

More Love, More Power

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Preacher: Mark Bates

[0 : 0 0] middle of between series. He just finished Daniel, which having done that before myself, that's exhausting. And he's about to start another series. So I want to commend your elders for encouraging Matthew to take a Sunday off between series because it is a lot of work getting ready for the next series. And for him to be able to do his job well and to serve you faithfully, I'm sure that's just a real gift to him. We're going to be looking at Ephesians chapter 4, excuse me, Ephesians chapter 3, verses 14 to 21. You know, why is change so hard?

Why is it when you want to change something, it is so difficult? So a few years ago, I decided I was going to get into shape. And so I joined Planet Fitness, \$10 a month, great deal. First week, I went four times, which was my goal. Second week, I went four times, which was my goal.

Third week, not so many. Fourth week, not so much. Soon, I found that I was going less and less. And then when I would go, I would go and I would kind of like do a few reps on a machine and I hated it. And I moved to the next machine and then I'd hate that. Then I'd get on the treadmill and I was going to run for 30 minutes and I'd only run for 20. And soon I found that I wasn't going at all. You know, I wanted to be in shape. I just didn't want to work out. Another time, I decided I was going to learn Spanish. And it's really not that hard now. I mean, they have these incredible software programs. You have Duolingo, which is free. You have Rosetta Stone.

And all you have to do is spend 20 or 30 minutes a day and you can learn a new language. First day, I'm like killing it. I'm getting after it. Second day, same thing. And I'm learning and I can say buenos dias and everything. And so, you know, donde esta el baño? And all the key things you need to know. And so, I'm getting after it. And after a while, I just get busier and busier. And I find I'm just too busy to learn Spanish. I really wanted to learn Spanish. I really wanted, I should say, I really wanted to know Spanish. I didn't really want to study Spanish. And it's a different thing.

And it's very hard to change. I mean, proof of that, I think, is the diet industry. The diet industry is a \$40 billion industry in the United States. We're actually paying people to help us not eat. And it's not like, you know, it's rocket science to figure out how to lose weight. It's pretty doggone simple. Eat less, exercise more. There it is. I could write a whole book, two chapters.

[2 : 2 3] First chapter, eat less. Second chapter, exercise more. And we all know how to do it. But it is so hard if you've ever had to really do it. So hard to actually do that thing. I mean, nobody looks at a bag of Oreos and goes, I bet those are good for me. No one says that. No one drives by Amy's Donuts and thinks, you know, I need a little healthy pick-me-up. I mean, we know what to do. We do not have a knowledge problem. We do not have a knowledge problem. It's just very hard to change.

And I think many of us approach our life in Christ the same way a dieter approaches a diet. We think that the key is simply more discipline. So we determine we want to change. We force ourselves to stop doing the wrong things. We're just going to will ourselves. I'm just not going to do it anymore. And I'm going to do the right things. And we just make a determination we're going to do those things. And then we soon find that just like the diet, you start binging on the Oreos of sin once again.

We find ourselves getting back into the same old patterns over and over again. And then you come to church and you look around and it seems like everybody else is doing it because I'm looking at you guys and you look like you have it together. So why am I the only one who's struggling like this?

Maybe something's wrong with me. Well, maybe the problem is not you. Maybe the problem is the way we approach this. What if living the life in Christ and living a life faithfully to God was more like a Thanksgiving feast than a diet? What if it were more like a dinner with friends than sitting alone eating rice cakes and kale? What if it were actually a delight and a joy? In this prayer that we're about to read, we find that that's what the Apostle Paul actually teaches us, that God's life-giving power, His transforming power, is something that we can all know and experience in our lives. And as it's transforming us, it changes us. And here's the good news. To experience God's transforming power, God doesn't just say to you, suck it up, buttercup, and get on with it. You know, He actually tells us how we can change and gives us the power to change. And so we see this in Ephesians 3, verses 14 to 21.

In fact, we're going to spill over, I think, and go ahead into chapter 4, verse 1, because it shows you a little bit more of the context. So Ephesians chapter 3, 14 through 4.1. This is God's Word.

