

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW | LOVE

BART SHAW | JUNE 5, 2022

Alright. How are we doing? You guys doing good? There's a lot of energy in this room today. Man, it is so good to be with you. Welcome. Much love to everyone here at Northwest, watching online, then at all of our campuses, including my dear friends at the North campus. I'm so excited to be here with you all today.

Yeah, some North campus people here today too. Love you guys.

Well, if you are new here we are fresh off of the heels of a great series that we just wrapped up titled *Significant Other*. We were looking at God's design for human relationships. The work we did there is going to set us up really well for where we are going today.

Like Aaron said, we're kicking off a brand-new series this summer that we're calling *What the World Needs Now*. We're going to look specifically at the fruit of the Spirit that we find in Galatians 5. These are the qualities, the attributes, the byproducts of walking in a close relationship with God.

You're going to have the opportunity to hear from several others on our teaching team this summer and a couple of special guests. These next eight weeks could be what you call topicgenical. And that's not a real word. It's also not a foot cream. It just means it's a way for us to teach exegetically through some foundational Scriptures in a very topical way. I think you're going to love it. It's going to be great.

So what I want to do today, I just want to start off by asking you all a question. If I were to ask you what does the world need now, what would you say? What does your world need now? I'm going to leave it rhetorical, but I want you to let that sink in and think about that for just a moment. What does the world need now?

I took the liberty of asking a few of my friends, just wanted to get a sampling. And I think their answers are probably pretty indicative of what a lot of us feel. So I want to share those with you.

To get along. Yeah, we'll use that. We need that in spades.

To start over. Ouch. That one's pretty rough. I might need to defriend that one.

Lower gas prices. Can I get amen? A lot of amens.

Jesus. Okay. Someone gave us the Sunday School answer. It does work.

This one might be my favorite one:

Taco Tuesday every day. Come on. Come on. I need to get that sanctioned because I'm all about that one.

We're going to be making the argument that the world needs the fruit that the Spirit provides. And if you're at all familiar with the fruit of the Spirit, you know the one that encompasses all of the rest, the big one, is love. That's what we are going to look at today.

So thanks for the softball, Aaron. I don't know if I should be grateful or upset. It's kind of like meeting the President, the topic of the economy is talked about. You can literally talk about anything you want. I can spin it to say almost anything.

It's kind of like this. Consider this. If I asked you guys to write me a song and the topic I gave you was love, what would you say? I would have hundreds and hundreds of different examples that were brought to me.

All of that to say, I just want you guys to know I'm going to be up here for a while. Some of you thought it was bold of us to go through Romans in 11 weeks. Well, we are about to cover the most predominant theme of Scripture, the most significant of all human attributes and qualities in the next 30 minutes. Are you ready? Let's go. We are ready.

Thankfully, Aaron and the team have unpacked love for us so beautifully over these last five weeks and they focused considerably on *Eros*, which is that romantic, sexual love.

So for that I do thank you, Aaron, that I don't have to address that. My kids thank you.

Many of you do. If we had to hear dry humping one more time, I don't know what would happen. I guess you just did. Sorry. Sorry about that.

Kyle did a great job last week breaking down brotherly love, *Phileo*. That series set us up really well, but it also makes it really difficult because I really wrestled with, "What can I say about love that you haven't already heard? What hasn't already been said?"

Yet, here we are. We live in this world that has a lot to say about love. But it seems to be only certain types of love, expressed in very certain ways. It tries to claim love as a theme and as a banner, but I wonder if it might be holding on to a different type of love than that which God shows us.

So much of the love that I see in the world comes with strings attached. It contains a certain ideology that applies only to select people in certain ways. Usually those we feel deserve to be loved, maybe who agree with us. This is wildly confusing.

So what does the world need now? It's not hard to see that our world is in desperate need of real love. If I asked you guys to come up with examples I'm sure we'd come up with many examples where love is significantly lacking, probably in recent days.

Some of you were probably targeted with the same Facebook ad that I saw about a month ago. It was from a large, national, well-known restaurant chain. To protect their identity, I will go ahead and change their name. I'll just call them Fanera Bread. Let's go with Fanera Bread.

