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Love Transforms

I Corinthian 13:13

July 29, 2007- Sunday, 11:00 AM - Dr. David H. McKinley

[Dr. McKinley, message, Love Transforms]

Let's just stop and think a moment. [applause] That's powerful, isn't it? If you stop and think about it, there really is no greater motivating force... there is no greater transforming power than the power of love. Love changes everything. And love has been identified universally as both the primary need of all people and the greatest lack among all mankind. There's great issue over the matter of love. And as a result there is no word that is more frequently used in speeches, pieces of music, thematic developments in all dramatic presentations, poetry, sermons, and the like... No word that is used more frequently than the word love.

Love is the master theme in the Bible. You cannot pick up this Book without seeing and hearing the witness of love. And yet no where is it more crystallized than in 1 Corinthians chapter 13. I invite you to take your Bible and turn with me there this morning because this chapter is known as the love chapter of the Bible. This chapter and verses from it have been placed on many wedding announcements, have been used as a reminder of many experiences of friendship because many people have tried to capture and to communicate the message of the power of love.

The Apostle Paul, a man who was driven, a man who was hard-hearted, a man who had great zeal but had lived his life without love, was ultimately transformed by the power of the love of Jesus Christ. And in giving expression to the transforming power of love, Paul wrote these words:

1) *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I'm a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.* 2) *And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.* 3) *If I give away all I have and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

Paul clearly says life minus love is nothing. And you know what nothing is. It's a zero with the edges trimmed off. It's nothing. Life is all about love. Love adds value to everything that we know and everything that matters in life. And yet Paul says for all the things that I can have, if I have any and all of these things and have not love, then life is nothing.

If I could paraphrase for you what Paul is saying in the very ah... beautiful and very wonderful words of expression, just taking it to the bottom line this is what he's saying: Without love all I say is ineffective; without love all I know is incomplete; without love all that I believe is insufficient; without love all that I give is insignificant; and

without love all that I accomplish is inadequate. Life minus love equals nothing!

That's why he comes down to verse 13 in this same passage, and at the close of this chapter, dedicated and devoted to the power of love, he says this:

13) *Now faith, hope and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is (What?) love.*

And then don't let the chapter heading and division become a barrier, because as soon as you step over into 1 Corinthians 14 and verse 1, the first [tap] two [tap] words [tap] are these [tap], "*Pursue love... pursue love...*" Why? Because love makes all the difference in life. Love is transforming and transformational. And here's the message that I want you to get; here's what I want you to carry away in your heart: God's love... the love of a Father, when it is experienced in you life will transform all who receive it and all who share it... God's love will transform all who receive it and all who share it.

So the same Bible that tells me about the power of love, tells me the source of this love; because while I know that love matters and the world knows this, it seems that the world can never find the right source of love. Our sources are inadequate. Our resources are depleted. But the Bible says clearly God is love; therefore to know Him, to receive His love is to be transformed and to live to share His love.

According to the Bible, the very character... the very nature and every act of God can not be separated apart from the reality of His love. God wants you to know today that He loves you. God wants you to know that He cares for you and for every need that you bring into this place today. And while we are the objects of God's perfect affection, the struggle that we have is that we do not naturally emit Godly affection to people in our world... people around us. Therefore over and over not only does the Bible give witness to the testimony of God's love, but the Bible raises the standard of love as becoming the most vital principle by which all of life is to be governed.

Jesus Christ said in John chapter 13, verses 34 and 35, "*A new commandment I give to you,...*" Now the audience that was listening to Him knew the commandments. They knew the Ten Commandments and they knew all of the moral and ceremonial and... and religious laws that were found in the New Testament. But Je... ..in the Old Testament. But Jesus came along in the New Testament and said:

34) *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you. So you also love one another.* (And then He said this) 35) *By this will all people know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.*

The symbol of the Christian faith is not the Crucifix; the symbol of the Christian faith is not the fish or the dove. The symbol of the Christian

faith is a human heart imprinted by the reality of God's love that so changes the character of that human being that they begin to live to express that character to other people. When people see you... when people see me... when people see us, the symbol of faith should be the ever present reality of His transforming love. And when human hearts are beating in response to the rhythm of God's love, it changes everything.

