

Putting it all Together

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[0:00] So I got up here this morning, just walked up, was getting ready to have you sit down and realized, oh, I don't have my Bible or my notes.

So I had to go back down. Now I'm back. Now I'm ready. So now if you guys could all get seated, we will get going forward. I'm going to talk a little bit this morning about Pastor John and Pastor Tim and myself and a little bit of what we do and why we do it and where we're headed.

And one of the things that I really want to emphasize is a verse in Hebrews has become really important to us. This is Hebrews 13, 17. But of course, the thing that really stands out is that we keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account.

That's a very heavy, it's a joyous burden, but it's still a burden. To realize that I will account to God, not only for myself and for my family, but for how we conduct ourselves as a people of God, as a family of God.

And so that is a topic and conversation that Tim and John and I have had specifically looking at that passage. What does it mean to be accountable? What are we accountable for? And it's a theme that kind of runs through our minds every time we meet.

[1:38] We're thinking about, what are we accountable for? What is God going to expect of us? We've learned in the process of studying this and talking about it, that there's really four things that are very clear that the Bible, just categories, that the Bible expects us as the church pastors to keep in mind.

One is the ministry of the word and prayer. You see that in Acts chapter 6. The early church was growing like gangbusters, that well over 3,000 or 4,000 people, and they had a group of widows that were not being adequately served.

And so, of course, the complaints were coming to the apostles, and they just realized we can't do it all. There's only 12 of us, and we just don't have what it takes.

So what they did is they appointed the deacons, and they specifically appointed the deacons to free up the apostles to focus on the word of God, the ministry of the word of God, and for prayer.

So that's one of the things that we have to keep in front of us. The next is to protect the church from false doctrine. We're going to come back to this passage, but in Acts chapter 20, Paul is saying his farewell to the elders of Ephesus.

[2:52] And he tells them, your job is to protect the flock. And then later, Timothy was sent to Ephesus to help that growing church there appoint elders and get their organization right.

And part of what Paul told Timothy was, you need to teach this church to protect it from false doctrine, because we're always subject to attack from the outside or even attack from within as we're trying to understand the Bible.

We need to be protected from false doctrine so we can focus on what's right. So we're responsible for the ministry of the word of prayer to protect the church from false doctrine. We're responsible to shepherd the sheep.

We're all sheep. Sheep need constant attention. We have families in need. We have families in crisis. We have ongoing things that are always happening within our body.

Spiritual needs, emotional, relational needs, certainly physical needs. And now while the pastors aren't responsible to necessarily be at every bedside or every home, there's only so much we can do, so many hours in a week.

[3:56] But we're responsible before God to make sure that we are structured in a way that these things can be done well. That's a

responsibility we take very seriously. And then lastly is to lead the church, to look ahead to the future.

Where are we going as Tri-State Community Church? How are we going to execute this mission that we've adopted? What is our vision for our future? We'll be talking about that as part of the All-Church meeting at the end of next month.

The family meeting is what's our vision? And God puts it on us as pastors to keep that going, to keep focus on that. So these are things that shape our agenda every time we meet.

And just so you know, we're busy. John and Tim and I meet every Thursday for lunch. And some of it's just family stuff and building our friendships.

But every week, we each have something we got to talk about that's immediate. And then once a month, we get together for several hours and we're looking at this next meeting. We're going to look at those surveys that many of you filled out and look ahead to what is our plan?

[5:02] What are we doing as a church? Primarily in these four areas. We take these things very seriously. We take them seriously because we love the Lord.

We feel His call on our lives. And we love you. We want you to know that you're loved. And as we're serving you in this capacity, we want that love to be clear.

But there's something very interesting that we're going to look at this morning. Turn in your Bibles to Revelation chapter 2, just so you've got it.

We're not going to go there quite yet. But the Church of Ephesus is a cautionary tale. Because they did everything right and got it terribly wrong.

And we're going to look at that and think about it. So get in your Bibles to Ephesians, or Ephesians, Revelation chapter 2, and then listen. So we're going to talk about the Church of Ephesus.

