

Visiting Pastor John Essig

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Preacher: John Essig

[0 : 0 0] So to be here, and it's already been noted, my name is John Essig. I've been a pastor at Fellowship for like almost 40 years. So it started when I was three, and then it's been a long time.

And so it's wonderful with my new role at Emanuel Christian Academy that I get to be around other churches. I mean, I never get to go to church myself. I'm always there. So it's fun to sometimes go and just sit and be a normal church person, so to say.

But it's also wonderful to come and share with other churches. So I really appreciate the opportunity. We'll get to it. I'm going to do a little bit of an introduction, but we'll get to it. But I'll tell you the verse we're looking at today. It's John 13, verses 34 and 35.

And it's a concentration on the love of God. And you guys have already been singing about that this morning, so that's awesome. Just a few more minutes about myself and how I ended up in my role.

As I mentioned, I've been at Fellowship for a long time, but I've been very involved in the community as well. One of the involvements I've been enjoying is at Emanuel Christian Academy. My son went there from TK, transitional kindergarten, and then 12 more years, so 13 years there.

[1 : 1 0] But before he even went to school, I was on their board as their pastor accountability board president. So he had this board that basically makes sure that the board meetings are going well, that if there's conflicts or interests or things that are happening, they have a spiritual advisory board.

And I've led that board, and Matt Roll has had me on the school board for all those years. And that's where it got me into trouble because I was just minding my own business, and two board members got on the phone and called me and said, John, we're going to lose our superintendent, which I was instrumental in bringing to the school because he's taken a college job as a college president in Murfreesboro, North Carolina.

And so we just wanted to let you know that. And I'm like, oh, gosh, what are we going to do? And I immediately started pacing around my little table in my office, and they said, well, sit down.

I don't know how they knew I was standing up, but they said, sit down. And I'm like, hmm, and so we'd like for you to pray about that job. And my first words out of my mouth was no, because I've been in fellowship for all those years.

You know, I don't have a resume written. I'm not planning on going anywhere. I've planned on being there forever. And enough of that, I was slowing down a little bit. I have a technology business, and I literally had just talked to the other pastor, Grant Edwards, a week prior and said, you know, I just want to back off a little bit of this and augment.

[2 : 3 7] You know, getting close to that 40-year mark. And so I'd already kind of made my plans. And a week later, these guys called me, which, you know, I said naturally no. But then I made the mistake of praying about it.

And as you already figured out, God had other plans. And, you know, it didn't take long or hard, because I dearly loved the school. And before I accepted that role, and officially, I mean, I really kind of jumped in in April, but officially began there in about mid-May.

You might be asking, and if you are, I'm glad, why would you leave something like fellowship where you've been at, and it's still my church.

I still attend there, and I still get to preach there every now and then, which is kind of fun. But why would I leave that to go to Emmanuel? A lot of people have asked me that. And the reason why is the reason I've been a pastor my entire life, and the reason is the same reason Emmanuel exists.

Emmanuel exists to provide a biblical worldview to its students and families. And said differently, you know, Emmanuel exists so that people can experience the love of God and live their lives following Jesus.

[3 : 53] Now, that's why I'm a pastor. And so I look at Emmanuel, and I'm thinking, wow, you know, what an opportunity to pour in deeply the 50 or so staff members and the 295 or so students and their families.

You know, if you haven't figured it out, we pastors are lonely between Sundays because you guys want to visit us once a week or so, right? So we don't get that much exposure. Well, you know, at school, they're locked in with me all day.

They have no choice but to be around, right? So it's just a deeper opportunity for discipleship for me. And I've always been involved with young people. We did the Youth Center. We've done the Loft.

We've done so many things reaching young people at fellowship and in the community. I just saw it as a golden opportunity to help people to know Jesus and to leave a legacy, frankly.

I'm very allergic to religiosity. And I think that could be a danger in a Christian school. You know, you can get caught up with do's and don'ts and all the rules, and you kind of forget the reason you're there.

[5 : 03] And I'm so intense about knowing Jesus and experiencing the love of Christ. I mean, I feel like, you know, this is a great opportunity for me to do that. Emmanuel's mission statement, I'll read it to you.

It says, it is a Christ-centered learning community that exists to educate students of Christian families and prepare them for God's calling. And I like to, like, we call it, we abbreviate Emmanuel, E-C-A.

So E is Emmanuel, right? Christ-centered Emmanuel, right? C is for the Christian community, the discipleship community that it has. And A, being an academic academy, which is where we educate our children to see and to realize a biblical worldview.

Some people that come to Emmanuel, they have mixed motives for coming. Some people come because they think it's safe. And certainly that's an issue in our schools today.

Some people come because they want a great education. Obviously want to provide that. Some people come because their friends go there. You know how bad it is. Well, if they came for those reasons, surprise, we've got a lot more in store for you than that, right?

