out of your heart and into the lives of others.

Well I know there's two groups of people here tonight that need prayer. The first group of people is those of us who would call ourselves Christians, but we need to experience the love of God in a fresh way tonight. We want to be filled again in such a way that we love our neighbor. But there's another group of you who have never experienced the love of God. And this is what I'm going to ask for us as we pray. Would you just take your hands and cup them. This is nothing special, it's nothing magical or mystic. Romans 5:5 says that the Holy Spirit pours out the love of the Father into our



hearts. And I want you to just form a cup and put it near your heart. And I want to pray for us, that God would fill us in such a way that He pours just one drop so that we could overflow with the love of God in our lives.

“Lord, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You that we can see Your love first of all in Your perfect Scripture, but also we see it displayed in our lives, Lord. I thank You that we can seek Your love, that as we come to church we can come and ask for it and believe for it and we receive that. And Lord, I thank You that we can also experience Your love. You long for us to love others in the same way that You are loving us. And Lord, I pray that right now, by the power of Your Spirit that You would just pour the love that You have into the hearts of Your children. I pray that You would give them hope, that You would grant them to love in all the ways we talked about tonight. And Lord, for those who have never tasted Your love, I pray that they won't leave until they have spoken with a trusted friend or pastor that they can ask what it means to really understand the gospel of Christ and His love in our lives. And so Lord, we are grateful for You and for Your truth and for Your love. And we ask this now in Jesus' name. Amen.”

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