You know when we started today, we didn't have to get more than about a minute into this service this morning and just the rhythm of the music... the drive of the music... the call of the music had some of us [clap] clapping our hands, some of us stomping our feet, some of us bobbing our heads, some of us wiggling a little bit. I mean, we had all kinds of things going on because you had to respond to the rhythm of what you were hearing and what was capturing your heart.

And when you begin to respond to the rhythm of God's love in your heart, it changes you, it changes every relationship, it changes all of what matters in life. And this is natural because it is natural to the person who experiences the transforming power of God's love.

What does the Bible tell us? Romans 5:5:

5) Because God's love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

There is a new channel of love in your life and mine. And that new channel of love is now to be the place where a lost world, hurting hearts, empty lives, hungry souls who crave to know the knowledge of their Creator, can see and experience His love and it's through me and it's through you and it's through the witness of Jesus Christ in this world.

Now having said all these things about love, I have one great obstacle... I have one great obstacle in trying to speak and to communicate this subject of love to our minds and hearts today, and you know what that is? It is the fact that in our world today love is so used and abused and confused that it's hard for us to get on pa... same page when it comes to the concept of love. What kind of love am I talking about? How does this love present itself? What is characteristic of this love in my life and in your life? Because the world around us has so used and overused and confused the word love that we struggle to really understand.

Well, let me not just wander with a lot of personal reflections and sentimental thoughts. Let's just go right back to the heart of this passage that says to us that life minus love is nothing, and let's hear what Paul says about what love is really like. Beginning in verse 4 this is what he says:

4) Love is patient and kind, love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice in wrong-doing, but it rejoices in the truth.

Paul clearly and succinctly says: "This is what love looks like."

And one of the things that I would observe as I read this passage of Scripture, and one of the things that I want you to connect with as I share these thoughts with you this morning is simply this: Love... transforming love, according to the Bible, is not a feeling. God's transforming love is not just a feeling. You read this definition of love and nowhere do you get the idea of emotion. I'm not saying it doesn't have any emotion; I'm just saying that nowhere is love being defined and described as pure emotion, because love at its core is not emotion; love at its core is action.

When you see the picture of Dick and Rick Hoyt you don't see just the sentiment of a father, you see the commitment of a father! I'm sure there have been a lot of times in the relationship that Dick and Rick have shared that the emotions have not always been positive. But what Dick Hoyt has done as a father is something for his son, not because he had sympathy for him, and not even because it always made him feel good. They've run over 25 marathons, 7 triathlons together. That doesn't feel good! At least if it does, it's an experience I've certainly never had, because I hadn't been anywhere near that far, and I can tell you it felt like quitting long before that amount of time!

But I say that to say that what was it that drove this father to do this for his son? It wasn't the emotion of love; it was the action of love! It was an action that said my son's life needs to be presented and my love needs to be expressed openly; and this is the character of true love.

Love is a commitment to a course of action that may result in feelings, but isn't dependent upon feelings alone... Love is a commitment to a course of action that may result in feelings, but it doesn't depend on feelings alone. If it does, no human relationship has hope.

Now we enter human relationships because of hopes and because of feelings. No doubt about it, one of the dimensions of love is romance. It's a very beautiful and a very wonderful dimension of love, but romance is only one small part of the whole description and definition of what love is. In fact, romance and the feelings of romance can get you into trouble. It caused Ambrose Bierce to write these words: "Love... a temporary insanity curable by marriage." [laughter] You can identify with that, some of you today, can't you? Or what about George Lichtenberg's description: "Love is blind but marriage restores its sight." [ha] [laughter] You know what I'm talking about, don't you?

