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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Loving Deeply From the Heart

1 Peter 1:20-24

Prayer: *Father, we just want to thank you for your grace. I just thank you for your goodness. I thank you for these little ones that we can enjoy just seeing just being blessed by your word. Lord, this morning we pray that we would be blessed by your word as well, that you would again give us the ability to open it up, accompanied by your Holy Spirit so that it would have lasting value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we've been looking so far at 1 Peter, the first chapter which says in verse 14 to 16, it says: *As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy because I am holy."* And so far we've seen that as obedient children we are chosen by the Father, sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to the Son. Let me just pick up on verse 17 of 1 Peter. It says this: *Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. For you know that it was*

not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

We've been looking at that reverential fear from many different angles. There was the fear that we've just seen spoken of here of God's impartial judgment, there's the fear of God's grandeur, the mountains, the oceans, the sheer enormity of what God has created and who God is, the fear of disobedience, the fear of forgetting particularly what it is God has done for us. And so we spent the last two messages discussing that reverential fear and now in verse 22 God begins to give us a practical application of what it is we have learned. And we quickly find out that he sets the bar of obedience to a far higher notch than we are accustomed to. This is *1 Peter 1:22-23*. It says this: *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.* There's one particular phrase that jumps out at least at me from this paragraph, and it is the command to "love one another deeply, from the heart." Ed Clowney commenting on the phrase "deeply from the heart" said it's the very same phrase that describes Jesus in the

garden of Gethsemane. To paraphrase *Luke 22:44*, it says: *And being in anguish, Jesus prayed more deeply from the heart. And his sweat was like drops of blood.* See, "deeply from the heart" is a phrase that means love stretched and strained to the breaking point. It's the kind of love that God now expects from us. And so we ask the question this morning: How do we love deeply from the heart? We want to look first at the "who" and then the "why" and finally at the "how" of that kind of love.

So first the "who." Who are we called on to love deeply from the heart? Is it our husbands, our wives, our kids, our friends, those whom we know? Actually it's probably none of the above. See, loving our loved ones is not really what God has in mind here. There's really no need of a stretched and strained love for those who are willing to love us back. And God tells us who we are to love in *Luke 6*, and it is those who won't, don't or can't love us back. This is what Jesus says. He says: *"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great,*

and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." Well, there goes Jesus eliminating about 90 percent of all the love that you and I are familiar with. He says: *"Love your enemies, do good to them. Be kind to the ungrateful and wicked."* Well, that requires an incredibly strained, stretched out love. In this case in our text this morning, God is challenging us to apply this love to our brothers, that is to the church. Again, our text this morning is: *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have a sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.* Peter's speaking to the church.

You know you mention the word "church" today and very few people understand what it really means. Most people picture a building. And that's not what the church is, it's not what the church was. The church is not a building, it is a group of people, it is a group of "called out ones." That's what the Greek word "ecclesia" means. It's where we get the word "ecclesiastical," it's where "church" comes from. Well, the early church was an ecclesia that had koinonia and that's another familiar word, it's a Greek word that many of us are familiar with now and that word means "fellowship." And in essence what it means, it's a shared connection with Christ. And Acts 2 describes it very well, it

says: *All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.* Understand, this is not just a gathering of like-minded people. This is a unique God-powered, God-ordained and God-loved enterprise known as "the church," also known as "the bride of Christ." And we know that Jesus's love for his bride, for the church was so great that he died for her. *Ephesians 5:25* says: *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.* Now common sense and your own eyes are going to tell you that if anything, the church that is precious to Christ is not that way. But it also should tell you that anything that is precious to Christ is going to be something specifically targeted by the enemy for destruction, which is why we find the church so often without splendor and full of spots and wrinkles and blemishes and anything but holy. I mean Peter knew that the church back then had a host of problems in addition to the persecution. We know from scripture that the church had problems with drunkenness, it

