

FALLING IN LOVE - FAILING IN HATE
That You May Know - I John Series - Week 8
Dan Burrell

Good morning Life Fellowship. It is good to see you. Today I want to start our service off by doing something we have done in the past from time to time. I think that it is something we need to do periodically, because it reminds us of a greater truth, and it is a part of the truth that I want to speak of this morning. And that is the fact that we are part of a family. And it is a family that is composed of members of Life Fellowship as well as all believers around the world, churches that are meeting now, or will meet at some point in the next few hours, or some have already met in the last few hours. And truly this family also has been gathered for generations with some of them residing in Heaven today. We also know that there are some who will be part of the family later that are not part of the family presently. And all of them are the family of God.

I think it is important that we see ourselves connected to God's family in that way. It isn't just about Life Fellowship; it is about the Kingdom, the Kingdom that Christ died for and He has called us to salvation and redemption. So I just want to take a moment if we could and pray for our churches. You probably drove by some churches this morning on your way here. So as I lead in prayer, please follow, and in your own seats pray for the churches you know. Maybe there is a church you grew up in, maybe there is a church that you follow on social media, or one that you listen to their podcasts. So let's pray for the church at large today.

Father, we do thank you that we are part of something greater than ourselves, individually, and even in this local assembly. And so Father, as we gather here we acknowledge that your family gathers in other places as well. And while we ask for your Spirit to be present and active in our hearts and our lives here, we also ask for that for others as well.

We pray for the pastors who are opening the Word all across our communities and our nation and around the world. We pray for our brothers and sisters who will sit in seats in cathedrals and in store front buildings, in homes and in sanctuaries, under trees and in stairwells, all around the country, all around the world in public and in private.

Father, we think of our fellow laborers in fellow churches in this community. And while we can't name them all, Father, there are so many that we do know and we love. We love the people that are there, we love the pastors who minister. Father, I pray specifically for churches like Grace Covenant, Lake Forest, the church at Denver, Lake Norman Baptist, Love Lake Norman, Peninsula Baptist, Mosaic, and Journey Church.

Father, all across this community your Word is being lifted up. And so, Father, we ask that you bless those congregations, whether they meet in person, or whether they are meeting on the Internet, or whether they are like us and doing both. Father, we pray

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that you would bless us and be glorified in our unity and even in our differences. Father, may we be reminded of that great quality that unites us and that is our salvation, and our love for you that creates a love for each other. So we pray for them, and we pray for us this hour. For it is in Christ's name I pray. Amen.

Now turn with me in your Bibles today to I John Chapter 3 where we are going to continue our study. You know sometimes people have asked me in the midst of the pandemic how I am approaching preaching. Well we are four months into this pandemic and I am tired of talking about it. I don't know how you feel about it but I am just tired of talking about it. But the reality is it is still around us and now it seems to be just a little bit worse. We are still hearing about it, we are still talking about it, and we are still seeing it in the news daily.

But one of the things Pastor Ben and I want the church to know, and one of the things that is a priority that began with the past history of our church, with the current leadership of elders, as well as for us who minister presently, our primary mission is to remember this is a church that has always been built on the Word of God. This is a church that is built on the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. We have to do other things, and we get that, but it all begins and ends with the preaching and teaching systematically, expositionally, and authoritatively the Word of God.

And so that is not is going to be something that we ever abandon. If we abandon that then we have completely changed to our churches. And that is why we have remained in the systematic study of the Bible. We are already planning our next series, and I won't go ahead and tell you about because I want to make sure that we announce it as a team. But I am very excited about it and I am already studying for it. Again we are going to dive deep into the Scripture.

So as we look at this passage this morning I will tell you that I have struggled with this passage, because there are so many things going on in our world today and this message is such an important message. It is a message that is important from the Scripture every day always. And I don't want us to lose that, and I don't want to take away from that by applying it to our current situation. At the same time there are things going on in our current situation that we need to highlight in light of this Scripture - not just as a nation but even as a church. And so how to do that with balance I will tell you has caused me no small amount of angst this week.