[5 : 01] For this reason, I bow on my knee before the Father, from whom every family on heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory, He may grant you to be strengthened with the power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you may be rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we could ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever. Amen.

I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. This is God's Word. Let's pray. Fathers, we come to your Word this morning.

We continue to pray the prayer we sang just moments ago. Open the eyes of our hearts, that we would see Jesus. We know that that vision of Him is what will change us, is what is transforming. We know that is how the Spirit works. But Lord, today we come as your people who tried to change ourselves, and we're discouraged at times by that, and so we know we need something more. So Holy Spirit, open our eyes. Help us see Jesus. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. The first thing that we see in this passage, or we will see in this passage, is the weakness of willpower. You know, the weakness of willpower. And we see this really in the context, because over the past two and a half chapters of, or really three and a half chapters of here, or two and a half chapters of Ephesians, Paul has been celebrating the kindness of God. He says, before the world was ever formed, before you did anything good or bad, before you were even a thought, God set His love upon us, His people, and cherished us. And He did this knowing who we are. Even though we had sinned against Him, even though we had spurned His love, even though we would live according to the pattern of this world, as Paul says in the previous chapter, God, out of love, chose to save us and call us as His own. And furthermore, He took us, all of us who were hostile people, and He takes us from every family of the earth, as he says, and He brings us all together into one united family, into a redeemed humanity, people from every race, every tribe, every ethnic group, every culture, and He unites us into the family of God. Now, as Paul reflects on this, and as he thinks about all that God has done for us, he is so amazed that he just all of a sudden stops his letter and breaks out in this effusive prayer of praise. He is astonished by God's grace. He is absolutely amazed by it. And so, he prays this prayer. And notice that in this prayer, he prays to every person of the Trinity. And God is one. He exists in three persons, three persons, same in substance, equal in power and glory. And he prays to each of them. He prays that the Father will strengthen you in the power of the Spirit, so that Christ the Son may dwell in your hearts. The Father and the power of the Spirit, Christ the

Son. And the ultimate result of this Trinitarian blessing is found in verse 17. You see there in verse 17, it is that you may be rooted and grounded in love. So, to sum it up, what Paul is praying is that we and his other readers will experience the strength and the power of God. How we experience the strength and the power of God? We'll experience the strength and the power of God by coming to know the magnitude of the love of Jesus Christ. If you want to have the power of God in your life, you want to see the power of the Holy Spirit unleashed in your life, it comes through understanding and knowing the love of God. Here's the key to the Christian life. Here it is. The key to life itself is found in grasping, as Paul calls it, the breadth and length and height and depth of the love that God has for you in Jesus Christ. And this love that he has for us, as Matthew told us earlier as we confessed our faith together, is a love that is given to us by grace and by grace alone. And it's what Paul said just in the previous chapter. He says, for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, the gift of God not of the result of works, so that no one may boast. We did nothing to earn it. We did nothing to deserve it. He gives that to us.

[9 : 39] So what Paul is saying, the key to living in the power of the Spirit, the key to having the power of God unleashed in your life, is basking in the grace of God that you're loved and you're cherished by God, not for anything that you do. Your performance has absolutely nothing to do with it, but strictly based on what Christ has done for you. Now, immediately when we hear this, there's some of us saying, but we got to do something, right? I mean, yes, grace gets you in, but at some point, we got to stop talking about this grace stuff, and we got to tell people, come on, get it together, right? I mean, you know, grace, grace, and you're using us as license, you're just using us as an excuse. And so don't we eventually have to tell people, okay, grace, that's good, but now it's time to move to maturity. And so you need to get busy working. That is a version of what we might call Nike theology. What's the Nike slogan? Just do it, right? And that's the way many of us approach the Christian life. It's just do it. You know, and some use this as a theology of life. And so here's what the Bible says, just do it. The Bible says, don't lie, just do it.

The Bible says, don't lust, just do it. The Bible says, be holy, just do it. What is it about, thou shalt not commit adultery you don't understand? Just do it, right? I mean, it's pretty clear. It's pretty clear. Just do what it says. That was my approach to living the Christian life for a long time, even after I became a pastor. And I actually taught people that approach.