See, the reality is that love can't just be based on emotion, because it's so much more than just feeling. That's why Emmy Bloom: "Love at first sight is easy to understand. It's when two people have been looking at each other for a long... a lifetime that it becomes a miracle." You see, that is love in action; that is love in commitment.

And when I say to you today in the human realm that love must be more than emotion, how much more is that true in the spiritual realm? When I tell you that God loves you, I'm not saying God's got feelings for you. I'm not saying God's up there in heaven with cupids and hearts and feelings and romance, and saying, "Oh I love you, I love you." That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about the action of God on your behalf; that God has taken action for you and for me to restore and to redeem a broken, fallen creation, in order that we might have relationship with Him and that we might live lives that matter because of the power of His great love.

That's why the Bible says in 1 John 4, verse 7 through 11:

7) Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8) Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. (His character, His nature.) 9) In this, the love of God was made manifest (How do we know it?) among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. 10) In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that He has loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11) Because if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Do you see that the Bible says the love of God is an active love. It's not an emotive love; it's an active love. Now when I see it and I respond to it, it evokes all kinds of emotions in me, to consider the wonder of God's active love for me. And the secret to what God has done in His action is all wrapped up in one word that we can all trip over in that passage. It says He has sent His Son to be the propitiation...

What in the world is propitiation? Have you been talking to people lately who are talking to you about propitiating? [laughter] Somebody says, "Oh I've just been propitiating." No, they're probably haven't. [laughter] I mean it almost sounds like propane in a tank that's about ready to explode. It's at the point of propitiation. I mean... [laughter] that's the only thing that I can associate. What is propitiation? But you know it's a very simple idea to help us understand that, and it simply means to cover... to cover.

Have you ever been out to eat with someone and you're enjoying a great meal and having a wonderful time? And then came the moment when they brought the bill to the table, and you knew, you're kind of in that awkward moment where you're trying to figure out how are we going to do this? I mean how are we going to divide... Have you ever been there? And somebody just reached over, put their hand on the bill and said, "I'll cover it." That's a good moment, isn't it? [laughter] I mean, the meal just got better, didn't it? No doubt about it! "Hey, I'll cover it." Now have you had that happen to you? Can you nod your head? Somebody's had that happen?

Now if you haven't, Mark Rylander is sitting right over here. He's a love machine. You just go up to him and say, "Mike... Mark, nobody's ever covered my meal." Just get him. I'm sure he's open for lunch today, right Mark? And so you just catch him. He'll... he'll cover it.

You see, the idea of saying I'll cover it... that's what God is saying. In His love He has sent His Son Jesus to become the covering. What sin and rebellion and condemnation have destroyed, God has restored and covered in the Person of His Son Jesus Christ, who shed His blood to be the propitiation... to be the covering for our sins.

See, love isn't just a feeling. This transforming love is the very act of God and the power of God for us. It's not a feeling. And that's why I say, God's love... the love of a Father transforms all who receive it and all who share it.

There's something else I want you to see, and that is that transforming love not only is not a feeling, but it's not fleeting. What do I mean by that? Well, simply this: If feelings are internal changes that go on, up and down in the course of my life, the idea of that which is fleeting is what changes because of the circumstances in my life. And the Bible makes it very clear that this transforming love of God is not based on the passing, changing conditions of life. It's consistent [tap]; it's faithful [tap]; it is enduring [tap]! It's not a fleeting or a fading thing; it's an enduring and an abiding thing! Look in verse 7:

7) Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

That's why I would have to say to you again this week as I did in the message last week, that we must be careful about using human experiences... circumstances to become the measure of God's character. Just because everything in your life isn't simply, easy and fun doesn't mean that God doesn't love you. God's love is what remains, abides and endures. And as believers when fellow believers go through hardships and heartaches in life, it needs to be the love of God that is poured out in and through our lives to remind them of the enduring quality of this love in each and every one of us. So love keeps acting; love keeps responding; love keeps moving even when the circumstances of life are changing.