And as the week progressed the angst grew. So this will be a little bit unusual from the way I would normally approach it. Up until 8 o'clock last night I was still tinkering, changing and revising it. I have handwritten notes here this morning. I wanted

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to make sure that I heard from God on this and stayed true to the Scripture, but also applied it in a way that makes sense to us right now.

So what I am going to do is take the first half, and we are going to go through it. And I will tell you that we have reduced the length of the service a little bit because of social distancing and so forth. And you know I can talk fast, right? So I am trying not to lean into that too hard, but I am going to try to give you the meat and the context of the Scripture and hope that you get the basic idea from what the Word of God is saying and also hope to challenge you.

You know on Thursday nights we do something with our Life Communities, but anyone in the church is welcome to do this as well. We go deeper in the Scripture on Thursday nights; we just do a deeper dive. And Pastor Brad leads that with several others of our team and lay leadership. It is a zoom meeting and we break into small groups. I would really urge you if you have not participated in that yet to do that as it will take you deeper into this passage and help you go another layer. If you want to be a part of that and you haven't been, you can just email Pastor Brad or the church office and we will get you on that list. And I would really urge you to consider doing that just to kind of take it to another level.

So the first half we are going to do that, and then the second half I am just going to talk to you from my heart. So that is kind of the context and I wanted to tell you that up front so you will know how I have approached it this morning. Let's begin by reading the passage and we are going to start in verse 11 of I John Chapter 3. I am going to stop after verse 11 and 12 and then we will read the rest of it after that.

“For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” There are a couple of things I want to say here first of all. All you guys when you see ***“love one another,”*** probably think, *‘Oh here comes, Dan. He is going to preach about love.’* I know - I know, okay? A lot of us guys when we start talking about this, because of the way we are wired, we have a predetermined idea that this is a woman's emotion, or this is a soft emotion, and the next thing we know there will be some cherubs floating around shooting arrows at people - all those things that come with love.

But I want you to see love in a different context today. I want you to see love as an act of character. I want you to see love as something that is a commandment that we are supposed to obey. I want you to see love as something that is courageous and that requires a backbone, and that sometimes requires submission and effort and initiative. So when we look at that this morning I kind of want you to think of it in masculine terms. And I am not just saying that because I am a sexist or something but because I know my

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own heart and I know how men often think. And it is one of the reasons why there are always more women than men in churches, because for some reason we think that a lot of this is beneath us and somehow in our masculinity it denigrates us. And I would say, *'No, the opposite is true,'* and I am going to try to demonstrate that to you this morning.

The other thing I want you to notice is this. Look at the first five words again: ***"For this is the message."*** This is the message. When you look at that I want you to understand what the message is John is referencing. And that is this - it is not a social justice message. It is not a political message. It is not a self-help message. It is not a relational message. The message that he is talking about here is the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And whether you are looking at the letter from John or one from Peter or Paul or James or any other apostle, whether you are looking at it in part or in whole, understand that every time that you see the Scripture talking about 'the message,' the message is that we are sinners, separated from God who need a Savior, and that our salvation comes with our faith and repentance in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what makes us part of His family.

We are not all God's children - we are all God's creation, but you are not a child of God until you have made Him your Father. And you do not make Him your Father until you accept His terms and conditions and He has called you into His family. And then you say, *'Yes, Lord. And I repent of my sins and I trust in you completely.'* And at that point you are adopted by the Holy Spirit into the family of God. So we understand here that John is saying the message is when you trust Christ you become family. The message is that the gospel makes a difference relationally to those who have trusted in Him. And we need to make that very, very clear.

Now let's continue on in verse 12 where it says: ***"We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous."*** So when we stop here for a moment, we think, *'Wow, one moment we are talking love and the next minute we are talking murder. First we are talking about family and then we are talking about dysfunction.'* So how do we understand that?