[6 : 11] It's a lot more important to be there, not just for safety or education or friendship, but we want you to experience God. We want you to understand and look at life through the Bible and then leave a legacy for your children, for your children's children, your children's children's children, because you know how to follow Christ in every area of your life.

So it's not just Bible class, a school with Bible class. We integrate a biblical worldview in every class. It's TK through graduation. And so we talk about the sciences or other topics where you think it may be hard to relate your faith, and it's not hard.

We can bring the Bible into every aspect of life. And beyond that, not just in the school environment, but we instill this in their lives and in their families' lives. So, wow, that's a big, big, tall order.

And like I said, surprise if you came to school for those other reasons. That's fine. We'll deliver those. But the real big blessing is we want you to know and follow Jesus and be able to articulate why you follow Jesus in every domain, every aspect of your life now and here to come.

So, looking at John 13. You're wondering if I was ever going to get there, right? It says, A new command I give you, love one another.

[7 : 33] As I have loved you, you must also love one another. By this, all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

Now, it seems a little, if you stop and think about it, it seems a little crazy that this is Jesus saying a new command.

And you're kind of thinking, shouldn't they already know that one? Probably should have, yeah. But what's new about it is you're loving not on an equational basis.

Not on a, like, well, you love me, I'll love you. And on an exchange basis. But he's telling him that the new part of this is you're going to love people like I love you, like Jesus loves you.

And the love that Christ brings is so radically different than our human love. It's completely different. And we love that way, in a radical way.

[8 : 52] People notice that. Now, everybody knows how to be a friend. You go to a local bar, they have friends there. That's not what he's talking about, just being a friend. We're talking about laying your life down for your friends.

Laying your life down for a stranger. Loving an enemy. Radical kind of love. And when you do that radical kind of love, it's amazing. And we take things for granted.

And we assume things. But why would he have to clarify this? Because it is so radical. That's why. I was at a hospital last night visiting a family who didn't want to be there.

But there they were. And on their screensaver, it has the mission statement of the hospital floating up. And it has their key words. And so, words like integrity and service.

And I kind of chuckled. Because then it says human dignity. I'm like, well, good. I wasn't hoping to get something better than animal dignity. I mean, machine dignity.

[9 : 51] Of course it's human dignity, right? But sometimes you feel like you've got to put that extra qualifier in front. And I think that's what Jesus was doing here. It's like, he's alliterating a little bit saying, a new command.

A new command. So how do we find this capacity to love? How do we find that? We find it in Jesus.

Really, we're nothing more than religious fakes. If we just act like Christians without Jesus. And I'll say this again a little later.

But it's an absurd proposition. But we face this temptation every day. To try to be Christians without Christ. Try to be Christians without Jesus.

And that means when we're caught up in the do's and don'ts, that's what we're doing. Jesus didn't come for a religious order. He came for us to know him.

[10 : 50] To bridge a personal and intimate relationship with the Father. That's something you experience. That's where the radical love comes in. It's in that experience.

There's lots of world religions out there. And they're not, you know, they're not so attractive. But knowing God through the Son of Christ is amazingly attractive.

So I have this quote from John Stanford. I'll try to read it slowly. Maybe twice. I'll let you let it sink into you. He says, Love cannot be willed.

The person who tries to love as an act of will is likely to wind up a persona that looks like he or she is loving. But with the shadow side hidden in the unconscious that negates it.

Love must come from the heart if it is to be genuine. It cannot be feigned. Not even with the best intentions. Love cannot be willed.

[11 : 55] The person who tries to love as an act of will is likely to wind up a persona that looks like he or she is loving. But with the shadow side hidden and the unconscious that negates it.

Love must come from the heart if it is to be genuine. It cannot be feigned. Not even with the best intentions. Do you see where we're coming from there? You can look like you're loving.

Kind of fake it. But we all know when someone really cares. When someone really asks. How are you? And they're standing there waiting for the real answer.

Not, how are you doing? Fine. You know. They may care. But in that moment, they're really not expressing care. They're expressing a courtesy. We all know how to look like Christians.

But are we reflecting the radical love of Jesus in our lives? Are we experiencing it for ourselves? And are we sharing that with others? That's the challenge.

[12 : 55] And it's challenged by our very nature. Our human nature being sinful and fallen. Challenges that. We much prefer religiosity over a relationship. It's a whole lot more responsibility when you have to engage in a relationship.

It's easier to just do the right things. It's simpler. Have you ever thrown a little child up in the air or bounce him on the knee?

And they're like, woohoo, this is great. And then you put him down because you're kind of done. And they go again. And you're like, oh, wee-hee-wee. And a couple times, you're like, I'm kind of done.

Right? Well, that again thing is that in that moment, it comes from first it was done because you're just happy to see him and you're coming out of joy. And the fourth or fifth or eighth time, whenever it happens, now it's just a commitment.