had problems with racism, it had problems with class envy, they had sexual issues, pride issues, freedom issues. And I ask, does it sound familiar? Am I suggesting that the church might be riddled with scandal and hypocrisy? Yeah, it is. And it's very easy to get discouraged when you're looking at the church itself, but we have to understand that of any institution that the enemy might target, the church is target number one. All the enemy's resources, all of the enemy's fire power is directed at the church. So it should really come as no surprise that the church is in fact a battleground. And in some ways we are worse off than we were back then. You see, there was in the early church a social, spiritual and physical network, a koinonia, if you will, that is clearly missing today. Today, thanks to TV, thanks to cell phones, thanks to the Internet, we live in communities that are not just isolated by family but by the electronics within the family. And so for us, koinonia or fellowship is optional. I mean we're not part of the physical, social or spiritual network that we have to be in order to survive. We no longer live in an agrarian culture, so we are no longer tied to this idea of springtime or harvest and this need for cooperative labor. This world can be turned off or on with the click of a remote.

So why should I put up with the frustration and annoyance of people if I don't have to? Well, the answer to that one is very simple.

As a Christian you have to. Love one another deeply from the heart is not a suggestion, it's not a request, it is a command that flows naturally from the grace that we already received. Listen to how God puts it. God says: *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth, apply that truth to what I've called you to and that is loving deeply from the heart.* And the "who" we are to love is really the issue here. God makes it very, very clear, anybody can love loveable people. Even sinners love those who love them. God wants to see how we love the guy who cheated me, the woman who spread lies about me, the person who used me or annoyed me or frustrated me. The early church used to be this place where that kind of stuff played itself out, and it was not pretty. I mean, there were fights over food, there were fights between the rich and the poor, there were Jew versus Gentile, legalist versus liberals, there were all kinds of conflicts. The church in Peter's day was also under tremendous external pressure and persecution. So outside you have the hostile pagans; inside you have the hostile Christians. That pressure forced folks to seek God's answer to how to get along. Now the only pressure that we have today is pressure that comes from God himself. And that pressure is in the word of God. In fact, it's all over the word of God. Let me just give you a few examples. This is *John 13:34*: *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if*

you love one another." Romans 13:8: *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.* Galatians 5:13: *You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.* And Ephesians 4: *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.* And you know there are dozens and dozens more. I mean, if you read scripture at all, you're not going to escape this. And I suspect that one of the most difficult questions God will ever ask us is this, it's: How well did you love those you don't like? My guess is he won't even bother to ask us about loving loveable people. I mean, again, "If you love those who love you, what is that to you?" That just cuts the legs off most of the love we know.

So why is this kind of love so important? I mean, why -- why force a love on us that we don't want? I mean, why not just learn to live and let live, separate but equal? Well, Revelation 12:7 tells us actually the "why" of loving deeply. What it does is it tells us a story about way back when, when there was a war in heaven, that there was a rebellion that was headed up by the lord of light who was known as Lucifer and as powerful as Lucifer was, we know from reading scripture that he was no match for God, that he was thrown out of heaven and he landed on earth. We know he was no

match for God because we know that from nothing God produced Lucifer which makes God infinitely more powerful than any of his creatures, and it leads to the inevitable question that I know I've asked, I assume many of you have asked it as well, why didn't God simply destroy the devil when he rebelled and be done with it? I mean, why this need for all of this redemptive history, and even more particular, why the need of a cross? I mean, part of the reason was that God was unwilling to fight power with power, even though he would be the obvious winner. Instead God chose to pit the power of power itself verses the power of love because love is the ultimate power in the universe.