So I got this Facebook ad from Fanera Bread that was advertising unlimited free drinks. For two months you could literally go there every single day, get multiple drinks, no questions asked, no purchase necessary. It was a trial to see if you wanted to get a subscription in a couple of months. I was very intrigued. This was literally two of my favorite things: drinks and free stuff.

And I did what you should not do. I looked at the comments. And, Lord, have mercy. I opened up the comments to see what people were saying and I wish I was cherry picking. I'm not cherry picking. These were right off the bat, almost in order of the list of what I saw.

Panera Bread offering us, so wonderfully, unlimited drinks, and these were the comments that were popping up.

Katherine: "The charged lemonades are great, but it would be really nice to have some kind of sugar-free lemonade option even if just Minute Maid from the fountain. Some of us can't do so much sugar."

Thank you, Katherine. Duly noted.

Next one. Shanna: "If only they had Coke products."

How dare you offer me free drinks that aren't Coke.

Jackie: "You got rid of the best iced tea, (plum ginger hibiscus). I'm guessing because it was very low in calories and too healthy for the general population is why it was removed, ughhh."

Kimberly: "If I'm paying \$18.37 for a sandwich and a drink, I should hope I get a free refill."

Kimberly, it's called reading. Left to right. Top to bottom. I'm just saying.

Sean: "Does broccoli cheese soup count as a drink?"

No, Sean, what are you thinking? Do you drink your soup? What's wrong with you?

Marc: "Scam. It's a way to steal your credit card information."

There it is. The motive. Expose Panera Bread.

Can you imagine being on the marketing team? "Hey, guys. I've got an idea. It's going to change the game. We're going to lose a little bit of money on the front end but it's going to pay off in the long run, because who wouldn't love free drinks?"

Apparently a lot of people would not love free drinks. All of the hatred that is coming as a result of them offering free drinks is crazy.

We've all experienced this type of behavior, probably on a much more personal level than something like that. We've seen the hate. Hate gets spewed so often in the name of love. And I think we can all agree.

I don't have to spend a lot of time making the case for why the world needs real love.

There is war in our world. There is injustice all around us. There is violence, it seems, at every turn. And it's very easy for us to point to those really big things, but I kind of wonder if we turn that pointing back here, could we possibly be part of the problem?

I asked you to think about what the world needs now. A recent poll was actually conducted. It surveyed 100,000 Americans and it asked a very similar question. And it was published in the *Harvard Review* less than two months ago.

It asked Americans... here's the crazy thing—80 percent of us agreed on the same thing. That's remarkable in and of itself, that 80 percent of Americans agree on anything.

They were asked: What do you need in your life to bring you more happiness, peace, and contentment? Not surprisingly, free drinks did not make that list. So Panera Bread can use that market research right there. They didn't answer with love. They didn't answer with puppies, which is a very acceptable answer in my opinion. No, the answer that four out of five of us gave when asked: What do we need? We said that we need more money.

Let's get this right. We live in the most affluent times the world has ever known and we think the thing that we need in our world right now is a little bit more money.

It can all seem so hopeless, can't it? So daunting.

Back in the 60s there was a popular song titled by the same title of this series. Some of you probably triggered this, right? "What the world needs now is love sweet love it's the only thing that there's much too little of."

Now it was the 60s so I'm not exactly sure what sweet love they were talking about, but we're going to assume innocence on this one. Here we are, half of a century later or more, and the world is still as desperately in need of love as it has ever been.

Perhaps we should stop asking each other what we need and begin to ask our Heavenly Father what we need. So, let's do that together now. I want you to grab your Bibles. Let's go to Galatians, chapter 5. That's where we're going to spend the bulk of our time here today—asking God what He has to say. Tap or turn there. We'll have some of it on the screen for you as well.

As you're turning there I want to give you a little bit of context. This letter was written by the Apostle Paul. An early church father, author of much of the New Testament.

He's writing to early churches that he had planted and influenced in modern day Turkey, in this region of Galatia. He's giving them advice on how they can learn how to look like and follow Jesus. He's addressing a lot of confusion in this letter. He's doing what any good pastor does, he's bringing clarity and a sound voice to all of the chatter around them.