Right? Now I'm just doing the right thing. And that's what happens. We experience Jesus. And we go, wow, this is awesome. Again. Now, the things that led us up to that first experience, when we say again, we don't want to do those things.

[14 : 03] We just want the good feeling again. And in that moment, I think our greatest temptation is to want all the good feelings with God without being intentional in our relationship with him.

I just want a blessing. I just want to feel better. I just want to answer to my prayer. I want to feel close to you. Again. Again. Again. And we negate the thing that initiated that throwing up in the air, which is the relationship, the joy of knowing one another.

We skip that and just want to feel good. Now, this is kind of amazing because Jesus spoke those very words right after he said those things, right after he washed the disciples' feet.

And, you know, you're probably familiar with those passages. But he was showing them pretty radical, crazy love before he said that. Because it's usually the servant's responsibility to wash feet.

You have to remember about feet in those days. Our feet are pretty clean. And we joke about your stinky shoes or whatever. But we weren't walking through streets, which were also used as sewers.

[15 : 08] We weren't walking in sandals, open sandals, where feet were dirty, dark, and brown. We don't have feet like that. And so, in being a good Jew, cleanliness was a very important thing.

And so, to go in someone's house, you had to, like, have your feet washed. And the lowest of the low servants would do that. Jesus washed their feet.

These guys are, you know what I mean, which I think Jesus probably had a little bit of pleasure in this, but he was always spinning their heads, right? He was all making them go, what? Wait a minute. Who is this guy that we're hanging out with here?

He's not supposed to wash our feet. And you know the story. Peter was upset about that, right? And he said, yeah. If I don't do this, then you're not a part of me.

And then he said, well, wash my whole self. See, they're just starting to experience this radical love. So, Jesus wasn't just saying it in theory and concept. He was literally living it out. This Greek word, this word in the Greek for command, this new command, Greek understanding of that is in the strongest tense.

[16 : 21] So, it's not a suggestion. It's not a rule. It's almost like the way we would use an emergency. Like, it's a fire.

You must exit the building. That's a command. It's that kind of tone that Jesus used with his disciples when he said this. A new command.

In other words, you must experience my radical love. Yeah, I'm going to wash your feet. And then you must, if you follow me, you must wash other people's feet.

You must. Because if you know me, experience me, you'll be compelled to do the same. Now, we see this. Jesus said it differently on the Sermon on the Mount.

Right? I mean, he just turned everything upside down in that message. It's amazing. But he said, the cultural norm, then and today, in the Middle East, is love your neighbor, hate your enemy.

[17 : 23] Love your neighbor, hate your enemy. We see that every day in the news. Right? He said then, love your enemies. Right? And pray for them.

Wow. This is the new command he's giving. Again, the people around him are going, wait a minute. Love my enemies?

Pray for them? The Middle Eastern culture lives and dwells in this vengeance repayment. That's their culture. Radical love.

Radical love. Radical love is that you love your enemies. And, you know, you know other things he said. Turn your cheek. You know, someone steals your coat, give them your shirt as well. Jesus was turning this stuff upside down.

More radical than we care to realize. So our interaction with each other. And with our culture around us has to be characterized by love, not hatred.

[18 : 26] Not tolerance. Not acceptance. Not acceptance. Love. Love. Wow. You know, if you're like me, you're thinking, hope I can measure up, you know, and hope I can do that.

But again, fortunately, Jesus will give you that strength and you get that strength when you experience his love. So in a sense, you have to understand the gospel for yourself every day.

Your need for Christ every day. I think every hour, every minute of every day, if I could have my way, I would remember, I would experience God's forgiveness and mercies in my life.

So that I can be that gracious and loving to every person I come in contact with. And they're experiencing the gospel every day.

So it's not a trumped up kind of strength love kind of thing. That you kind of, shh, who are you going to love in this moment?

[19 : 28] You know, it's more like God is loving me so much. How can I not? How can I withhold my love from another person? He's loved. That's how forgiveness flows, right? We forgive not because we want to.

Not because, oh, well, they forgave me, I'll forgive them. No, we forgive because Christ has forgiven us all of our sins. He's forgiven me all of my sins.

How can I not? How can I withhold forgiveness for you or for you? And you're one sin against me when Christ has forgiven my millions of sins. I was having a bad day the other day.

I won't go into all the badness, right? But coming home from the ER, I just wanted to get home. Just wanted to get home. I was tired. Early morning, the next morning, I was not really talking with my wife at that moment.

I was just like, just wanted to get home. I'm going down Upper Valley Pike, right in front of Fellowship, right? And I get, the cop pulls me over, a police officer pulls me over. Ten miles an hour over, you know, from here to that back wall from the 45 minute hour.

[20 : 38] I just started a little soon, right? Believe me, I wanted grace in that moment. Did not get it. You know, it's just hard sometimes to have all those emotions and those feelings that you want to have, even in those moments.