There are things that go on in Scripture that are really cool, and like Pastor Ben talked about this last week there are chiasms like the meat in a sandwich and so forth. And a chiasm is a device, it is a literary device that God used in the construct of human language to be able to make an important point. There are other forms, and I used to be a grammar teacher and I love this kind of stuff, so I was challenged this week to write a Haiku. Now I know that is really, really weird to most of you, but I do love that kind of poetry. It is just challenging to me because it is very mechanical and I like that.

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So this is called hyperbole. Now hyperbole is when you take an extreme or sometimes an exaggerated example. Now this is not an exaggerated example because this really happened. John is calling us, though, to an extreme example, because let's be honest when we talk about murdering your brother it doesn't get any worse than that. Unless you are talking about murdering the Son of God murdering your brother is about as bad as it can get.

I didn't have a brother, but I may have wanted to murder my sisters a few times, and if you will talk to my sisters they definitely wanted to murder me on more than one occasion. It is part of our makeup, right? You just fuss and fight, and again I am speaking hyperbolically, extremely. But that is exactly what is going on here. John is drawing this context and we are going to see the flip side of that later on in the passage, a dramatic exchange. But I want you to understand that this is what is at stake: in the message of the gospel it is life and death, black and white, darkness and light, hatred and love, murder and birth. It is the extreme that we are talking about. And God is trying to protect us from the worst we can be and He calls us to the best we can be.

So that should help us kind of understand where John is heading on this because right off the bat he says: *'Don't forget, this is my message.'* And then he kicks it off by reminding us what Cain and Abel had happen to them. Abel got murdered by his brother, Cain. Now look with me if you would in verse 13.

“Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before Him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and He knows everything.”

Now the overall theme of this series we have been in has been 'That You May Know.' And here God is saying there are some things that we need to know. These are things that come with the gospel. This is something you can know when your heart accuses you and says, *'God couldn't love someone like you. You are not really a believer. You are not part of the family.'* No, we can know these things.

So as we kind of get into this passage we are being reminded that this is a gospel message. And I want to take us very quickly through six of these verses and show you

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some characteristics, because John is saying this: we are called to love and it is not an accident. We are called to love and it is intentional. And we are called to love and it matters.

So let's look beginning in verse 13 and try to break this apart systematically. ***“Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.”*** The first thing we need to know is that Christian love is counter cultural and it is supposed to be controversial. It is counter cultural and it is controversial. Our love, born of Christ, runs counter to the antichrist values of the world. And throughout the passage, particularly as we get toward the end of it you are going to see John talking about the Spirit of the antichrist.

There are two spirits in the world and we are not talking about the antichrist like in 'Left Behind' and all that; rather we are talking about this system that runs against God, that hates Him. It is a dramatic system that is so apart, so different from the other. Now here is where I want to stop for a moment. Remember what Jesus said in John Chapter 15 and verses 18 through 20. He said: ***“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.”***

Here is what the Lord is saying that we need to know. We are called out, we are foreigners, we are aliens, we are different, and we don't fit in here. And there is a mentality I think in the evangelical church in America today, and it is because from our nation's history from its very founding that there was this predominance of Christianity, Judeo-Christian values and ethics that has softened us and changed our expectations to make us think that this world is our home. This country has a flag wrapped around our Bible that we are one and the same. And it is not true.

There is a system that is bigger, and it started long before the United States of America began, and it will last a lot longer than the United States if the Lord tarries. And that is the system of the antichrist which is in contrast of the system of those who love God and trust His Son for their eternal life. It is not about patriotic values, it is not about where you are born, it is not about the color of your skin, it is about who you worship, and who lives within you.

And here is the bottom line - you and I will not fit in. We are not supposed to fit in. We are always going to be in this world at the wrong lunch table. We are always going to be picked last. We are going to be the ones that people snicker at because this world is not our home. And that is what the Apostle John was saying that Jesus said. He

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said, *'If they put me to death, why do you think they are going to love you? Why do you think you are different?'* Jesus said to the disciples very, very clearly that they were all going to die, except John, because they followed Him. He let them know that up front.