[6:03] So, Eliana, give me the map, if you would, my dear. So, this is a map of Paul's journeys in Acts chapters 19 and 20.

By the way, there's this website, freebibleimages.org. It's got all these maps. They're really well done. I fall in love with this website. But that giant pointer, like you see on Google Maps, points to the city of Ephesus.

And if you look really close, you'll see that Ephesus is right on the shore of the Mediterranean.

Ephesus was in a strategic place. It says that in Acts, while Paul was there, he ended up being there for more than two years, that the gospel spread all the way up into Asia.

That that was the place that it started. The church in Ephesus was growing at a great pace. It was in a very, very strategic location. And so, God had a plan to put a church there so the gospel could spread inland and go from there.

So, in Acts chapter 19, don't turn there. I'm just going to give you an overview. In Acts chapter 19, Paul came into Ephesus, and he discovered there were 12 people who had made a profession for Christ. That's what they thought.

[7:18] But as he talked to them, he realized they didn't actually understand the gospel. They had been baptized into John's baptism, which was a baptism of repentance. John the Baptist, you'll remember, before Jesus came onto the scene, was preaching this baptism of repentance.

What you're doing is wrong. You're headed in the wrong direction. You need to turn. But John's baptism went all the way to, Okay, that's bad, but what's next?

John didn't tell them. Jesus did. And so, these people in Ephesus, there's about a dozen men, had been baptized into John's baptism, and they were in this limbo place.

Well, where do we go from here? Well, God, because he's God, sent Paul, and Paul had the opportunity to share the gospel with them. He was starting out in the synagogue, which was his regular practice.

He explained the rest of the gospel, that Jesus died on the cross for your sins, and that when you put your trust in him, when you receive what he did on your behalf, then you're saved.

[8:24] You're a new person in Christ. The Holy Spirit comes to live in you. And so, these dozen men were baptized, and the Holy Spirit did come upon them. It says that they prophesied, they spoke in tongues, and they very clearly demonstrated that a new life had come upon them.

And so, that was the beginning of the church of Ephesus. Now, if you're familiar with the book of Acts, you know that Paul and the other apostles, their habit was to go into a synagogue, start to teach the gospel, and then the Jewish leaders would say, Oh, no, Jesus wasn't the Messiah. We don't like him. We don't like you. And conflict arose, and out they go. That's what happened in Ephesus. Three months in, Paul says, I've had enough. I'm out. So, he goes to the school of Tyrannus, which was basically a public space, and he starts a new church with the original 12 that he had baptized, and then others that were coming to Christ, and the church really began to flourish.

Paul ended up teaching there for two years. Acts 19 says, This took place for two years so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of God. Both Jews and Greeks.

So, the gospel is spreading into the world. Very important to keep in mind. So, we see this growing body in Ephesus. You with me so far?

[9:49] Well, it's becoming so powerful, such a force of good, that it's affecting the silver trade. There's a sportsmith by the name of Demetrius who made his money by making idols, because Ephesus was the city of Artemis, one of the Roman goddesses.

And so, Demetrius liked to make these idols and sell them at a profit. But the gospel was spreading to such a degree that Demetrius was losing money.

He didn't like that. Of course, he didn't go to the people and say, Hey, these people are costing me money. No, he made it a religious argument. This Paul is dishonoring and discrediting the good name of Artemis of the Ephesians.

He is distracting people from pursuing our goddess to pursue this one God who came as a person in the form of Jesus. And he gathers everybody together.

There's a riot. It's a big mess, which often happened as the gospel came into an area. The town clerk came in just before Paul was going to go in to speak to the crowd, because he didn't want to lose an opportunity.

[11:01] The town clerk stood up and said, Hey, what are you people doing? Most of them didn't even know why they were there. They just figured, Hey, here, there's a crowd. There's a lot of energy. Maybe there's free food.

Let's see what happens. Just like anything, you know, you see something going on and a crowd gathers. Well, this huge crowd gathered. The town clerk says, Look, this is enough. If you've got a problem, Demetrius, with Paul, take him to court.