You know, what a radical thing for me at that moment. Instead of just thinking, I must get home. I'm mad at this police officer. Give me grace. What if I just, what if I was just loving to hurt her, you know, but I wasn't.

I was polite, but I wasn't loving, you know. It's hard. It's hard. But that's where we have, that's our calling, right?

That's how we're supposed to live. To know the radical love of Jesus and then to radically love others that way. The Bible does not support hatred. And Jesus did not die for a political party.

Now, I'm not stepping on your toes there. Maybe I am hoping, but. He died for us to have personal relationships with God the Father. So, this plays out in our, with our friendships on Facebook, what we watch on TV, all the social medias, dinner conversations, etc., etc.

[21 : 59] Again, we're going to really radically love others. And we're not experiencing Christ and not sharing that radical love. What are we, what's our narrative?

That's just kind of wasted verbiage being spilled, spewed out on our, on our community and on our friendships. How different our lives would be if every day we fell in love with Jesus.

Again and again and again. How different would it be if that was our primary goal every day?

I'm a to-do person. I love to get things done, right? My primary goal every day is to get my to-do list done. Sometimes I have to write it, rewrite it like eight times a day to make it shorter so that I can get it done.

And sometimes I get so goal-oriented and so driven that I forget what's most important. I think we all deal with that temptation. But our goal really isn't heaven, is it?

[23 : 07] Our goal is not to escape hell, is it? Our goal is Jesus. Jesus is our great prize. Jesus is our great prize.

When you catch Jesus, you've got everything else. Right? When Jesus catches you, you've got everything. Our goal is Jesus, to know him, experience him, bring glory to him.

Abundant life is only found in Jesus. It's found nowhere else. You cannot, you know, we all go to movies, we do things, we take vacations, we relax, we watch TV, we do whatever you do.

And you do experience something in the moment, right? Some kind of pleasure, something you value. But how long does it last? Not very long.

You ever notice they sell new car spray? Because that new car smell doesn't last very long. It's probably toxic anyhow, but you know. I want my car to feel new again.

[24 : 13] Okay, how's that working for you, right? Okay? The world does not provide anything of lasting value to you. Nothing. Nothing.

I mean, if I were to tell you you have five years to live, how different would you be living? If you walked out of this building with that news, you've got five years.

Would you radically change how you live? If so, you should change how you live. I know.

It's easy to say. It's hard to do. But we should live with Jesus as our goal. And the priorities that he would have for us. People talk about not having regret.

And it's not about not having regret. It's about doing God's will in your life. Right? And having your priorities straight. Having God's priorities for your life. So you can't do God's will without a biblical perspective.

[25 : 18] A biblical worldview. A biblical worldview. Which is, again, why I'm at Emmanuel. And why I stand in front of you today. To challenge you to have a biblical worldview. And I don't mean a myopic one that's this big.

But I mean an expansive worldview. When you look at the world, you look at it through the Bible. The Bible gives us answers for why there's pain and suffering. None of the other religions give you that.

Right? The Bible gives you an answer to how to act in every situation. Right? So our worldview changes our behavior.

So if you don't have the correct worldview, you don't end up following. I'm not saying that correctly. But you end up not following God's will. Because you didn't have his perspective.

Which is the biblical perspective. I have some good friends. Her names are Kim and Carol Ober. They don't live too far from here. I live over by Lawrenceville. We said, let's have ice cream a couple Fridays ago.

[26 : 18] And so we went to, we met at the Cone Corner. Well, we typically eat there outside. Right? But my house, it was like today. You know, kind of dreary and rainy.

And ugh. You know. And so we thought, well, bring a coat. Maybe even go inside. It's so cold in there. We need a coat either way. I put on jeans. My wife brought a coat.

We show up. Meet the over. We're standing in the parking lot with t-shirts and shorts. I laugh at them. They laugh at me. I'm like, what are you doing? What are you doing? Well, they only live, you know, five miles away. But their house, it was sunny and warm and pleasant.

I don't get this weather thing. But you see, my weather worldview was eeyore, dark and gloomy, right? And their weather worldview was sunny and warm.

And that view changed how they behaved. They wore shorts and t-shirts and we wore jeans and brought a jacket. Because that was how I was interpreting my world.

[27 : 21] Only one of those was true. Only one of those was true, right? And so as we understand our world through the Bible, which is true, we will come out with the right behavior.

We'll bring the right, put on the right attire. And we'll be prepared to interact with our community around us with the right words, with the right understanding. And that's a biblical worldview.

And that's how significant it is and how important it is. Because our children today, our students that I interact with and our families are just getting, we're losing, by and large, we're losing the culture war.

And people think they're acting biblically. But they're really not. And so the legacy, the older you get, the wiser you get.