We talked about that love in verse 4... what it looks like. Let me just take though, and give you 4 simple words as to how love acts. Real love... a love that is not based on feelings, a love that is not based on the changing conditions of life. What are some actions of love? First John 3:18... John said this:

18) Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and truth.

So what are the deeds of love, what are the acts of love in our lives?

Well I would suggest first listening. If you want to be a loving person, be a listening person because one of the greatest acts of love is to listen to another. How many of us would be first to admit that the primary conflicts that we have with our mates, with our children, with our friends [tap], with our work associates... whether it's boss [tap] to employee [tap] or

employee [tap] to boss [tap]... How many of us would be first to admit that the biggest problem we have in relationships is communication. We struggle to communicate with others. But you know why we struggle so much? Because we believe that the secret to effective communication is getting other people to sit while we broadcast. [laughter] Doing just what I'm doing this morning! [ha] [laughter]

But I want to ask you something this morning. Are you listening? Not are you hearing my voice but are you listening? Are you listening? Tell me this morning, are you listening?! [yes] Thank you! I just need to be sure you are! [laughter] Now sadly, that's how we treat our mates, isn't it? "Are you listening to me?!!" [laughter]

But you see listening is hearing with the heart. Listening is not simply understanding... it's not simply wanting others to understand you, it's wanting to understand them. And one of the great secrets of love is being a man... being a woman who cultivates the act of love. That's why the Bible says: *"Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, boast. It's not arrogant or rude."* How many times are we rude because we're broadcasting instead of listening? You see the Bible says love... true love is a love that is an active love.

I'm sure you've heard about the couple who were well up in years in life. They were in the twilight years and they were sitting on the porch at sunset. The old man reaches over and takes his wife's hand of many years and he says to her, "Sweetheart, I'm sure proud of you." She said, "What'd you say?" He said, "I'm sure proud of you." She said, "Speak up! I can't tell what you're saying!" He said, "Honey, I'm proud of you!" She said, "Yeah, and I'm tired of you too!" [much laughter] Well, we're not listening [tap]! And whether it's in a marriage [tap] or a friendship [tap], or (listen to this) in your relationship with God, one of the first steps of love is listening.

Another is to overlook. If you want to be a lov... loving person and have a love that continues and endures, you have to learn the power of overlooking. That means that you're unwilling to mark and to simply account every offense and to carry it with you through life. So many people in life become destroyed because they're consumed by the things that they focus on... an offense [tap], a thought [tap], a letdown [tap] that they will never let go of or get beyond.

It is not true that the people that we love the most are often the people who hurt us the deepest? Sure it is. Husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, children. We hurt one another. And yet the Bible says that one of the great things that we have to learn is the power of forgiveness. Many times people in our lives do not desire forgiveness based on the way that they've treated us. But the Bible doesn't measure forgiveness based on how you're treated. It... It means that we measure forgiveness based on how God has treated us. And the Bible says this [Ephesians 4:32]:

32) Be kind to one another; tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.

I never do a marriage ceremony that I don't ask the couple publicly as a part of their vows to communicate publicly "I will be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving, as God has forgiven me." Why? Because apart from forgiveness, human relationships have absolutely no hope. And when I talk about overlooking, I'm not saying that we deny issues, I'm not saying that we stick our hands... heads in the sand, I'm not saying that there are not issues of truth and trust that must be dealt with in every relationship, but I'm saying [tap] to you that so often love faints, love fades, love is fleeting because of an unforgiving spirit.