He also let us know in Scripture if we think today as a Christian in the United States of America that we are always going to be at the cool table, we have a misperception of that. And we need to understand that the love that we have is supposed to run counter to the culture. And at times it is controversial because here we are to love truth more than we love being liked. We are to love truth more than fitting in. We are to love God and be willing to pay the price for that if the only other choice is that we have to love the values that are against God.

So when we take a stand about anything that is found in Scripture - the Ten Commandments, Biblical morality, the definition of marriage, how to treat each other - all the different things that cause controversy today, we are never going to be on the big side, the right side, the winning side as the world counts it. But that doesn't matter because we are on the right side. Why? It is because it is His side.

Now in the midst of that we have to love the right thing. And that is the truth of the Word of God and the God who authored that truth. So in that, this is how we operate. We are operating as opponents, we are operating as the oppressed, we are operating as the minority, but we do it differently. We don't do it out of hatred; we function out of love.

Which brings me to the second thing - Christian love is consequential and focused. Look with me if you would in verse 14 where it says: ***"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death."*** There is a different kind of love that Christians have and should have for each other that is important. There are over a dozen words to describe 'love' in the Greek. There is only one in English, so it is kind of frustrating to explain it.

'I love my mama.' *'I love the Kansas City Chiefs.'* *'I love pizza.'* *'I love my kids.'* *'I love my country.'* *'I love taking naps.'* All of those are different kinds of love, okay? There are different kinds of love. And so when we use that word we kind of have to stop and think about what kind of love we are talking about right here. Should we love the nonbeliever? Absolutely. We should love the nonbeliever.

But the love we ought to have for each other in the body of Christ is a special category of love. It is that love that John is talking about right here that drove Jesus to the cross. It is that love that you have for family. It is that love that gives you an extra level of patience and makes you lean into forgiveness. It is kind of that love that you

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have towards your kids or your family, your mama, your dad. Everybody else can be a jerk, and your dad can be a jerk, and you are going to treat your dad differently about being a jerk that you would treat anyone else being a jerk. Everybody's kids are going to act up, but when your kids act up it is a different relationship. You know how it makes you feel, right? And that is the way it ought to be for us in the church because we are family. It is focused and it is consequential.

Now look in verse 16 where we will see a third thing. It says: ***“By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”*** Here is the other side of Cain and Abel. Cain told Abel, *‘I hate you. I am going to murder you.’* Christian love says, *‘I love you so much that I will die for you.’* Now, I have to tell you that I love a lot of people, but I am not really enthused about the idea of dying for someone else. That isn't something that makes me want to jump out of bed in the morning and look forward to. And why is that? It is because that is the ultimate sacrifice. I like to think that I would die for my family. I would like to think I would die for you. I would like to think I would die for truth. I hope so, but I have not been put in that position, so it would be arrogant for me to say that I absolutely would do that. But my love is of such a nature it is definitely going to be something that I hope that I would do.

Now I am not interested in dying for some anonymous stranger even though that might be really noble of me. But I have to tell you that I am just not that noble. I still have a wife, kids, grandkids and things to do and so forth, so I am not going to be running out looking to die for just anyone. But for my family they are in a special category, and that is what Jesus meant. Look, there was Cain and Abel and the consequences of that ill-founded love was that Cain ended up murdering his brother.

We fail in hatred, but when we are living and falling in love with Jesus it causes us to love people so much that we would be willing to even give up the most selfish desires. Why did Abel get murdered by Cain? It was because Cain was jealous. He said, *‘Look, God accepted Abel and approved of him.’* So on this side Cain resented Abel's righteousness. And on this side when we say we love someone we should want to live for them and we should be willing to die for them because of what we share, and because of what Christ did for us. So there are these two extremes. And the bottom line is this - Christian love is sacrificial, Christian love is selfless, Christian love doesn't ask what is in it for us but rather what does someone else need.