And he makes this bombshell of a comment right here at the beginning part of the chapter. We're going to look at that together, verse 6 of chapter 5:

"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."

That's a bold statement. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. So what does that mean? What does God mean by that? It means it's a faith that works. It doesn't stop here, cognitively, something you say. It's something you do. It has action to it.

Paul is beginning to help them break from the old laws, the old rituals, what culture and society were screaming at them about what love is. Sound familiar? Checking boxes, jumping through hoops, and not real love. Simply saying is not enough.

And Paul is so fired up in the book and particularly in this chapter. We've had enough PG-13 messages here recently. I'm not even going to read verse 12 for you. At least not in the Greek. And I can assure you it's more than nanna-nanna-boo-boo-cuckoo kind of language. Some of you are looking at verse 12 right now, aren't you? Yeah. You have to look at in the Greek to get the full extent, but it's intense.

He's so passionate about followers of Jesus understanding and living out their faith.

And he's fighting against the world and those who are trying to derail them from their faith. And it all leads to an explanation that he gives us here in verses 13 and 14. Let's look at those:

"For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law," get that, the whole law, "can be summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

What a great argument for how we give the world what they need. There is purpose to our freedom. Do not use it to sin, but to love others. Oh, and by the way, this is how you love God, by loving His kids.

Parents you know this. If someone loves your kids well, they are loving you well. Case in point. This week my son had an end-of-year school drama. We had so many friends and family that came to attend to support us and to support him. That's says I love you to me more than you showing up to see me today or anything else like that.

Loving His kids is loving Him. What a great tip on how we love the world.

Paul is going to keep unpacking that for us. So let's go ahead and jump into verse 16. He tells us how we do this:

"So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives." Who? Say it with me. The Holy Spirit. Don't lose sight of that. We're coming back to that one. "Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves."

Let the Holy Spirit guide your life then you won't be doing what the sinful nature craves. There is a very real battle going on in every single one of our hearts. All of us who follow Jesus, it's so true. Waging war with the flesh, our own brokenness and sinfulness, and the Spirit.

Paul unpacks that here in the next couple of verses. And then we're going to jump right into the great explanation of it in verse 19. He tells us what it's going to look like:

"When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear:" Okay, deep breath. No seriously, take a deep breath. You're going to want it for this list. Ready? *"... sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties,"* and in case I missed one, *"and other sins like these."*

That is a really comprehensive list. And I'm sure many of us could raise our hands as guilty parties. He just described our world. Nothing has changed. The battle wages on. This is the fruit we see around us. And far too often, if we're honest, in us.

So that's the bad news. The good news is still coming. Verse 22, look at this. Here it is again:

"But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!"

Church, this is that definitive list of the fruit of the Spirit. This singlehandedly kept poster printing companies in business in the 80s and 90s. Church people, can I get an amen?

Some of you know the song that goes with the fruit of the Spirit, right? Paul makes it clear that there are two ways to live, by the flesh or by the Spirit—two. That's it. The

flesh is our sinful nature. It's our default. It's our brokenness that is built into us. God did not make us this way. We did. Sin did. And our desires can get distorted. That is why we have His Word. That is why we have His Spirit to guide us.

We live in a world that is telling us that if we have a desire, it must be good and it must be fulfilled. The last time I did that, my kids were vomiting Oreos.

If I had time I could share with you so many dozens of stories of lives that are wrecked, finances that are wrecked, marriages that are wrecked because of this exact principle—people living to fulfill the desires of the flesh. If I asked for hands to go up in this room and at all of our campuses, they would be up all across the room, if we were honest.

The other way to live is by the Spirit. To bear the fruit. Specifically today, we're going to look at the fruit of love. So how do you do that? I'm glad you asked. We're going to look at that. I've got an answer for you. You're going to want to write this one down. Are you ready?

You can't!

You can't. That's the sermon. Thank you guys for being here today. This has been great. Here's the thing. I'm going to let you guys in on a secret. You don't work to produce spiritual fruit. You don't work to produce the fruit of the flesh. They are natural byproducts of where you are planted. Who is guiding your life? Who is leading your life? This is such a great litmus test for us to spiritually evaluate ourselves. Am I producing this kind of fruit?