Next, the value. If you want to love, be a person who knows the importance of placing value on other people; acknowledging them, getting to know them, adding value to their life through what you know and share with them. Certainly it's true of Team Hoyt, that Dick Hoyt, the father was not willing to let a physical disability or a physical struggle become the bases for which he would hide and put his son away. He did just the opposite. Instead of saying this is what my son can't do, he put him on public display so that everyone would see and understand the value of Rick Hoyt... Rick Hoyt, and his heart because there's a father's love that said, "I value the life of my son."

When people around you need you to place value upon them, how many times are we discrediting people, are we taking from them rather than adding credit to their lives?

A number of years ago, Dr. W. A. Criswell, the pastor downtown at First Baptist Church here, was performing a wedding. And when that wedding was over and he was taking pictures with the bride and the groom, a groom did what sometimes they do to a minister. It's one of the most embarrassing things that ever happens, but he looked at Dr. Criswell and said, "Hey, preacher, what do I owe you for this ceremony today?" Well, Dr. Criswell, being the wise and gracious man that he was, looked at that young man and was grateful that he wanted to give him an honorarium but you know what he said? He said, "What's she worth to you?" [ha] [laughter] If I have any ministers here, that might be a great way to get a really good honorarium, especially if she's standing there! I just thought I'd let you in on that. (No, I'm just teasing.) [laughter] "What's she worth?" Because you see, that's what it's all about in relationships; it's the relationship of value, the relationship of worth.

Listen, overlook, value, encourage. You want to be a person that adds love to the lives of others? Be an encourager. I don't know of a person in the world who doesn't need encouragement. Everywhere I go I see people who are struggling with life and who need the reinforcement of someone's love. That's what I love about verses 4 and following. It's a reinforcing kind of a love:

4) And therefore (it says) love bears [tap] all things, believes [tap] all things, hopes [tap] all things, endures all things.

But it even points out that love does not rejoice in iniquity [tap]; it rejoices in truth. When I say be encouraging, I'm not just saying encourage everything. There's an encouragement that's right and an encouragement that's wrong. And somebody... sometimes people need the encouragement away from wrongdoing in their lives. Destructive patterns, destructive behaviors. But we all need encouragement.

I heard about a father and a son who were sitting around on a day, and the little boy looked up and said, "Dad, let's play darts." And the father said, "Sure, son, let's do it." They went in the room where they had a dart board and the little boy grabbed the darts and he started throwing them. And about 20-25 minutes later the father said, "Son, I thought you said you wanted me to play darts with you." He said, "Dad, I do." He said, "Well, I've been sitting here for 20 minutes and you're the only one throwing the darts." He said, "What am I supposed to do?" He said, "Dad, you're just supposed to sit there and say, 'Wonderful, wonderful, great job!'"

I mean that's what we need in life, isn't it? Somebody who will encourage us, somebody who will spur us on because the Father's [tap] love [tap] transforms [tap] everyone [tap] who receives it and everyone [tap] who shares it! Transforming love is not a feeling, transforming love is not fleeting, transforming love brings freedom. This is such a powerful statement. Look down in verse 11. Paul says:

11) When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child, but when I became a man I gave up childish ways. 12) For now we see in mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

Paul is talking about the limits of life. He's talking about the distorted images of life. He's saying there are a lot of things in life that I don't understand; there are a lot of things in life that I can't explain, but I can tell you this: Knowing the love of the Father has transformed even the hardest circumstances of life. And when I don't understand, and when I hurt and when I suffer and when I struggle, I've learned that there's freedom in love because the Bible says [1 John 4:18]: "Perfect love casts out fear."

You see, there's fear in my life in this world. We all live with fear. But the only thing that can take away the power of fear is the freedom that comes in love. And when I begin to realize that God loves me perfectly, even though my life may not be easy and my circumstances may not be enjoyable, it is that knowledge of the love of God and the hope that I have in Him that gives me freedom to live life without fear.

Today atheism is experiencing a big revival. And one of the primary things that the new atheist prophets are proclaiming is that all faith is delusion because it's based on a premise of love. But you pick up the writings of Christopher Hitchens (God is Not Great) or Richard Dawkins (The God

Delusion)... These men basically say many things that they use to dispute the reality of God but one is that how could there be a God who's loving, who has suffering in this world?