And the older you get, you understand how important those small decisions are in someone's life. Grandparents, I think, get it best. Grandparents are very supportive of our students at Emanuel.

[28 : 24] Because a lot of times they're thinking, my children don't get it. But I'm going to make sure my children's children get it. Okay? My children are thinking, oh, it's okay to do this or that.

It's not a big deal. But the grandparents go, oh, no. You start down that road. I know where that's going to lead you. And so I have a lot of grandparents that stop out and say, hey, I'm glad you're here.

I want to make sure Susie or Johnny is able to come here because their parents may or may not get it. But I get it. That's because there's wisdom in those years. You look back and you realize just a little decision at this point in life, a little decision at that point in life.

It may be only one degree off now. But you add 20 years to that. And you're way off base here or there. And that's what a biblical worldview will do for you.

So you will make the right decisions and stay on course and be in God's will. I'm so grateful for Marvin. He's been a wonderful guy that has held that, championed that cause for so many years, teaching the Bible, understanding the Bible, learning the Bible.

[29 : 32] That's so important to fulfilling God's will for your life and encourage others around it. So I said this before.

I'll say it again. And as crazy as it sounds, a lot of people try to be a Christian without Jesus. And when you do that, you're just falling into what I call religion.

Do's and don'ts. People say sometimes, oh, somebody fell in sin. And they say about them or about themselves. They'll say, I'll be able to blow my witness.

And I say, yeah, you've disappointed the Lord. But your witness isn't doing all the right things. Your witness is that God loves you even when you don't do the right things.

Your witness is you have a Savior. Your witness is Jesus. Not you. That's your witness. Who of you, when a young child, and we are young children, we're knee-highs to God.

[30 : 52] Sometimes we get ourselves kind of grown up, see ourselves as willful teenagers or adults. We're not peers with God. We're little children to God, which is awesome. You want that.

But when you see a young child lost or hurting, going the wrong way, what do you do? You pursue them. You reach out to them.

You draw near to them. How can I help you? Let me console you. Let me pray for you. Let me guide you. Let me bounce you on my knee.

We do that for young children, right? And that's the way it is with our Lord. When we young children are struggling, He's not going to run away from you and say, get your stuff together.

And then I'll come over and hang out with you. He's like, you're hurting. Come here. And He gets down, in our little kid level, and He looks us in the eye and He hangs out with us.

[31 : 57] And He lifts us up and encourages us. That's our Father. That's the love of Christ coming to us.

So we blow our witness. We blow our witness by running away from God when we sin, hiding behind curtains like our parents can't see us. We do little things with God.

When we punish ourselves, we think, well, that's, I'm being a good Christian, you know, I'm giving myself a time out. When I was a very young Christian, I'd sinned and then I, and then I thought I had to do like three days of time out.

Because that's how long, crazy things you think, right? That's how long Jesus was in the grave. So I needed to have three days. What was I thinking? I don't know. Pastor Grant pulled me aside and said, John, that's not from the Bible.

I'm like, oh, okay. You know, it's kind of, we do that to ourselves, right? What happened in the garden? When Adam found out that they, when he'd sinned, they hid, right?

[33 : 04] They hid from God. And God says to them, who told you you were naked? You know, what are you doing? What's all this self-awareness all of a sudden? Come out.

Come out. I'm hyped. You can't hype for me. We all know, we see children hide behind a pencil. A cat hide behind us. A weed, you know, like we can see you, okay?

Just because your eyes are blocked doesn't mean we can't see you. God sees you. He loves you and he pursues you anyhow. Our witness is the love of Christ. The 2016 Pew Research Center states that most of those under 35 years of age who have left the church because they no longer believe it was true.

35 and younger, they call these nuns. N-O-N-E-S. Nuns. No associate.

None. When he says, what religious affiliation do you have? None. So these are the nuns, right? A lot of studies have been going on with this age group because that age and under are leaving the church in very alarming numbers.

[34 : 14] So, I'm reading this article and it says that most of them are, when asked, they don't believe, they don't believe, many said their views about God had evolved and some reported having a crisis of faith.

These are the questions that they asked. Learning about evolution, these are the crossroads, I'm sorry, when they decided what they believed was no longer true. Learning about evolution when they went away to college is a classic one.

Religion is an opiate for the people. Rational thought makes religion go out the window. Lack of sort of scientific, any sort of scientific or specific evidence of a creator.

I just realized somewhere along the line that I didn't believe it. I'm doing a lot more learning and studying and kind of making decisions myself rather than listening to someone else. These are statements from the 35 and hundreds.

They're just telling you why. Now, the article I was reading was saying, the problem is we're not giving them good evidence and good rational reasons. We're not giving them a good argument. Probably true to some extent.

[35 : 20] Yes, we of the church have failed them in not giving them the proper tools to interact with their society. Yes. But I'll say more than that, just John Essex's opinion, what they're lacking is an experience with Christ.