You know, when Paul introduces his famous treatise on love in *1 Corinthians 13*, we all recognize it, everybody's heard it, he says, oh, that's the wedding passage, yeah, we hear that at weddings. It says this: *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.* Now what I find of great interest in this passage is not just the words that Paul is saying but the way he introduces this whole concept of love. You see, he says by way of introduction in the very last verse of the chapter before this chapter, in the 12th chapter of *1 Corinthians*, he says: *Now eagerly desire the greater*

gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way. What God is telling us is that love is the most excellent way and he demonstrates that way in his response to the devil. You see, God's response to the devil is the point of departure between two very separate kingdoms, that is God's kingdom, the kingdom of light and the enemy's kingdom, the kingdom of darkness. See, the devil is all about the power of power itself. Jesus said in John 8 that lies and murder are his primary weapon and everywhere you see where power is the main goal, you see lies and you see murder. He said this, Jesus said this to the Pharisees about their father, the devil, he said: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." Jesus also referred to the devil as the prince of this world. And indeed he is. This is a world that runs on lies, deceit and power. On the other hand, God's kingdom is the kingdom of love, and speaking the truth in love is God's primary weapon. You see, when you look, you see, we really can divide this world into two primal forces, each with the king and each with a kingdom playing themselves out in a proxy war that we are right in the middle of. And Christ, our king, became one of his proxies. Then he lived out his life perfectly with us proxies and then he died on the cross so that we could be with him forever. Jesus's

death and resurrection literally proved the power of love over the power of power. And we Christians are expected to be little Christs when it comes to exercising that particular power. When it comes to loving people, we don't want to love. And that's why *Colossians 3:13* says: *Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*

So what God is saying is the church is really the venue in which that love is to be demonstrated. Glorifying God means displaying his character and his attributes to the seen and the unseen world. And if loving those who won't or don't or can't love you back is God's greatest attribute, well don't you think he expects us to show it? Don't you think -- don't you think he expects us to demonstrate that? In fact God says, really, if you don't get this part, if you don't get what this is all about, then nothing else really matters. This is what he says in *1 Corinthians 13:1*, he says: *If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do*

not have love, I am nothing. If I give all that I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but I do not have love, I gain nothing. You have to understand that when God is talking about love here, he's not talking about having warm fuzzies towards nice people. He is talking about his people as the possessors of what is the greatest power in the universe and that is the ability to love others as Christ loves us. And again, as Christ says: "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?"

So the "who" is people who won't, don't and can't love us back, and our primary practice field is the church. It's right here. And the "why" is because as God makes it clear, love is the most excellent way. So how about the "how"? How about the "how" of loving deeply from the heart, of stretching and straining to love people that we don't want to love. Well, God tells us first where to go to find the "how," and it's right in our text this morning. Let me repeat it. It says: *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures*

forever." And this is the word that was preached to you. You know what God is saying? God says you really want to get, you want to get the "how" of loving these difficult people? You're going to have to go to the living and enduring word of God. God says: All scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. And we see teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, and that's not at all what we think of when we normally think about learning how to love. We'd much rather stick with the wedding passage which is just really a definition of love.

See, much of what God has to say about learning to love deeply is not only difficult, it's highly counterintuitive as well. God also says this in *1 Corinthians 2*, he says: *The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments.* See, God tells us that the scripture is supernatural instruction ungraspable without the Holy Spirit. And the world which is really the other kingdom which is the kingdom that we happen to live in right now, that world does not and cannot get the things of the Spirit, and scripture tells us

why. It says in *2 Corinthians 4:4*: *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* So what it's saying is if you belong to the world, if you are part of this world's kingdom, then the words of scripture are going to be much more like Sanskrit than English. I mean, they just won't make sense. God is telling us that his instruction will be unlike any other instruction that we get, that it will jar our understanding, that it will offend our sense of self and challenge our way of thinking. God's also telling us that -- and he's telling us this in advance, he's telling us that much of his teaching is going to appear to the world outside as utter foolishness. See, the prince of this world is not stupid and it is his task to blind and confuse us because he wants us anywhere but in our bibles, 'cause there you're going to find eternal instruction that may at first seem to be counterintuitive but that stands the devil's directives on their head. See, we not only have two kingdoms, we have two completely different ways of understanding how those kingdoms enable us to interact with each other and with this world. Understand, the prince of this world has his doctrines and his instructions, and even though they are murderous lies, they are oftentimes presented as far more rational than the kingdom of God. We've all heard lots and lots of his scriptures, his platitudes. Oftentimes they sound just like