And while my purpose this morning is not to pause and to give you a full apologetic on the reconciliation of human suffering and the character of God's love, let me take a moment and just say this: If there is no love, if there is no God then you need to know that life is just fatal and fatalism, and you're just waiting for your moment when life turns tragic. There's no reason for life! There's no reason to love! And though these have become the prophets who say the problem with religion is that it says there's a God of love, while we live in a world of struggle and of suffering, if there is no love, then life is just fatal.

In fact the very fact that they say that you can't justify the love of God and the suffering of man... whoever gave them the idea that there was a right and a wrong of suffering to begin with? It all comes from the moral premise of right and wrong, of God's love and of evil and hate; and it is the love of God that helps me and sustains me even in the worse moments of life.

"Because now I know in part, but one day I will know even as I am known."
"Now I see through a mirror darkly" but it is the love of God and the confidence of that love that sustains me and that keeps me, and Scripture gives constant affirmation to the reality of the character of God being love, and the testimony of millions of witnesses is simply this: That the love of God, the Father's love transforms all who receive and all who share it.

You have heartache at a hard time? Are you listening to this message today, saying, "How could God love me? Look at my life! Look at what's happened! Look what people have done!" I submit to you the greatest hope that you have is that God loves you, and that it is that [tap] hope... it is that [tap] confidence that can give you freedom even when you feel like you're living out your worse fears.

There's one final thing and that is that transforming love is the key to a fulfilling life... transforming love is the key to a fulfilling life! First Corinthians 13:13 says:

13) *So now faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

Paul begins this statement by saying life minus love is nothing but he ends this statement by saying life with love is fulfilling, it's thrilling, it's valuable! And the one thing that adds value to my life and to your life is the reality and the power of His love!

I can assure you that if Dick Hoyt could stand here today he would tell you that while he would have never chosen a pathway in life for his son Rick that would have been one where he was inhibited and limited, Dick would

tell you that he and his wife have learned more about love through Rick than any other person. And that there is a fulfillment in what they've learned to give in this relationship than they could have ever gotten out of the relationship.

Our problem is most of us look for fulfillment through the things that we can get. We're constantly wanting others to gimme, gimme, gimme, gimme, gimme some love. We're constantly wanting others to be the source of health and strength and fulfillment. Fulfillment is not found in what you get; fulfillment is found in what you give! And that's why when you learn what real transforming love is and is like, it changes your life. There is a cost in love. There is a commitment in love. There are conflicts of love. And there is great sacrifice and even grief associated with love. But I want you to know that for all of those things that are hard, life is only fulfilled when it has been touched by transforming love.

A number of years ago on a beautiful day much like today, down in Florida, there was a father who was out working in the yard and doing some things around the house when suddenly he heard the backdoor of the house open and his young son came running out the backdoor. As he was running he was running down the lawn toward a dock that they had there. They lived on a beautiful little lake and the little boy was throwing off his shirt and kicking off his shoes, and he was headed for a moment... a nice, cool moment for a dive and for a dip in the pool.

As that boy made his way there to that little lake that was there, the father suddenly noticed just as his son hit the water and started swimming away from the dock, that there was a large alligator in the middle of the lake that started moving toward his son. With a panic stricken voice and terror in his eyes he started to scream his son's name, calling him to come back to the shore. And surely enough the little boy made a u-turn and as hard as he could and as fast as he could he started swimming back but the gator was gaining on him. And just as the boy got to the dock the gator got the legs of that boy.

But at the same time the father grabbed the boy's hands and his arms and there was a huge tug o' war taking place between that gator and that father. And while the gator had power, the father had passion! And he fought and he held for a moment. Another neighbor had seen all of this unfolding he picked up a gun that he had there nearby and he ran down; he shot the gator. They were able to get the boy away and retrieved him. And after a long period of recovery and rehabilitation the boy was restored.