And here's how I would do it. I'd be struggling with some sin, habitual sin, which, you know, obviously we constantly do. And after I'd sin, I'd feel guilty. And I'd pray and I'd say, Lord, forgive me. I promise I'm going to do better next time. I'd make a vow. I'd say, God, help me. If you help me, I will do better. I will not do this again. And so for a while, just like working out or learning Spanish or anything else, I would do it. And then the sin would come back and I'd do it again. And I'd pray again. And this time, my prayer would go along with some self-flagellation. I'd have to feel guilty for a while, have to feel bad for a while, you know, beat yourself up a little bit. And then after I beat myself up enough, I would come and say, okay, Lord, I mean it this time.

I really, really mean it. Please forgive me. And I promise I will not do this again. I'd make another vow. And of course, I'd break the vow. And so what happens after a while of doing this, how do you feel? You feel like a failure. And I'm a pastor. So not only do I feel like a failure, how else do you think I feel? Like a hypocrite. And that's not even the worst part of it.

And now I go to pray. And I go before God, this holy God, and I'd be praying. And I go, I messed up again. And my image of God is sitting there in heaven going, come on, Bates, get your act together. Do you ever feel that way? You feel like you can't even pray because you're so ashamed and you're afraid that God is so disappointed in you that he just doesn't even want to see you. He's like, okay, I love you because I got to because you're my kid. But really, I'm kind of sick of you at this point. And I felt that way. And I think many Christians feel that way.

[13 : 16] Of course, I wasn't doing poorly in every area of my life. I was doing pretty well in other areas. In fact, I was doing a lot better than other people. And so in those cases, I would look at other people and going, why are they struggling with that sin? What is wrong with them? Why can't they get their act together? And so you have this mixture of shame on one hand for my failing and pharisaical arrogance for where I was succeeding. And I think many people come into the church for those two things.

They've got shame over their sin where they are struggling, and they look at other people either in the church or in the community, and they go, what's wrong with these worldly people? What's wrong with all these non-Christians out there? Why can't they get their act together? And the implication is, like I have my act together. And we find ourselves either feeling like failures or become self-righteous, arrogant Pharisees. And it's not because we're not trying hard enough. You know, focusing on your sin, focusing on your sin will never lead to godliness. We see this, and we don't have time to look at it extensively, but you see this in Romans chapter 7 and Romans chapter 8. The Apostle Paul says there, actually, if you use the law of God, all the rules, say, I'm going to follow those rules as a means by which to get holy. Paul says what happens is the law actually enslaves you. It actually makes you sin more, not less. The law incites the flesh, your sinful nature, so that you actually sin more. It stirs up sin in your heart. And he goes on to say it's not because the law is bad. The law of God is actually good. It's beautiful. If you want to know how to live a good and beautiful life, the law of God describes that for you. It's what the good and beautiful life looks like.

So the problem, though, is that the law is powerless. The law gives you information, but it cannot bring about transformation. The law of God is like Bubba. Bubba is sitting there on Saturday afternoon watching his football game. And I'm from the south, so it's an SEC football game where they really know how to play football. And so Bubba is there, and he's on the couch, and he's watching the football game, and he's got his beer in one hand and his Doritos in the other hand. And there's this young kid who reaches out to catch a pass, and he drops it. And so what does Bubba do? Come on, boy, you got to catch that ball. I mean, he just gives it to him, right? He just yells at the TV. Not that I've ever done that. And he just yells at the TV. Now, is Bubba right?

Of course he's right. But do you think the kid doesn't know that already? You know, he goes to football practice every single day. He's been doing this his whole life. He wants to catch the ball.

He's trying to catch the ball. He dropped the ball. But Bubba is there yelling at him, but he's not any help at all. That's what the law of God does. It tells you what you ought to do. It tells you what things you ought to do, and it shames you when you fail to do it. It becomes crushing to you.

[16:10] The problem is the law is right, but it can't bring about transformation. It can only give you condemnation. That's because the law of God has no power. It appeals only to the will.