scripture, and that is by design. I mean we all know "God helps those who help themselves," right? I mean you wouldn't believe the amount of people who think that comes right out of the pages of scripture but it's nowhere to be found in the Bible. In fact God can only help those who understand and recognize their helplessness. Here's another one. Have you ever heard anybody say, "Oh, judge not lest you be judged." Have you ever heard that? Well that one comes right out of the Bible. See, the devil is very adept at using the Bible to his own ends. I mean how often have you heard that phrase coming from people who really know nothing about the scripture as condemning every single critical assessment of anything but in particular some type of behavior that scripture forbids. *"Judge not lest ye be judged."* Think about it. Really? Really? I mean absolutely nothing is to be judged by anyone? I mean consider the very paragraph that that statement came in. It was in Jesus's own words in *Matthew 7*, he says: *"Judge not, that you will be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you."* And then only four verses later, Jesus says: *"Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you."* You see, what's actually taking place here is that Jesus is forbidding us from taking the place of God and pronouncing final judgment on any other human being. That's something that's reserved only for God,

but that doesn't mean that God has forbidden any judgment whatsoever. I mean think about it, only four verses after Jesus says, "Judge not," he says, "*Don't give dogs what is holy, and don't throw your pearls before pigs.*" You can't possibly do that unless you have some sense of judgment about what is a dog and what is a pig. So Jesus couldn't possibly mean what we take him to mean when he says: "*Judge not lest ye be judged,*" and he actually expects us to exercise discernment, discrimination and, yes, judgment. See, two different sets of rules, two different kingdoms.

How many times have you heard the golden rule stated as "he who has the gold rules." That's the way they say it. And again, that's exactly how the enemy works. And God says the exact opposite: "*For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?*" What you have to understand is that there are two distinct kingdoms with two distinct leaders and two distinct paradigms. In essence there are two distinct ways to view life itself: One is from the prince of peace, and it's full of life and it's full of truth, and the other is from the prince of this world and it's full of lies and it's full of murder. And when it comes to loving one another deeply from the heart, we have only to look at God's instructions to see how radically they differ from the enemy's. See, God's ways to stretch out our loves is to follow

these simple steps that he lays out for us in Luke 6. Let me just read them to you. He says: *"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them."*

Now I said these were simple. I didn't say they were easy. Fact is you know these are not just hard, these are impossible. God says we do not love as we ought, and we get a glimpse of what that ought is, and we throw up our hands. We think, God, you can't be serious! I mean when we do that, we are really acknowledging what kingdom we really are drawn to, whose kingdom we actually think makes more sense. I'd be the first one to tell you that God's kingdom is counterintuitive. I'd be the first one to tell you that it jars us. I mean, love those who hate me, who curse me, who mistreat me, who beat me, who steal from me? Well, God, you must be using hyperbole because you can't possibly be serious. Well, God is absolutely serious. This is what loving deeply from the heart is all about. And so we ask, all right, okay, even if I buy

that, how in the world am I supposed to do that? And here's where we get confused and here's where the enemy sows that confusion. We don't do the loving. See, it is God who does the loving. Listen to what *Romans 5:5* says: *God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* That's for us as believers. We have the Spirit of God within us, we have God's love poured into our hearts. You see, it's not the hose that provides water to my dying plants. It's not the hose, it's the well. The hose just conveys the water from well to plant. So it is with the love of God. It is poured into our hearts with the understanding that we are the means of conveying it. I mean, I cannot manufacture love for my enemies just like a host can't manufacture water for plants. I can't manufacture it but it can convey it. Let me give you an example. This is one of the best examples I know of. Most of you know who Corrie ten Boom is. She was a woman who was imprisoned in one of the Nazi death camps for sheltering folks, and she survived miraculously, her sister died. And after the war, she was given to lecturing and speaking to people about how the Holy Spirit had worked in her life. She described an incident that illustrates how this love works, this idea of us just conveying God's love. Let me explain to you how -- let me just set it up for you. She was instructed by God to shake the hand of a person she knew as one of the prison guards that had tormented her. She was speaking, she saw the man come into the

room, she said, "I know who that guy is. He was one of my tormentors." And so God spoke to her about loving that person, and she rebelled. She just said in her mind she simply could not extend love to someone who had been so monstrously hateful towards her. But all God asked of her was to be obedient enough to extend her hand in a handshake. And as an obedient child, she did just that. Let me explain. These her words describing the incident.