A newspaper reporter came to the home to do a story on this little boy. And as they talked the reporter asked him if he could see the scars. So the little boy pulled up his pant leg and there were all the scars that had been left by the mangling of this alligator. But then the little boy said, "But hey," he said, "I got some other scars" and he lifted up his sleeves and he said, "These are from my dad." He said, "My dad grabbed me and my dad held onto me, and my dad just wouldn't let me go."

Now guess what I'm trying to say to you this morning? There's a God who loves you so much that He will not let you go. There was a hymn writer who put it in these words: "Oh love that will not let me go. I rest my weary soul in Thee. I give Thee back the life I owe, that in Thine ocean's depths it's flow may richer, fuller be."

God loved you so much that He sent His Son to be scarred with the reality of the death and the payment of your sin and mine when He was nailed to a cross. But He was taken from that cross. He tasted death, He rose again, He offers us the gift of eternal life, an expression of the love of the Father! And if it is true that the love of the Father transforms everyone who receives it and everyone who shares it, then all I can do this morning is say to you, have you received it and are you sharing it?

I want to ask that heads be bowed and eyes closed.

Our Father in this moment we come to You, thanking You for a living witness of Your word, of Your love, of Your care. And Father, I thank You that in love that You have taken action for us to provide a way of salvation to offer a life that would be changed and transformed. And I pray right now, Lord, in this place in this moment that you would let Your love so touch and change our lives that we would never be the same [music begins] again. And Father, we simply give You this moment, a moment to review where we are, a moment to respond to what we've heard, and I pray, Father, that today people will not simply have heard my voice, but they would listen to the voice of Your Spirit calling them, affirming to them Your love, Your care, Your grace. In Jesus' name. AMEN

As you look up I invite you to stand up. And as you stand with me I want to ask that no one be leaving. This is a most important moment in this service today for it's a moment of response. What we're going to do is we're going to begin to sing a song of invitation. And it's just that... it's inviting... inviting you wherever you are to respond to the love of God today.

Some of you today need to enter into a relationship with God by receiving His Son Jesus Christ. You know you can receive love or you can reject love. There are many people in this building today who could tell you of the bitterness of rejected love... husbands and wives and children. But I want you to know God has extended His love to you and today I don't want you to reject that love; I want you to receive that love. I want you to respond to that love.

And so the way that we're going to do that is we're going to sing. Ministers of our church are going to stand here at the front, all across the auditorium. They're already standing there in the balcony, and they're right there on that ah... on that landing, right above those of you in the lower balcony, right below those of you in the uppermost part. And they're simply there to receive you and to help you to take the next step in your relationship with Christ.

If you want to know and receive His love, to become a child of God, you can do that by saying, "I want to know God's love in my life." If you want to take the next step in your life, having received Christ, but now needing to go public and to do what others did today, follow Him in baptism ...

Do you know why we baptize? Jesus said [John 14:15], "If you love Me, keep My commandments." And baptism is motivated by love, nothing more, nothing less. I love Christ. I want people to know I belong to Him. It's just like the wedding ring I have on my hand. It communicates to the world that I belong to and that my heart is devoted to another. And so that's what baptism is. And some of you need to be baptized.

Others of you need to get connected and committed to a family... a church family. You don't need to sit on the periphery and just love God's people at a distance. You need to get involved and share your love and your service and your sacrifice in the church. And today I want to invite you to become a part of Prestonwood.

So let's respond to His love. Let's not let pride or arrogance get in the way. In fact, the Bible says, "Love isn't arrogant, love isn't proud, it's not boastful. It humbles itself."

And right now I want you to come, not to embarrass you, not to point you out, but to receive you and to help you to take the next step in your life with Christ; never to be the same, transformed by His love. Come, as we sing.