We don't judge people. We know that. But we do evaluate things and we should evaluate ourselves. Jesus said you will know a tree by its fruit whether it is good or bad.

So I know in my life, if I'm producing this kind of fruit, I'm walking with Him in the right way. Am I slow to anger? Am I gracious? Am I generous? Am I joyful? If I am I know it, my family knows it, and many of you who know me know it. You see it in me.

But if I'm not, I begin to see it. I begin to see that I get a little more quarrelsome, quick to anger, more lustful desires, there's more jealousy, and selfishness that comes out in me and I know that I'm not planted in the right place, I'm not connected to the vine. And it's a very simple principle. But it's hard for a lot of us to get because the church has missed it for so long. We use the fruit of the Spirit as a tool for behavior modification. And the result is that we have failed, miserably.

Has anyone ever tried to will themselves to sexual purity? Good luck with that. You ever tried really hard to be patient? Or have you tried to count to 10 so you didn't explode in anger. Yeah, me neither. Right?

Bearing fruit is not a matter of the will, it is a matter of discipleship. It is not about behavior modification it's about heart transformation.

I just want to say one more thing here before we unpack love a little further. This is all so very important for everything we're going to do this summer as we listen to all of these fruits. If you are working hard to produce spiritual fruit it will not work. It won't work. You cannot do it. Do not work harder, draw closer. Come on.

Jesus gave us this principle to live by. I want to look at this for a second. I know we've unpacked this before. Jesus said:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do," say it with me, *"nothing."* Nothing.

Let that sink in. Apart from Jesus and abiding in Him you can do nothing. You cannot produce that kind of fruit on your own. It is a natural byproduct of where you are planted. We walk with Him. He bears the fruit.

And this list of the fruit is so beautiful. When we see it in the life of somebody else it stands out. It's attractive. And it's evidence of the faith and trust in Christ in the way he's lived his life and where he is planted.

So let's go ahead and move on to love today. I want to look at the granddaddy of them all in the remainder of our time. I'm going to make a bold statement here so please don't throw stuff at me. The word *love* while accurate is also entirely unhelpful. It is completely unhelpful for us. For us to truly understand love we have to redefine it.

Actually, better yet, we need to more accurately and more fully define it.

So what does God mean by love?

I love my beautiful wife, Brooke. She's sitting right over here. I love you. And she loves watching *Doctor Pimple Popper*. To be fair, she loves me too, very much. At least she did before I used that *Doctor Pimple Popper* joke. So I don't know. Jury is out on that one. Sorry, babe.

Are those two things the same? No. The problem is language. And if you've been with us any length of time you know that in the Greek New Testament, which the Bible was written in, there are at least four different types of love that are expressed with a very different word.

In English it's very difficult because we almost always use one definition, the first definition that is found in the dictionary, which says this: love is an intense feeling of deep affection—an intense feeling of deep affection. In other words, love is what one feels. Love is often something you earn. It's a feeling that is fleeting.

God has so much more to say. A much fuller picture on love. We've looked at this in previous weeks. I just want to do a quick review on something Aaron showed us a few weeks back. The four loves.

The first one is:

Phileo;

which is that brotherly love, that friendship. The city of Philadelphia. That is what that word refers to.

The second one is:

Storge;

this is an empathic type of love.

The third one is:

Eros;

we just spent a lot of time on that—romantic, erotic love.

And then today, the big one is:

Agape;

which is sacrificial love.

Agape is the word that is used in every instance in Galatians 5: verse 6, verse 13, verse 23, it's all pointing us toward love being a choice, not a feeling. A decision. Intentionally to put others first. Sacrificial. It's starting to sound a lot like what the world needs now, isn't it?

God's love is unconditional. But the world gives us a version of love that says this: "I love you until you mess up." "I love you until you offend me." "I love you until you even genuinely wrong me. And then you don't deserve love. You deserve shame. You deserve hate, rejection," certainly not those free drinks, we've established that.

When someone or something stops giving us enjoyment or pleasure or reciprocation, we stop loving. What we do is we use the dictionary's definition of love, not God's.