She said: "Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: 'A fine message, Fraulein! How good it is no know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!' And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course -- how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women? But I remembered him, and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face-to-face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze. 'You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk,' he was saying, 'I was a guard there.' No, he did not remember me. 'But since that time,' he went on, 'I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well, Fraulein,' (again the hand came out --) 'will you in forgive me?' And I stood there -- I whose sins had again and again to be forgiven -- and could not forgive. Betsie had died in that place -- could he erase her slow terrible

death simply for the asking? It could not have been many seconds that he stood there -- hand held out -- but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I ever had to do. For I had to do it -- I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: That we forgive those who have injured us. 'If you do not forgive men their trespasses,' Jesus says, 'neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.' I knew it was not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that. And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion -- I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. 'Help!' I prayed silently. 'I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.' And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. 'I forgive you, brother!' I cried. 'With all my heart.' For a long moment we

grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely, as I did then."

That's the most excellent way. That's what God is speaking about. This is what loving deeply from the heart is all about. And what God is saying is he is the well, we are the hoses. I think one of the main reasons why we don't have a sense of the love of God is because he gives us this love in its incipient form, that is he gives us the acorn and not the full grown oak tree. And we are given the gifts of love with the expectation that by instruction from God's word we are going to participate in growing it. I mean Corrie just invited us into that process. We just got to see how God was growing that in her. And it is our task to flesh out the love that God has placed within us by his Holy Spirit.

You know, it's amazing to watch how a male deer can grow a magnificent set of horns in just one season. You know, the horns bud out, then they grow and they're covered with membrane known as velvet and the deer rubs it off against trees and rocks and all kinds of other stuff. Now you can go and you can find a bear and you can instruct the bear to go rub his head against the trees and the rocks just like the deer do, in the exact same way, and expect to find horns on a bear, no, it's not going to happen. And the

reason why it's not going to happen is because God didn't put them there in the first place. See, God's gift of supernatural love has already been placed within us: *"Because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."*

Michael Jordan is an excellent example of growing that gift in a more human setting. Let me just give him as an example. Michael Jordan is considered by most to be the best basketball player who ever played the game. He had a phenomenal gift and he had an extraordinary work ethic and he became the world's best basketball player by working out what God had placed within him. But he did something extraordinary at the end of his career. If you remember, he tried to switch to baseball. Now he still had the very same drive, he had the very same work ethic but the best he could manage was a mediocre baseball player. What was missing was the giftedness. You see, you cannot grow an oak if you don't have an acorn. And God says that all Christians when it comes to love have been given the acorn. God says he has poured out his love into our hearts, so all of us already have the gift. Our task is to develop the worth ethic to grow it. Okay. So where do we do that? Well, where did Peter practice that? Where was the one place where different races, different sexes, different classes, different social strata all have no choice but to intermix? Where was the place that was guaranteed to stretch one's capacity to love deeply

from the heart? Well, it was the church. That was the basketball court, that was the practice field. The church for many today is a place that we go to once a week to hear five songs and a talk about God, then we can go home and think, well, I'm done for another week. I mean that's like Michael Jordan watching a Bulls game once a week and thinking that's making him into a basketball star. It's just not going to happen. You see, Christians by definition should be the loveliest people on the face of the earth. You and I both know we are not. So how do you learn to love your enemies? How do you learn to do good to those who hate you, to pray for those who mistreat you if not within the community of believers that God has given to us? Where do you go to learn how to love deeply from the heart if not the church, also the family. I mean the church and the family are virtually the only social settings where God's way of doing business is set out and reinforced, and it is a supernatural business. I can't tell you how many times just in a given week we as a church call on each other to stop and pray for somebody who's in some type of circumstance or situation or even a crisis. You know, the Elks and Kiwanis and the rotary are all fine organizations but they can't do that. Only the body of Christ can do that. Only the body of Christ does the supernatural. The church and the family is often the place where the truth of scripture gets tried, gets tested and proven. You know, drugs, racism, class envy, sexual issues, gossip, slander, all of this

stuff was what Peter was looking at every single day. And the church and the family was the only place where that culture got challenged, where a new and different culture was practiced.