But other than that, this crowd needs to be dispersed before the authorities come in and disperse you violently. So Paul never gets a chance to speak. The crowd disperses. And then Paul goes on with his travels.

It says he went further into the inland from there. But fast forward, Paul ends up going to Jerusalem. He gets imprisoned. Waits for over two years for some sort of a sentence. It finally appeals to Caesar. He's going to be sent up to Rome.

[12:07] While he's in Rome, he writes the prison epistles. The prison epistles, we talked about this a couple weeks ago, are Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon.

The three longer books. Philemon was a personal letter. But Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians have a lot in common. And they really, they deal with specific issues at each of those individual churches.

But they also complement each other and they build each other well. So it's good to look at them together. I skipped a step that's very important.

And along the way, Paul had traveled. He left. He came back. He went to a town to the south of Ephesus. He summoned the Ephesian elders and gave them his farewell.

This is before he went to Jerusalem. He told them, you're not going to see me again. Not in this life. And he gives them a charge. We're going to talk about that again here in a few minutes. This is in Acts chapter 20.

[13:05] And then he goes on to his imprisonment. There's a question. We're going to unpack this here in a minute. We see a church that started with a dozen people.

They moved to the school of Tyrannus. They experienced enormous growth. To the point they're affecting the church, the culture of the city in which they find themselves. They become ascending body.

People are going out all over Asia with the gospel. And then you're going to see in a few minutes as we turn to this passage in Revelation that something went drastically wrong.

And it's very important for us to think about this as a church that's really trying to focus on our mission and values so that we don't make the same mistake. Let's pray together and then we're going to read Revelation chapter 2.

God, thank you that we don't have to figure any of this stuff out on our own. That, Lord Jesus, when you were about to leave, you told the disciples, I'm not leaving you as orphans.

[14:14] It's actually good for you that I leave because I'm going to send the Holy Spirit. And that, Lord, now we know that when we've come to faith in Christ, we have the Holy Spirit living within us to teach us, to reveal your truth to us, to help us to understand.

But, Lord, we still have to listen. We still have to obey. And so, God, I pray that as we talk about what went wrong at Ephesus over the course of time, that we would guard ourselves from making the same mistake as a church here.

And we also pray, God, that you would use Tri-State just like you use the Ephesian church. That we would carry the gospel everywhere we go. People would come to Christ because they hear the good news from members of this church.

And they see it modeled by members of this church. God, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So, Revelation chapter 2, we're going to read verses 1 through 7. A little context.

Jesus, Jesus, John is an old man by this point. He was put in exile on the island of Patmos. And while he's there, he has a vision.

[15:23] Jesus appears to him. And in this portion of John's vision, he receives the words of Jesus to the seven major churches of Asia.

And the first one that's addressed is the church of Ephesus that we've been talking about. To the angel of the church in Ephesus write, The one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this, That's Jesus.

This is Jesus, the king, talking to the church. I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance and that you cannot tolerate evil men. And you put to the test those who call themselves apostles and they are not.

And you found them to be false. And you have perseverance and have endured for my name's sake and have not grown weary. If you were to read the words of the other six churches in the next chapter and a half, one of the things you'll find is that the highest praise goes to the church at Ephesus.

Jesus said to them, You guys are doing really well. I am very happy with this. And actually, I'm not going to unpack it because of time, but the four things, the four major topics that I told you, John and Tim and I, keep at the front of our minds, all of those are happening in Ephesus.

[16:57] The word is being taught. False doctrine is being protected against. The people are being cared for and the church is being led.

The Ephesian elders were well-trained, they were well-equipped, they were doing what they were supposed to. But then you get to verse four. Oh, you got right there.

Never mind. I should look. Verse four, but I have this against you. We don't want to hear those words from the Lord Jesus, ever. This is why it's important to guard ourselves, to be aware.

We don't want to hear these words. But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

Therefore, remember from where you have fallen and repent and do the deeds you did at first or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place unless you repent.