It's kind of like, "I used to love Oreos before that event." It's like some of us say, "We used to love our spouse, but we fell out of love." Or, "We used to be best friends and then he broke my trust. He let me down. He didn't meet my expectations." Fill in the blank.

Or it's kind of like how I used to love Purdue basketball and then the Peacocks. Thought I could use that joke. It's still way too soon. It's way too soon. A lot of damage there.

Agape is unconditional because it's a decision.

Church:

Love is not a fleeting feeling, it's a bond that is built!

Not a fleeting feeling, it's a bond that is built! It's a commitment that is upheld. The world needs this kind of love. And we have literally cornered the market on this one. The basis of our faith and our life is built on this truth that God loves us so much that He gave of Himself sacrificially when we didn't deserve it.

The reason the world thinks the way it does about the church is because we have not shown them this kind of love.

There was a Barna study done a few years ago that was featured in the book *Unchristian*. They surveyed young, non-Christians 16 to 29 years old. And they asked them to choose their descriptors and rank their descriptors of how they perceive the evangelical Christian church. Some were positive. Some were negative. Think whatever you want.

Ninety-one percent, number one answer, 91 percent said: anti-gay, followed closely by hypocritical and judgmental. We did get friendly. That was 70 percent, so we got that one.

Where is the disconnect? Why hasn't the world seen this kind of love? Now I've spent some time here recently thinking through this. I've been marinating in this, and I have a theory as to why this is true. I want to share it with you. You'll want to write this down. You can't show what you don't know.

You can't show what you don't know. Now, I want to be clear. I'm not talking about information. I know that many of you believe and know that God loves you. Some of you may not totally believe that yet. But you know cognitively, you've heard that God loves you.

If it was just about information, I would say we love people because God said so, and you do it. But how well is that going for you?

No, I'm talking about something much deeper. I'm talking about experience, something that changes the way that you live and is a natural byproduct of the way that you live. Just like the fruit that we've been talking about—knowing Him, being with Him, growing close to Him.

You can't show what you haven't truly experienced for yourself. This isn't behavior modification this is heart transformation.

Now, I bet we've all tried to show something that we didn't know. I know I have. It didn't take me long to come up with an example for this.

A few years ago my kids were a little bit younger. They were ten and seven at the time and we were watching a big dance, March Madness NCAA tournament game. Purdue game, I'm sure.

I put the kids to bed, and we were debriefing, unpacking that whole thing and I explained to Camden, my youngest, who was seven at the time. And he said, "Daddy, I don't understand. What is the big dance? They were playing basketball not dancing." Great observation.

I said, "It's a metaphor. They are playing up on Cinderella and the slipper and the brackets and all that kind of stuff." I explained it in a very helpful, intelligent, fatherly way.

And a few seconds later my oldest son, Bryce, he was ten at the time, he was in the bunk right above us, and he chimed in and he said, "Daddy, I think you meant to say idiom, not metaphor." I was like, "What did you call me?"

It was obvious to me in that moment, the fact that he knew the word idiom, that he knew far more than I did about the subject. I was trying to explain something that I did not know. We looked it up. He was right. I was wrong. I was schooled by my ten-year-old. Very humbling moment.

We've all done things like that. We try to show something that we don't really know. And I think we've all done this when it comes to love. We try to check the box, do the right thing, feel like we should do it, obligation, behavior modification. But we miss the heart transformation.

You can't show what you don't know.

And the world needs the real thing, sacrificial, unconditional love. God made us and loved us to do precisely that. I want to help you do that today.

I want to ask you all a question at all of our campuses and here in the room. I want to ask you this and I want it just to sink in. Why are you here? Why are you here today? Not

at church, not in one of our rooms, not on the other side of the screen. Why are you on this planet? Why are any of us on this planet for that matter?

Some of us would say to serve Him, to share His Word, to do His will. You're not wrong. That's true. But those are secondary. It's not why you are here.

Parents, let me ask it this way. Why are your kids here? Don't say accident any of you. They are here to love you and to be loved by you. To share in the family experience. To carry on the family legacy.

We have been created to be loved and to give love. So if we want to give the world the love it needs, this is the place where we have to start.