That's what they're lacking. What they've done is they've found the religion is empty. Do's and don'ts really don't do much for me. If they experience God through an answer prayer, through prayer, through worship, through someone radically loving them, you know what?

You can say what you want, but I know, I know Jesus. I know Jesus. So what kind of messages are we giving?

What really is grounding you in your faith? I know for me, I think about it from time to time. You know, would I have the strength to surrender my life to Christ?

Christ? What if he called me to be martyred? Would I say yes? Or would I deny Christ? I'll tell you what would make me say yes.

[36 : 35] What makes me say yes is I know God loves me. I know he's real. He's not just an intellectual argument. He's not a moral code.

I'm not just being in tradition. I'm not doing what I've just told you to do. I know Jesus. By his grace and mercies, I know him.

And I can't look someone in the eye and say, I don't know. Because he's personal to me. If I had to die for the Lord, it's going to be that reason.

I know him to be true. I know him through his word. I know him through personal experience, that personal relationship with Jesus. I could never deny Christ because of that experience.

So my challenge for you today is to have that experience. To have that biblical worldview. To understand the radical love of Jesus. This new command.

[37 : 40] This new command. I mean, just look back to that verse again. We haven't been there recently. Let's slide back to my text here.

New command I give you. Love one another. As I have loved you, you must love one another. He's just talking about the foot washing, right?

Love one another. Don't just love me, but love one another. But love as I have loved you. So receive the love of Christ Christ. And then love one another. This is a new command.

And by this, you will know, all men will know that you are my disciples. if you love one another. We didn't go wide, but we went deep in those few verses today.

I want to challenge you to pray with me. I'm going to challenge you to pray with me for a few minutes here. I really believe in the power of prayer.

[38 : 48] That God changes lives as we pray. And I love praying with you. So we're going to pray. I'm going to ask that God, we experience God right now in those prayers, right?

We'll do some business with the Lord and offload our cares to Him. The really cool thing about having a relationship with Jesus is, yes, there's a yoke, but there's no burdens.

The stupid thing about our human nature is we love carrying around burdens and we want to shirk the yoke, all right? We want to do just the opposite. I don't want to be responsible, but I do want to be burdened and stressed out and worried and anxious.

I do want to carry those things. And we need to reverse that order. Say, Lord, I'll follow you. I'll take my yoke on, but you're going to carry all my burdens. What did Jesus say right before He went up to heaven?

He gave us what we call the Great Commission, right? He told them to go and make disciples. Got that. And what did He say? The very last thing that He said, I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.

[39 : 56] Wow. I have a good friend who's a crazy Ohio State fan, right? And God called him to be a pastor in Michigan.

Amen. He said, yeah, there's Judea, there's Galilee, and then there's the ends of the earth. Michigan is the ends of the earth, so I'm going to the ends of the earth, right?

He said, fortunately, Jesus promised to be with me. Of course, He's kind of joking, but He really will. He'll go to wherever your end is when you've lost your last ounce of strength, when you're facing the loss of a loved one, when a police officer pulls you over and you just want to be home.

He will be with you. He will be with you. And He'll be with you right here in this moment. He'll be with you when you leave. He's there with you. It's not flattering to be called a sheep.

Sheep are anxious, worrying, high maintenance. They're crazy to raise, right? But Jesus loves us. We are His sheep and His flock and He cares deeply for you.

[41 : 04] and He knows you intimately. And you can't hide from Him. So if you would, just bow your heads and let me pray with us. And then I'll field some questions and we'll go from there.

Jesus, we thank You for loving us. Your Word tells us that when two or three gather in Your name, You are there with us.

So we acknowledge that You're here with us. You inhabit the praise of Your people. We've given You praise this morning. We know You're in that praise. We know that You've promised to be with us even to the end of the age.

In other words, there's no point where You abandon us. So we know You're right here. And Lord, there's many of us here today who carry burdens, carry stress, worry, anxiety, fear.

And some would say legitimately because these are big things. But they're still all Yours to be carrying, not ours. So as we pray, Lord, You lift our burdens.

[42 : 32] You draw us closer to You. When these moments of silence, will You do business with us?

We're little kids hiding behind the curtain. You see us. Will You come to us right now? Get on Your knees and look us in the eye and take our hands and bring us forward.

Can you identify a few things that you need to surrender to the Lord right now? Again, maybe it's a concern for a loved one, maybe. It's your marriage, maybe it's finances, maybe it's your health, maybe it's a broken relationship, a son, granddaughter.

We so love You, Jesus. We're so grateful that You love us. Lord, lift our burdens.

help us, Lord, to see You and action around us. Lord, make Your Word come alive with us.

[44 : 18] Maybe some of us here today that just are kind of bored with their Bible study if we're really honest. Will You make that study alive again? There's some of us here, if we're really honest, who don't have much of a prayer life.