Yet this you do have that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.

[18:20] So I told you a minute ago that the highest praise went to the church of Ephesus. The church of Ephesus is the only one that was threatened with removal. The other churches that fall under some sort of judgment because they're not measuring up, the activity that Jesus warns them will happen if they don't change is directed at specific groups

within the church.

But at Ephesus, Ephesus, and only Ephesus, Jesus said to them, if you do not repent, if you don't go back to your first love, I am going to remove you.

They're subject to the harshest punishment if they don't repent. And what did they do wrong? They forgot their first love. That's the indictment.

You've forgotten your first love. So what happened? What happened from Acts chapter 19 and 20 and then we read the prison epistles apparently looks like a thriving church and then you look at 1 Timothy.

Timothy was sent specifically to Ephesus to appoint and train elders. what went wrong between then and when Jesus appeared to John?

[19:47] I want to pause and remind you of the work that we've been doing over the last several weeks. We've been talking about the tri-state mission values. We exist to glorify God.

Walking closely with Him, striving together to become more like Jesus every day. That statement was lifted right out of Ephesians 4.

Paul's letter to this church that thrived that the wheels saw off. We need to be careful brothers and sisters that we don't make the same mistakes.

Because this mission statement is true, it's good, it's biblical. But if we forget our first love, it becomes empty.

Do you remember what Paul wrote to the Corinthian church? I'm going to summarize the first three verses. If I do all kinds of great stuff and have an eloquent voice and reach out to the lost and do all this great stuff but I don't love, it doesn't matter.

[20:59] It doesn't matter. It's empty. So what happened in Ephesus? That they still had a good mission statement but they heard those words, I have this against you.

First of all, I think they got what's called mission creep. You've probably all seen this in one way, shape, or form. It happens in the military. I've seen it happen in church contexts. I've seen it happen at work where you've got a job to do.

I am famous for this, by the way. You've got a job to do. So for instance, when I was a youth pastor, my job was to reach and disciple teenagers.

Well, our youth group would be a lot better if the Sunday school was under my purview, the children's Sunday school. So all of a sudden, my job expanded from 5th through 12th grade to birth through 12th grade.

You know, I worked through proxies, but I was running the show all of a sudden preschool to 12th. Mission creep. Then I realized I need more help, so I need to find adults who can contribute, but the church I was at at the time, people didn't know their Bibles very well, so soon I'm dabbling in adult Sunday school and teaching adults how to study their Bibles and having more influence there.

[22:28] And then you get the idea. All of a sudden, the youth pastor, now this all happened at a time when that particular church didn't have a senior pastor, so there was nobody to hit the brakes. And by the time our new senior pastor came on board, we had the biggest youth group in Kalamazoo, Michigan, because I turned the church into a youth group.

All the adults worked for the youth group, all the kids were involved, and we hired a new worship director, and everybody was accounted for in my ministry.

mission creep. We got distracted as a church, and that was happening in Ephesus. They got so focused on this good mission statement that they lost their way, they lost track of what they were actually supposed to be doing.

love. They substituted tangibles for intangibles. Now, what do I mean by that? Love is kind of nebulous. How do you measure love? I don't know.

You can't take a survey. Do you feel love today? Why or why not? So it's easier to look at how many people do we have in Sunday school this year versus last year, or how many people were at this month's potluck versus last month's potluck, or how many seats in the people in the pews?

[23:44] You get the idea we're looking at things that we can check boxes and say, this is how we're seeing growth. One of the things that's true of the American church, this comes up all the time, are the three B's.

This is how churches tend to measure their success. Building budgets and butts. Do we have a growing building? Do we have a growing budget? Do we have more butts and seats? God must be blessing. That's what the Ephesian elders thought. Look at all that we're doing, and yet they lost their way. So they shifted from focusing on getting to know relational people well enough to be able to evaluate how we were doing and loving each other, and got more involved in building butts and budgets.