And the ultimate problem is not one of the will, but one of the heart. There's an early American pastor theologian named Jonathan Edwards, and Jonathan Edwards observes that in every situation, whenever you have a choice about what you will do and what you won't do, you will always inevitably do what you most want to do. In fact, Edwards goes on to say this. It says, ultimately, you cannot but do whatever you want to do the most. In any situation, you always do what you most want to do. Now, the problem is we oftentimes have conflicting desires. So let's have our desire to be healthy. You know, who doesn't want to be healthy? I mean, nobody wakes up in the morning and goes, I hope I feel miserable today. I mean, we want to be healthy. And so we have that desire. So you have that desire to be healthy. And so, but you have this other desire. I have another desire that I like to stay up late watching Netflix, and I like to eat only things that are either fried, baked, or sugary, and maybe an occasional steak. So I have this one desire, be healthy, eat donuts. And the problem with those two desires is they conflict each other. Now, how do you decide which one of those desires you're going to do? What Edwards points out is this, that at the moment you're trying to decide what to do, at that very moment of decision, whichever inclination is the strongest, you will do. He's not just saying you have a choice. Here's the fascinating thing about this. Edwards is saying you actually have no choice.

You will do always inevitably, and you can do nothing else other than what your strongest desire is at the moment. So if I desire good health, and I also desire the donut, if my desire for good health is stronger than the donut, then I'm going to forego the donut and go for a run. But if my desire for the donut is stronger than good health, then I'm going to eat the donut, and I'm going to lie to myself about running tomorrow. That's how it works. And so, yeah, I can't top that. So, you know, the point is, we're not rational creatures. You don't do what's logical. You don't do what you think. You do what you feel. We are creatures who are ruled by our passions. University of Virginia psychologist, Jonathan Haidt, uses this illustration to get at the point. He talks about a rider on an elephant.

So you have this image. You may have seen a picture. It's a picture of a man in India, and he's riding on an elephant. And the rider's probably 120, 140 pounds. And then there's elephant, which is a lot more than 120, 140 pounds. And it looks like the rider is in control, because wherever he steers the elephant, it goes. But if at any point, the rider and the elephant have a clash of wills, who's going to win? The elephant. The elephant. And he says that the comparison is this. He says, the rider is like your intellect. It's what you're thinking. The elephant is like your emotions.

And your will, you can superimpose your will on your emotions for a time. But whenever the two come to battle, ultimately, your affections are what are going to win. Whatever controls your affections controls your actions. Whatever controls your affections controls your actions. And the reason we struggle to live godly, selfless, sacrificial lives is because we're appealing to the rider when we should be appealing to the elephant. And that's what Paul does here. He shows us the place where living the Christian life cannot be one merely of duty. Ultimately, it has to be one of delight. And that comes by understanding our second point, that willpower is powerless. Secondly, we see that love is powerful. Love is the key to change. Notice the connection between love and power in Paul's prayer. He prays in verse 16, that we'll be strengthened by the power of his spirit, strengthened with power through his spirit. And how will we be strengthened? He answers that in verse 17, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And then in verse 18, he prays that we might have strength. Strength to do what? He says we'll have strength to comprehend, that is to fully grasp the breadth and length and the height and the depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. He's saying simply this, more love, more power.

[21 : 06] More love, more power. The more we grasp the love of God, the more power we will have in our lives. And that's because grasping the love of God does not merely change your will. It addresses your heart, your affections. The Puritan hymn writer, William Cooper, put it this way, said, to see the law of Christ fulfilled and hear his pardoning voice transforms a slave into a child and duty into choice.

So you will do things for people you love that you would never do out of duty for anyone else. You will do for love things you would never do out of duty. And so here's where faith comes in.