Look at verse 17: ***“But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?”*** Now let's just take it back a little bit. He is not asking us to die for anyone, but He is asking us to

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let our actions match your words. How can we say we love someone and walk by them when they have a need? How can we know someone else in our family is hurting and yet do nothing about it when we have the capacity and the ability to help them?

And by the way that is a biblical value that begins and ends in family and involves things like benevolence. I will tell you this right up front when we have benevolence needs, the needs of the church family, the body of Christ, are to come first. That is what the Scripture says - particularly the household of faith. We are just to be obedient to Scripture.

Do we help people outside of the church? Yes, we do on occasion. We make huge investments in them. We want to demonstrate the love of Christ with that. But who is to be the priority? It is family. That is God's plan. So when we understand this it ought to make us have compassion for each other. I am not talking about compassion for the unsaved; that is not what this passage is talking about. This passage is talking about compassion for each other.

And by the way there are times in the family we kind of get crossways with each other because we are human and we have sin natures and we are ornery. There are times when you are going to need to forgive me. And there are going to be times when I need to forgive you. But at the end of the day my attitude toward you needs to be of compassion with a willingness to sacrifice and with a willingness to share and be generous because we are family.

Now look at verse 18 where it says: "***Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.***" It is practical; it is authentic. In other words make sure your walk aligns with your talk. My mom used to have this little phrase and she said it to me so many times it drove me crazy. Kids, you ought to remember this though because it is good for you. '*Your walk talks and your talk talks, but your walk talks louder than your talk talks.*' My mom would make us recite that, and then we would try and speed it up. '*Your walk talks and your talk talks, but your walk talks louder than your talk talks.*' We would say it faster and faster. And it was ingrained into us.

And the idea is this. Talk is cheap and everyone can play a good part, but when it comes right down to making the sacrifice and showing the love, being generous, being compassionate, giving another person a chance - are we willing to do that? It is practical and it is authentic.

Let's look at verse 19: "***By this we shall know*** (again there is that word 'know' which is very key) ***that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before Him.***" You know a lot of people have doubts. '*Am I really saved?*' '*Am I really on my way to*

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*Heaven?’ ‘Am I really a Christian?’ ‘Does God really love me?’ Sometimes our heart causes us to doubt that. And here John answers that question in verse 20. **“For whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and He knows everything.”***

So we are to go back not to what we feel but what is true. And if you love your brothers and sisters in Christ, if you are sacrificial towards them, if you care about them, even when you are feeling ornery, even when Satan is accusing you, even when it is frustrating, even when it is hurt, you can know this - God loves you, you love God, you love His family and you are going to do the right thing.

I have to tell you that I have been married coming up on 36 years this August. There have been times when my wife and I have not exactly seen things eye to eye. We are both firstborns. We are both opinionated. We are both strong willed. So that can create excitement from time to time. But in the midst of our excitement, beyond that never, never underestimate the love and the commitment I have for my wife and that she has for me. We would go to the mat for each other.

And that is the way family is. That is that special love. So even when I may be at odds with my wife, I never doubt that she loves me. Even when I am being cranky and self-centered she never questions whether or not I love her. Even when your heart condemns you, go back to the facts - God loves you, He sent His Son for you, He died for you, He forgave you. You love Him, you love His people, don't let Satan put doubt where God put surety.

So that is the passage. Man, that was really quick and I unloaded it very quickly and I am still over time. But will you please give me just a few more minutes and let me share a few more thoughts from my heart. One of the reasons I think I had such a difficult time finalizing this message is that we are at a place as a nation and as citizens and even as a church where we need to double down on whether or not we love each other. And what real love looks like; what Christ-like love looks like.

I was born in 1961 and the 60s, if you study American history, were very tumultuous. Some of you who are as old as I am, or maybe older, will remember the 60s. It was during that decade that Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, and Robert Kennedy were murdered in plain sight and we saw it on our television screens. Nothing like that had ever happened before in the history of our nation and it happened three times in less than ten years. Students were taking over college campuses and much as what we see going on in the streets today was happening in the 60s as well. In 1968 there were huge riots around a political convention in Chicago. The National Guard came into the University of Ohio and opened fire killing several young students who were protesting.