Michael Jordan didn't become great by simply wanting to. He became great by practicing the game until it became second nature to him. We do the very same thing in the kingdom when we practice the game of loving those we have a hard time liking, because God's love is like the acorn that he plants within us and we decide what kind of oak it's going to become. And we decide it by how we respond to the small stuff, how we sweat the small stuff, how we sweat the interaction that takes place on a day-by-day basis with our community. Iron sharpens iron. People rub up against each other, conflicts develop. How do you work through those things? How do you sweat the small stuff? Do we love our enemies? Do we do good to those who hate us? Do we bless those who curse us, pray for those who mistreat us? And how about personal retaliation? If someone slaps us on one cheek, are we willing to give him the other? If he takes your cloak, are you willing to give him your tunic? Jesus is telling us that that is what loving deeply from the heart is all about. Jesus says that is the only love that counts. And you know why I know that? Because this is what Jesus said. I'll say it again. He says: *"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit*

is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full."

Well, that's the bad news. Most of our love is that kind of love. But you know the world says if you pursue Jesus's kind of love, you know what's going to happen? You're going to get crushed, you're going to getting suckered and you're going to be scorned. So it's a choice that you have to make. Now I can testify, I mean, I know who is full of grace and truth and who is full of lies and murder. I know because I have seen God's ways work miracles in people's lives for the last 44 years. And you know, I can ask the question: Is God's way counterintuitive? Does it oftentimes go against everything that the world tells me? Sure. Yeah, it does. But Jesus also said the last will be first, the humbled will be exalted, to lead you must serve, to live you must die, and all of those truths, they work exactly the opposite of the way we feel. The world's going to tell you loving deeply from the heart is just really a minor issue. It's just kind of a sidebar to our faith which is primarily expressed today politically, economically and socially by our vote and by our dollars and by our culture. And we are convinced that it is that vote, that dollar and that culture that really matters, and our faith becomes much more about politics and culture than about loving deeply from the heart, and that is

once again the enemy's lie, because loving deeply from the heart is not a sidebar, it is the heart, it is the epicenter of Christianity. We can see the enemy's lies when we are shocked to find that the "who" of loving deeply are those who can't, who don't or won't love us back. And that the "why" of loving deeply goes back to a war in heaven and that God's determination is to make love the power that is the most excellent way. And that God's love has been poured into us to make it our weapon of choice, and it is our task to grow that love, and the church and the family is the place where we do it. And finally, that the "how" of loving deeply is an unfolding process. It is literally God growing this acorn into an oak in each of us, and you can't do that without God's word and the church. Next time out, we're going to look at some practical ways to grow acorns into oaks, because God's got high expectations for his own. And he tells us: *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have a sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.*

Let's pray.

Father, I just again, I thank you, I thank you for your word, I thank you for the gift of that word, and just the idea of how counterintuitive it is and how far it goes against every single thing that the world is telling us. Lord, we have only to look at the results, we have only to look at what happens when the word

blossoms, when the word is treated the way it's deserved to be treated, when it's taken in, when it becomes part of people's lives, we see the difference. Father, I pray that each and every one of us would be enabled to understand that it is not us who does the loving, it is you. It is we who do the conveying of that love that you have poured into our hearts. Give us the ability even this week to come when we find those little things, when we are finding the small stuff of having to deal with people and conflicts, just take a moment to just stop and ask God, what were you trying to tell me here, what are you trying to instruct me about? Give us the opportunity, Lord, to make this not the sidebar but the center point of our love for you, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.