I want to let you in on a little piece that might be missing from all of our understanding of this. It's been so helpful for me. In the Old Testament there is a word called *hesed*. It is the word for love that *agape* derives from, ultimately. And it's woven all throughout the Old Testament. It speaks of God's love to us. It has a lot of deep meaning to it. I want to share some of that with you.

That word *hesed* means:

Loving kindness, to cling, to hold fast, it conjures up the idea of commitment.

What does that sound like? See, God's love in its purest form is best understood in terms of attachment love. The love a child has with its mother.

God's love is not simply stated, it's experienced.

In his book *Renovated*, Jim Wilder, a neuroscientist, unpacks this beautifully. He's actually breaking down Dallas Willard's seminal discovery. Dallas Willard was a great, great, great Christian theologian and philosopher. He co-collaborated on this book before he passed away.

And there was this great discovery. So they break this down and they explain in a little bit more. A child bonds with his mother as she feeds him, as she provides for him, meets his needs, prepares him for life. And there is a profound neurological bond that takes place when face to face non-verbal connection is made. A smile from a parent to a kid. The embrace. The kiss. The eye contact.

Neuroscience has a name for this now. It's called mutual mind. It is a familiar bond that creates in us the belief that these are my people. I will sacrifice for them. I will fight for them.

This is why so many of us love our dogs.

The same things are taking place in this attachment love. This is what building a bond looks like. And so many of us have never experienced and cultivated this crucial part of our faith. And that's why it's so difficult for us to show something that we don't truly know.

When we come to place our faith and trust in Jesus, the way Jesus explains it is that we have been born again. We just witnessed many people going all in today through baptism. How incredible. Starting that journey. Literally born again.

What does a newborn do? Nothing. Right? Nothing. All they do is receive love and care and provision from a loving parent. That's when that attachment love begins to build.

I've been a pastor for 20 years. And I've had the privilege, as a pastor sitting across from a lot of people with a lot of hurt a lot of stories a lot of pain a lot of hope and a lot of heartache.

I sat down with someone recently who's been on this planet for 40 plus years. And as we began to sit in it and unpack the story and identify what was going on, we came to this incredible, heartbreaking discovery. This person, in his 40 plus years on this planet had never, ever felt loved by anyone. No one. A lifetime of abuse, hurt, betrayal, rejection—never feeling like he was loved. *Agape* and *hesed*, those were foreign concepts to this individual. He saw some distorted forms of *eros* and *phileo*.

And some of you listening to my voice today have experienced the very same thing. There is always a string attached. Always trying to earn it. Always waiting for that other shoe to drop.

Maybe you know that God loves you in your brain and you've never really experienced it in your heart and in your soul. That can change today.

The church has been really good at helping us change belief and behavior but not as good at developing that attachment love that God made for us to experience.

So I want to create some space for us to take a baby step in that direction together right now. I'm going to walk us through a prayer experience together for a few moments. You can practice on your own. You can expand on this later.

So right now at all of our rooms at all of our campuses, watching online, I just want to get yourself comfortable. I want you to go ahead and close your eyes at all of our campuses. And I want you just to take in a deep breath and slowly breathe it out. God, I want to ask You in this moment to be present. Holy Spirit, we give You freedom, permission to minister to us, to have Your way.

I want you to begin by thanking God for all He has given you. I want you to begin by just thanking Him for your body. For some of you, that's going to be really hard if you don't love your body. You think God made a mistake. But I want you to know today that He loves you, He made you fearfully and wonderfully beautiful. He gave you the breath of life in your lungs today; it's a gift that you are here to hear my voice. Thank Him for it. Thank Him for your friends and your family who love you and have your back no matter what. Thank Him for His provision in your life, food, and the home that He has given to you. For the abilities and the skills that He has blessed you with. Give Him thanks. See Him as the One who is the true provider.

Now, I want you to think about the times that you've sensed God's presence in your life in a profound way. See if you can bring that to your memory. Maybe it was a moment of brokenness. Maybe it was the birth of a child. Maybe He saved you from something or someone. Maybe for some of you it is this very moment. I want you to sit in that feeling and that emotion and that memory.

I want to encourage you to pick a word or a phrase to describe what that presence is like for you. Maybe you just want to remember that under your breath softly, "God was,"

fill in the blank. "God was real." "God was present." "God was gracious to me. Good to me."