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We were at war in Vietnam. There was a draft and young men 18 years and older were subject to being forced to go into the military. I had a cousin who was drafted and in his first week in Vietnam he was killed. Those were the times then. They were hard times.

The sexual revolution had started. Traditional values of marriage and purity were out the window. Drugs were exploding in popularity and it began the cool thing to do on college campuses. We were at the height of the cold war against the Soviet Union. It was a difficult time. But today we are in similar times with Covid, economic collapse, high unemployment, uncertainty, political division of epic proportion, racial violence, social unrest, the rise of the radical left, an upcoming election, moral decay and collapse even, civil discourse obliterated by the phenomenon of social media, and that is just in the first half of 2020. We laugh now when we think about how optimistic we were in January 2020.

But it also creeps into the church. It has to. We are just humans. We are still fallen. We are broken. We are not all at the same level of spiritual maturity in this church. We have people who graduated from seminary and people who this time last year didn't know who Jesus was. Leaders are not perfect. We are all stressed. None of us have been through something like this before.

So much seems uncertain in our nation today, and it does creep into the church. Quite frankly it creeps into the homes as well. I am hearing about it. There are conflicts, separations, addictions, and rehab. It is happening all around us. So let me put it where we can all understand it. In all my years of ministry, and it will be 31 years this month of being a pastor, I have never had to be part of a team that has had to make so many decisions so rapidly in the midst of so much uncertainty, when the next news cycle can turn every decision that we have made recently completely upside down.

'Do we quarantine?' 'Do we re-open?' 'How do we protect the most vulnerable?' 'How do we demonstrate faith?' 'What are the limits of government authority when it comes to the practice of our faith?' 'What are the lines for our personal preferences and liberties as we try to come together for worship?' 'How do we maintain unity where there is so much over which we can disagree?' 'How do we lift up the gospel in the midst of all these decisions?' 'Masks or no masks?' 'Quarantine and quarantine again?' 'Social distance - how much?' 'Partial ministry - full ministry?'

'How do we handle the healthy that see this as a matter of personal rights and freedom?' 'What do we do when a decision is made and then the rules change again?' 'What do we do when we think we have made a good decision and discover it wasn't quite as good in reality as it was on paper?' 'How do we minister to hurting families when they have lost their jobs?' 'What about those who have addictions?' 'What about

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those who have a loved one in hospice?’ We have someone like that right now watching us and I am praying for that brother, who is at home in hospice and who has been watching the services online from his bed.

‘How do we take care of the widow, the single person, the single mom, the unemployed, and the elderly?’ ‘How do we help our missionaries who are abandoned around the world and cut off in many ways?’ ‘How do we protect our volunteers as they serve?’ ‘How do we continue to try and provide opportunities for corporate worship and personal discipleship and Life Community fellowship?’ ‘How do we do presentations of the gospel when so many are angry, frightened, frustrated and struggling?’ ‘How do we keep the morale of staff and volunteers up where it needs to be and healthy in the midst of frequently facing blistering criticism?’ ‘How do we demonstrate compassion and genuine concern for people in the community when we are just trying to hold on to our own sanity in the resurgence of Covid?’

We see that the things that were so important a month ago that we talked about from this pulpit are now overshadowed while we are in the midst of this. *‘What happened to the important conversations we were having about reconciliation and racial healing since it has been hijacked to some extent?’* Sometimes it has been weaponized by people with agendas, but that doesn’t change the fact that there are still hurting people out there who need to know that God loves them and we are not going to look at them through the parameters of race or skin color. But we are not talking about them anymore.