Will You open a conversation with us, Lord? A long one, a deep one, a passionate one. Lord, there's some of us here, like it might be some of us here that are pretending kind of to be Christian, really not surrendered.

And in these moments, Lord, will You receive our surrender. Thank You, Lord.

We ask that You give us Your peace now and Your joy. Help us to see Your perspective wherever we go, wherever we travel, with whomever we engage. May we love radically.

May we experience Your radical love. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

[45 : 39] Thanks for praying with me. It's good stuff. We were praying like that in the cafeteria of the church just Friday. So we've been having what we call spiritual emphasis week at the church.

I mean, I got church in my head at school. So we had a whole week of chapels is what we had. And so we did a couple things kind of different than we've done in the past.

And so we, the first day, it was a short week. So Tuesday, we just had sort of preaching time, times in the word. And Tuesday, I mean Wednesday, we had a worship set.

So just lots of praise and singing. Thursday, we went, started in the cafeteria and then I gave them a challenge to kind of be alone with the Lord.

And this is hard for kids. It's hard for adults too. But we want to be on our phone or device or something, right? So we're going to walk from Emmanuel all the way over to First Christian.

[46 : 37] And you get to the sanctuary, First Christian, you're going to be, don't walk with, don't walk with your friend, don't talk. So you can pray out loud if you want to whisper or pray silently.

And, well, it was cool. It did start sprinkling, surprise, right? The way the weather is. And so it was kind of rain drizzling on us as we walked over. We got in the sanctuary and we prayed.

And we prayed. And we talked about where their hearts might be divided, what's competing for their affections, right? And we walked back. And we sat in the cafeteria again and we closed the song and went our way.

And then Friday we broke into small groups. So we had everybody praying for everybody. We started off with the teachers praying for the admin team and then the teachers. Then we had students come up and pray for their teachers.

And then we had the teachers turn around and pray for those students. And then we had students praying with each other. And so it was like 45 minutes of prayer and it didn't seem like the five.

[47 : 39] You know, everybody enjoyed it. They had a lot of fun. So we've been doing some things like that recently. We've got a couple other things that are coming up. Grandparents Day is coming up Friday. I say February.

September 28th. So you guys are always welcome. If you have a grandchild or a friend, we'd love having you there if you're a grandparent. So there's a lot been happening at school.

Just to kind of get you into the mindset there, I've shared a few things with you. Does anybody have any questions related to the message or anything at school? Anything, right?

Anybody? I guess you guys do this pretty well. You do Q&A.; According to Marv, you do. So I'll do some Q&A; with you if you have any. Shoot. Ah, okay.

I like that verse. Is it on? The verse before that, the context of why he said this, and that's the fact that I'm leaving.

[48 : 41] Yeah. And I'm not sure that you apostles are ready. Yeah. If you want to be my disciples, and for them to know that you're my disciples and love sacrificially like I love you.

And that's how people will know. Yeah. Yeah. The disciples, I don't think, had it figured out, really. Even after he was ascended to heaven, they were still scratching their head, really, until the day of Pentecost, right?

Then Peter got up and preached. I mean, something he got a hold of and they figured it out. It's amazing to me how little the disciples, how they didn't fully understand until we do.

Now we look back at the Bible. Jesus was trying to prepare them, even in this situation, this setting. Yeah. Any other questions? That's good. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. How many calories in a cookie? Too many.

[49 : 47] Yes, that's the answer. So, you know, things that are on the radar at school, and if you have questions, raise your hand. We're changing a few things that I'm bringing to the table, and really, you know, like I said, I didn't see myself doing this, fulfilling this role, but being on the school board for 15 years, I had a long list of things I wanted to do, so.

First thing I did is I wrote a nine-page outline of where we're going to be in the next year and make sure the board was okay with that, and they go, where'd that come from?

I said, I was just resting in my head over the last 15 years. It took me about an hour and a half to write it out because there's so many things we want to do, so one of the things we're doing is we're not going to raise money for the school anymore, and they're like, what?

I'm like, no, we're going to raise money for students, and so we have a fund called the Way to Go Fund, you know, Proverbs 22, raise up your children in the Way to Go, right, so it's the Way to Go, but also whenever somebody donates to the fund, we go, Way to Go, so it's cool, Way to Go Fund, and so those are \$1,200, I'll take it, just a second, those are \$1,200, \$100 a month, \$1,200, so every student will get one, two, or three scholarships, Way to Go Funds, because instead of raising for the money for the school and the lights and the building, we want to bless students, and a lot of children would be at Emanuel if they felt like they could afford it, and so we're going to make it affordable to the Way to Go Funds, so it's just one of the things, got a question in the back.

John, it's nice to pray for other people, I haven't been able to pray for Pelosi or, you know, people like that, I can't, and I just want to know, can you really do that?