Now, I want you to think of a time when God smiled on you. Maybe it was a beautiful sunset you took in. Maybe it was a healing or a freedom or some comfort or direction or safety that He gave you, you just knew He smiled upon you in that moment.

Lord God, I ask You now to give everyone the ability to see You. May we even see the face of Jesus before us. I want to encourage you to see Jesus standing before you or sitting beside you right now. Look at His face. He had a human likeness, a human face. Look at His hands and see the scars on them. That was pain He took on for you. He loved you enough to do that.

Look back up to His face. Maybe you can see the creases in His eyes and the creases in His cheeks as He begins to look at you and smile loving, *agape* eyes for you. He freely gave Himself for you because He truly loves you as His own. The reason we love is because He loved us first. Hold onto that.

Father, I want to thank You for being our provider. For meeting our every need. For smiling on us, Lord, as we make our way throughout the days in this world. You are so present, and You've called us to be loved by You, to belong to You, to be a part of Your family. We thank you, Lord, for Your presence. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

I want you to see Him as the provider that He is to you. Don't miss His work in your life, His presence in your life, the way He smiles on you.

Church, what the world needs now is us. Not everyday us. Not judgmental, hypocritical us, fully loved us. And what would the world look like if we loved that way? Our God took a risk to love people, many of whom would never love Him back. And He empowers you and me to do the same thing.

What would the world look like? I think it would look like relationships and marriages restored today. I think it would look like people who are living their lives to fulfill the desires of the flesh, that they would change to produce true, spiritual, godly fruit in their lives and the world would take notice.

I heard it said so well recently, our truth will not be heard until our love is felt. May you know His love so you can show His.

The reason why some of you have never accepted what Jesus has done for you, you've never declared your allegiance to Him as a disciple, you've never followed Him, you've never really went all in is because you have never fully understood His attachment love. You've never made that bond and connected with Him. May you know today that He has created you to be loved and to give love.

He willingly gave Himself for you and set you free and wrapped you into His family, to adopt you. And you didn't have to earn it. You didn't do a thing. He gave it freely. We just accept it and align ourselves to Him.

I want to leave us with this verse from 1 John, 4:19. It sums up everything we've talked about today. It says:

"We love each other because He loved us first."

The reason we love is because He showed us the way to know His love so now we can show His love.

One thing we can do to further build that attachment bond is do what Christians have done for 2,000 years in every part of this world. They have remembered and commemorated and celebrated the bread and the cup, what we call Communion.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with Communion, it's a way for believers to remember and celebrate the underserved gift of the cross. It's not about a ritual to be observed, revered—it's about a person to be worshiped. And we worship Him as we remember Him. I want to invite you, if you received one of these to take it out and stand to your feet as we take Communion together at all of our campuses.

You see the night before Jesus would give up His life for me and for you; He had a meal with His followers. And He took the elements that they were eating right off of the table, He took the bread, and He took the wine, and He used them as an illustration.

He said, "Guys, I want you to know that I'm going to give My life for you very soon. And this bread and this cup, are symbols of My body that will be broken for you and My blood that will be poured out for you." This is the greatest of gifts. This is what we do. We celebrate Him and commemorate as we have for 2,000 years.

So, I want to invite you to take out that cracker which represents the body of Christ, and as Jesus instructed us, He said, "Take the bread and eat it for this is My body." Take it and remember it's of Jesus.

You can go ahead and open up the juice which represents Christ's blood. Scripture tells us that He took the cup of wine, and He gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them, and He said, "Each of you drink from it for this is My blood which confirms the covenant between God and His people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many." Take it and remember and it's Jesus' sacrifice.

Father, we thank You for Your sacrifice that was given for us. Lord, the great provision that You made on our behalf, to care for us, to meet our needs, to do what we could not do. Lord, it's a reminder of that gracious smile You place on us every day, that You are so present in this world and in our lives.

We love, Lord, because You showed us the way. So may the natural byproduct of our lives bear spiritual fruit, and most of all, Lord, love today. May we know Your love and as a response choose to love this world that You have put us in. Empower us, Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.