What is faith? Once the Bible talks about faith and many things, but ultimately we talk about faith in Scripture, ultimately we're talking about faith in Christ. What is that? We believe that Jesus, through his life, death, and resurrection, did everything necessary to earn the Father's love for us, so that by his death, he fully paid the penalty of our sins, so that when the Father looks at you, if you're in Christ Jesus, there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Now my question is, do you really believe that? Do you really believe, do you honestly believe, as you stand before God, there is therefore now no condemnation? When you're lying awake at night, and you think about what you've done throughout the day, when you think about your interactions with family and friends, is there really no condemnation? Do you believe that? Paul writes that.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. That's the gospel truth. Faith is believing that the gospel is true. And so, and not only is there no condemnation, but the Bible actually goes further than that. If there's no condemnation, you're at the point of being a pardoned criminal. But that's not all. But because you've been united to Christ, and by the way, the number one way the New Testament describes a Christian is someone who's in Christ, in union with Christ. Because you've been united to Christ, that means all of his righteousness has been given to you. Which means then, when you stand before God, your sin is gone because Christ has taken that away. And Christ has given to you his robe of righteousness. So he sees you with all of the righteousness of Christ. That is who you are. That is who you are through your union with Jesus Christ. And so, that means then that the Father doesn't just tolerate you, he adores you. I think of it like times I've been down at the front of a church like this, and you look back, and you see the bride coming down the aisle. And I, as the pastor, I'm standing right here by the groom. No groom ever goes, he's never disappointed. I mean, he looks and goes, wow, she's marrying me? I mean, you've never seen an ugly bride. They're beautiful. And when the Father looks at us in Christ, he sees us as gloriously beautiful because of what Christ has done. The faith is believing that. Faith is actually believing that God loves us, not based on our merit or our performance, but based on what Christ has done. Now, the problem is, as another Puritan, Walter Marshall, says, your heart is addicted to salvation by works. You actually believe, your natural human tendency is to believe that your acceptance with God is predicated on your performance. And so, we end up with this, what we call a legalistic mentality. Legalism says that you earn God's approval by keeping the rules and performing well. So, the better you perform, the more he loves you. The worse you perform, the less he loves you. And so, what happens is this, is that the more you think that God's love for you, his acceptance for you, the way he views you, is based on your performance. If that's your view, you're always going to be insecure, always going to be insecure. That's because your behavior will never, ever be good enough, ever before glory, ever before glory. And if you're thinking that you have to reach a certain standard in order to be accepted and approved by God, you can't do it.

[25 : 37] After all, what does God say the standard is? Be holy, even as I am holy. That's a pretty high bar, right? And if you think you're meeting that standard, if you think you're doing well enough, then you obviously do not have a proper appreciation for the holiness of God.

Because God is far more holy than you can imagine. And so, then if you think that you have to do that to a disciple, then what's going to happen then? If you have a proper appreciation for the holiness of God, and you think that you by yourself and in and of yourself have to be holy to meet that approval, then you're going to grow to the point where you actually hate God. Because what's going to happen is you're going to see God as a tyrant whom you can never please, because you can never meet that standard of holiness. And so, that's why the only way we can see the love of God is through Christ Jesus.

That Jesus, through his life, his death, his resurrection, and through our union with him, we now stand before him, holy, blameless, without spot, without blemish. But the Father looks at us, loves us, and adores us, not because we're performing so well. That has nothing to do with it, but because Christ has performed so well. So, when we begin to grasp this love, it changes us. Now, now, you cannot earn the love of God. Does that mean we do nothing? You know, if trying harder is not the answer, does that mean we just stop trying? Well, no. No, again, the Bible still calls us to obey. It calls us to pursue holiness. But we do not do those things so that the Father will love us.

We do those things because the Father loves us. And so, we seek to obey because we already have the Father's love. And when that love grabs your heart, then the Holy Spirit empowers you and works in you to live in a way that's pleasing to him. And so, as God's people, we find ourselves transformed by this. And so, we see that Paul then says in verse 20, when we begin to grasp the love of God, he says, then God is able to do abundantly more, far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us. So, he's saying God is able to do exceedingly abundantly more than you can ask or think. What's he talking about? He's not merely talking about you can pray and God can do something miraculous and supernatural. Certainly, he can. But what he's talking about is the work that God can do in you and through you and transforming you as the Holy Spirit is unleashed in your life. And so, what that leads us to is a life, ultimately, of obedience. But beyond simply being moral, what happens is when the Holy Spirit grips your life, it transforms you and enables you to live in a way that you otherwise would not be able to live. That you're actually able to live a life out of love for God rather than merely out of duty. You can actually sacrifice your own joy for the joy of others. That when you love someone, and this is true, when you love someone, you actually find greater happiness. Edwards said this too. You find your greater happiness in their happiness than you do in your own. That's how you live sacrificially. Now, recently, Trish and I heard, while we were at