‘When will normalcy ever return?’ ‘And if it does, what will our country look like?’ ‘What will our church look like?’ So yes, let me be honest and transparent - I am not afraid, but I am exhausted, and so are a lot of you. So are a lot of our team - our staff - our elders - our ministry leaders and our amazing volunteers. *‘Moms and dads - some of you are school teachers, what are you going to do this fall?’ ‘How is that going to work?’* Some of you have kids who will not be able to go back to school, so you have to home school them, and maybe you are not wired for that. What are you going to do? I get it. I get it.

Behind the scenes I watch people flex, adjust and grapple with difficulty and then inevitably those in leadership endure feedback and criticism that at times can be harsh and really feel personal. At the same time I know that all of us are confused. We are reeling and trying to adjust to each new challenge. It is frustrating. We don’t always make the exact right call and people are human. So we vent and we get angry and we need someone to blame sometimes.

I honked at someone really unnecessarily last week. I used that illustration because it doesn’t make me look quite as bad as some of the other things I have done, or

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thought. It happens. It happens in nations, it happens in businesses, it happens in families - so why wouldn't it happen in churches.

But here is our opportunity and here is the message of the gospel and of John and of Jesus: **In all things we must love!** In agreement, and in disagreement - in frustration and in endorsement - in anxiety and in perseverance - in division and in reconciliation, we must love. When we act in anything less than love we are failing in our mission. Will we disagree? Oh yeah, absolutely, but we will also love. We love because it is right, we love because it is commanded, we love because for the believer it is part of our DNA. We are Christians; therefore we love. It is a sign of the believer and in this we have been affirmed and confirmed by our Heavenly Father.

We can't give into hatred in any of its forms. Not in the extreme of murder, not in being unkind. In any of its forms it is wrong. It doesn't mean we don't have opinions, worries, disappointments or conflicts, but it does mean that in the beginning, right in the middle of it, and at the conclusion of it, we will love each other.

Love doesn't quit, it doesn't abandon, it doesn't threaten, it doesn't harm, it doesn't refuse to forgive, it does not withhold love. Instead love perseveres, it draws alongside of. Love encourages, love does good at all times, love forgives and love initiates.

Remember this - we can look at it in Scripture, those who follow Christ are supposed to be the good Samaritans. We are the shepherds looking for the one missing sheep. We are the coat givers. We are the second milers. We are the seventy times seven forgivers. We are the turn the other cheekers. We are the presenters of our first fruits. We are the takers up of our cross. We are the occupiers until He comes again. We are the faithful servant when the master is away. We are the grateful leper. We are the workers who watch the approaching night time. We are harvesters standing at the edge of the field waiting to be directed into the harvest. We are the celebrators of the return of the prodigal son. We are the defenders of the accused. We are the ones who bring our sick to Jesus for healing in the midst of the crowd. We are the ones who point the little kids to Jesus. We are the ones who give our lunch so that others might be fed.

And that means then for us in the middle of confusion, hardship, controversy, turmoil, and all of that, we have to grit our teeth and bear down. And it can look like a lot of different things. Some occasions it may simply be dropping groceries off to someone. For others it may be putting a mask on. For others it may be giving financially so that we can send some electronic Bibles to people who don't even have one Bible in their homes. It may mean volunteering to help serve others.

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It may be being patient with us as we wrestle through these incredibly difficult decisions we have to make on a weekly basis. It means that even if you disagree with some of the conclusions you can trust the heart of those who are trying to be protective and bold and obedient and wise and careful. And to trust that those who are making the decisions do not seek to offend or frustrate, but they simply want to honor God and the gospel, and to demonstrate their love of Christ that is to be found in the heart of believers for the sake of those who have not yet believed.

So my challenge as we take this passage and are reminded is that we might double down on grace and love. Let's patiently persevere. Let's open our hearts and our hands and our wallets and our minds and our homes. Let's fail at hating. Let's fall in love with God and His people and His Word. Let's not react to the circumstances around us but let's lead through them instead. Let's not be weary in well doing. Let's be an example of what real love looks like in a family to those who still walk in the world. Let's fall in love with Jesus and fail in everything that could look like hate.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.