[51 : 44] Do you really pray for them people? I do. Do you? But I don't find it easy, you know, I just share with you, and it's not, because people you feel like are opposed to you and opposed to our faith and our country, you want to, you want to sock it to them, right?

Yeah, right. But Jesus was really clear to pray for our leaders and to pray for our enemies, and so, I guess, it depends on what you pray, right?

Some people say, I pray for them every day, that God will take them out, you know, I'm like, well, not, probably not what he's going after there, you know, but, you know, I just pray they know Christ.

I mean, really, what else can you, what better prayer can you pray that people experience Jesus? I have a friend who, he's in insurance business, health insurance, his name's Michael Barrett, his business is in Cleveland, but he's the largest seller of Anthem, United, and Medical Mutual in the state of Ohio.

He's got a really unique program for health insurance. So unique, when they were writing Obamacare, they invited him to D.C., they wanted to hear about his, his program.

[53 : 00] So, if you remember, when that was going on, they had a big snowstorm, and they got locked in the rooms for like three or four days. Mike Barrett was locked in the room with Pelosi and Reid for three days.

Changed his life. So, he came home, much more committed to Jesus than he was when he went. Because, he said, Washington is just about money and power.

It was not about health insurance or health care. So, when he told me that story, I committed to praying for them. Because they need to experience Jesus.

Because we all do. That's a great question. I like the reality of that. That's putting it straight forward. Do you have another question?

There's one. Straight across. Don't say the wrong thing.

[54 : 06] I think what I want to say is when Christ is in you and you have anger and bitterness towards these political people, he still convicts you because he loves them.

you're angry as the dickens at them. But, when you do get angry and what you're really angry at is the enemy. But, we start saying that, well, okay, I'm not going to go there.

What I'm trying to say is we can only love people because Christ is in us. and if we're doing that thing you talked about, the rule thing that we're doing it because we have to because we're Christians, we're not really going to love them.

But, when Christ is in us, he leads us to love them. We can't get away from it. And, love is not always just being kind and good and all that, but it is his love.

And, I was at a funeral the other day and there was someone there that I was really mad at and afterwards we all got together and this person that really rubs me the wrong way started talking about his daddy and his mother when they died and how they all sat around and I just sat there looking at him and I saw his humanity and I saw him as God saw him.

[55 : 35] You know, I don't see these politicians on a day-to-day basis. Right. but they're humans and we've accepted the truth.

We know God and I don't know if some of them may and they just don't act like it but I'm getting way off. I just want to say Christ in us and can I say one more thing?

This is not a criticism of you. It's something that always bothers me when I hear preachers say when two or three are gathered together he is with us and I always just want to go well he's in us he's not with us he's in us and he is here with us because he's in us and I don't say that to you as a criticism I just say it as something that always bothers me when I hear people say that and I know you know it and that verse is true was true then but now that Christ is in heaven heaven sitting at the right of the father and God gave us his Holy Spirit Christ in us our hope of glory so we're together and he's with us but he's in us and there you go and thank you for your message everything you said today was wonderful and I needed to hear every word you said thanks yeah I think that what the scripture is saying about that is yeah you're absolutely true he's in us but there's a dynamic when we get together so he's among us too right he's doing something so I think the thing you want to watch is when you gather there's something that can happen in this gathering and so you know it kind of disappoints me sometimes

Christians get together and they go to a ball game or something and then like did the Lord say anything to you guys would you encourage each other and well no we're just watching a ball game like no you can gather anywhere in the name of Christ and Christ will do something in your lives because you're together there's a dynamic there that who should always watch for look for what God's doing among us but you're right he's with us in us and that would carry both those dynamics very good any other questions or thoughts I appreciate you sharing I like the openness and transparency it's good so my brother-in-law went to counseling one time my wife lost my brother too lost her mother and father very close to one another just a couple months apart both very unexpected and young in the mid-60s and so he went to a counselor so how'd it go?

well I think he lost I'm like what do you mean? well we just stared at each other and he talked first I'm like how did that help you?

[58 : 28] it's just stare contest you know sometimes I think when we have openness or these kind of Q&A's sometimes we just stare at each other waiting for somebody to go first right but we benefit when we go ahead and articulate the question and say the thoughts anyhow right so I'll be quiet a moment and if nobody else wants to go or share anything I'll close this in prayer okay will you join me as we pray one more time Jesus we thank you for being here among us and in us as we've already articulated we thank you that your word's alive help us walk out differently today not just for differences sake but for your kingdom's sake may we give you glory and honor in all things not just what we do but what we think how we how we believe Lord how we feel how we treat others on the inside help us to love even our enemies even our enemies

Lord may we have radical love in our hearts because you are in our hearts we thank you and we pray in Jesus name Amen it's wonderful to be here with you guys today so hopefully Marv will go on on vacation again and come back and come back