General Assembly, some of our missionaries who are working among the Kurdish people in northern Iraq. I know some of you probably have been to that region of the world, but not as missionaries. But they're working among these people in northern Iraq. Several different people groups, all in this area, many different religions, all of them part of what we would call an unreached people group, where less than 2% of the people of that ethnicity know anything about Christianity or Christians.

[29 : 38] And in that, among that people group, there was a doctor, a woman who was serving as a doctor there, not as a missionary, but in a relief form, and a young man who was there who was, I think, doing some sort of international aid. And they end up leading some of these people to Christ. The problem is, there's no church. There's no pastor. There's no missionary. And so here are these people, they're coming to faith in Christ, where the people never heard about Jesus before, and they're hearing about the work of God, hearing about the gospel, and they have no one to teach them about what's going on. And so we're saying, we need people who are willing to go to northern Iraq and tell these people more about Jesus, to disciple them. They're longing to know. And so, and not only northern Iraq, actually, over the next 10 years, as I've mentioned before, at Mission to the World, we need 1,000 new missionaries over the next 10 years. Now, why would someone leave Colorado Springs to go to northern

Iraq, which looks roughly like Palmer Park if it had been set on fire and there's nothing green left? Why would you do that? Duty's not going to do that. Duty's not going to do that. Duty's not going to call you to sacrifice. Then you think about 1,000 new missionaries. Who's going to pay for all that?

We are, right? What's it going to take to pay for 1,000 new missionaries? You can't keep living at your same lifestyle and still get those missionaries over there, right? It's going to require incredible sacrifice. What's going to cause that? Duty? Scolding? Berating? The only thing that's going to cause us to be aligned with the heart of God is knowing the love of God in our lives. That's what transforms us. See, you'll do for love things you would never do for duty. As Samuel Bolton, another Puritan said, it's my Puritan Sunday, things impossible to others are easy to them that love. Things impossible to others are easy to them that love. You know, we see this in parenting. Before Trish and I had children, we knew we wanted them. We just didn't want them. Because we saw everybody with them, and that just looked like way too much work. You know, think about the job description of a parent.

I mean, first, you've got to go through the pain of having the child. Then you've got to, you know, diapers, which are expensive. Then you've got to change the diapers, which are smelly. You've got to be available 24-7. You've got to clean up their messes. You've got to sacrifice your money that you could use for a vacation and spend it on them. You've got to educate them, drive them to ballet, drive them to soccer, drive them to the orthodontist, drive them to...

Who's going to sign up for that? Who...I mean, you could not pay me enough money to be a parent. Could not pay me enough money. You can't afford me. But man, there's been no greater joy in my life than having my three daughters. Right? No greater joy. You'll do for love things you would never do for duty. And when the love of God grabs our heart, when the love of God grabs our heart, it causes us to want to follow Him in obedience. By the way, this is rather revealing, isn't it? We wonder why we struggle to live a life of obedience. We wonder why we struggle to want to sacrifice for Christ's mission. We wonder why we don't want to give or work. And here's the bad news. The problem is not you lack discipline. The problem is that we lack love. It's not that we don't love God. As St.

[33 : 18] Augustine said, we might love the right things. The problem is we love them sometimes in the wrong order. We have disordered loves. And ultimately, all sins then go back to the greatest commandment.

The great commandment is love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And every single sin we commit ultimately flows out of that. Well, then what do we do? How do you change what you love? Well, to experience God's power, we must comprehend God's love. So what do we do? Well, we do what Paul does. What's Paul doing?

He prays that we might know the love of God. Again, look at verse 18. He prays that we may have the strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. If the apostle Paul thought that it was important for him to pray that for us, don't you think it'd be appropriate for us to pray that for us, right? If Paul saw this as key and critical, then we begin to pray that prayer. And so it's not enough just to try harder and say, Lord, you've got to change my heart. You've got to show me your love. And the interesting thing, too, is he prays that we might have the strength to comprehend that which surpasses knowledge.

That seems contradictory. But what he's saying is the love of God is like an ocean, and you can dive into it, and you begin to know its depths, for you're never going to reach the bottom. And so we begin to pray, Lord, grip my heart with your love. Help me understand the gospel in a much deeper way. So that's the first activity we do. First thing we must do is pray that God would change our hearts, that God would grip us with his love. Secondly, we engage in exploring the love of God. Now, as I mentioned earlier, you know, your heart is addicted to salvation by works. Well, the way we overcome that addiction is by reminding ourselves of the grace of the gospel. Or as some have said, we have to preach the gospel to ourselves every day. And to do that, God has given us means. He's given us worship. It's what we're doing here. It's why every Sunday you hear the gospel at this church, to be reminded of God's love. It's why every Sunday you hear that we confess our sins and we remember that we're forgiven, to be reminded of God's love. So the word, worship, prayer, and the communion of God's people, the relationship with God's people. And so we're to make diligent use of those means that God has given to us in this church. Now, early in my Christian life,

I did all those things. I'd read my Bible. I would pray. I was in accountability groups. All those things. But, and I'm not just saying it didn't help. I think it did help. But I was doing all those things as a religious duty. Like, if I miss my quiet time, God's not going to bless my day today type thing, right? If I, oh, if I read my Bible and pray, maybe God will bless me, and that sort of thing.

[36 : 25] Instead of thinking that I was a child of God already loved by Him. And so I would do those things merely as a duty, and it became just another means of legalistic self-righteousness.

But that's not what the means, we call these means of grace. We turn them into means of works. They're means of grace. And by means of grace, that means they're not means by which we earn the Father's love. They're means by which we remind ourselves that we are loved. We engage in worship and the sacraments and fellowship and prayer to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. And here's how the Christian life is more like a Thanksgiving dinner than a diet.

Instead of focusing in on sin management, which appeals to the flesh, we focus in on the love that the Father has for His children. What a joy, what a delight to remember how much He loves you. We appeal to our heart that God so desperately wants. So God does not call us as Christians to be stoics and deny our passions.

Rather, He's calling us to bring your passion to life by loving that only thing that will satisfy your hungry heart. Larry Crabb told a story about a girl who was in adolescent rehab.

She'd been there for quite some time, and she was going through this rehab program. Well, on this particular Saturday, the parents had not been able to see her for several weeks. On this particular Saturday, the family was welcome to come, and they had a rope in the back, and the family had to sit behind the rope, and all the people in the rehab program were up at the front. And one by one, different ones who were in the rehab program would step to the microphone and tell the truth about things that they had done. And so this young woman went to the microphone, and with much fear, trembling, and great shame, she confessed right there in front of her family and everyone else, how she'd stolen, how she'd been an addict, and actually how she'd even sold her own body as a way to get the drugs that she so desperately wanted.

[38 : 34] As she said these things, her father got up from a seat, and he walked down the aisle, broke through the ropes, and in tears he looked at her, and he said, I don't, when I see you, I don't see a prostitute. I see my beautiful daughter. And in tears she responded, Daddy, I've forgotten the joy of being your little girl. Christian, I think many of us have forgotten the joy of being children of God. You're a child of God. You're loved by Him, and therefore, you can live with a new power because we know the love of God. Let's pray.

Our Father, we do thank you that you are a good and gracious God, that you do not treat us as our sins deserve, but instead you treat us in the way that Christ deserves and what He has earned for us.

We thank you, O Lord, that that is ours through faith alone, in Christ alone, and by grace alone. And so, Lord, we pray that we would live out of the love that you've given to us.

And Father, I pray for those...