And then they allowed their love to grow cold. Because they became so task-focused that they lost track of being people-focused.

one of the things we talk about as we meet with the different people who lead teams, so Carol leading the Sunday school or Jim Huseman leading the welcome and greeting team and other people like that, is people before task.

[25:01] Because we want to keep the focus on caring for one another, loving each other. But it's very easy to put tasks before people. We got to make sure we got people in Sunday school.

We got to make sure that we've got people manning these different departments. And pretty soon, it's all about the task and we lose track of the people. And your love slowly grows cold.

We forget that God is about the work of people. And so we lose track. We get hard. Here's the thing that's sad about that, where Ephesus is concerned and what we're going to learn from.

Turn in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 3. Because Paul anticipated this. When he was in prison in Rome, shackled to some stinky Roman guard, he wrote the prayer that we're going to read.

He was anticipating what would happen that Jesus addressed in Revelation chapter 2. And our goal this morning is to learn from the Ephesian church and not duplicate their mistakes.

[26:16] So Ephesians chapter 3, we're going to read verses 14 through 21. This is Paul's prayer for the Ephesians. He also has a prayer in chapter 1, but I think this is the centerpiece of the book.

For this reason, verse 14, for this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power through his spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to him be the glory of the church, and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.

Amen. So we're going to quickly just go through that prayer. Why is Paul bowing his knees before the Father? Because he is the one that shows us what family looks like.

I bow my knees before the Father from whom all families in heaven and earth derive their name. We are Trinitarian in our theology.

[27:47] What does that mean? As we look at God, we recognize that we have one God. We talked about that a few weeks ago from Deuteronomy 6. Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, he is one.

But we also recognize that he manifests himself in three persons. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And you see this three-in-one from Genesis 1-1 all the way through the Bible.

Over and over again, this comes up again. And of course, the most obvious one is when Jesus gave the charge to the disciples, go and make disciples, baptizing them in what?

the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Now, that doesn't mean we're polytheists. We don't have three gods.

We have one God. It's a mystery of how it works. But essentially, God, in expressing himself in three persons, is in a dance between the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[28:52] and they delight in one another. They love each other. And that love, that love within the Trinity, is a model for us of how we should be loving each other.

It's delight. It's joy. It's total immersion in the good of the other. We see the expression of family relationships, how a family should behave, in the relationships between the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

That make sense? So that's where Paul is beginning this prayer. And then he prays that God would grant you according to the riches of his glory.

So if I said to you, I hope that Elon Musk will give you a car according to the riches of his glory, do you think you're going to get a dilapidated used Ford Pinto that got pulled out of a junkyard?

No. Elon Musk can afford to give you one of those really, really ugly, big old trucks. And he wouldn't even notice it because that's the riches of his glory.

[30:04] He's got all this money. He's got all these resources to make available. Well, God is infinitely above that. That God would grant you according to the riches of his glory, God is extravagant toward us.

Never forget that. That he would grant you according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his spirit in the inner man. Now, why do we need to be strengthened? Why does our spirit need to be reinforced, to be strong enough to bear whatever's coming?

We might think, well, because life is hard. We talked about that a few weeks ago. Life is hard. We need the extra strength to weather the storms of life. You wouldn't be wrong, but that's not what Paul's talking about here.

So why do we need to be strengthened in the inner man? So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. When life is hard, it becomes more difficult to focus our attention on the Lord Jesus. We need to be strengthened in the inner man to be able to keep that focus where it belongs, to remember who saved us, to remember who loves us, to remember who is an always-present help in time of need, who is available to care for us, and to give us the resources we need to care for each other.

[31:23] We need to be strengthened to make that our focus. But I would suggest to you that not only that, for us to contain Jesus himself requires a supernatural intervention within us just to handle what has been put within us.

Jesus is so magnificent. He's so great. He's so powerful. He's just so transcendent. He's beyond what we can even imagine. And to think that he comes and lives with us, that the Holy Spirit lives within us, we need to be strengthened just to contain that.

And so that's where Paul begins, that you would be strengthened through God's Spirit, the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And here's where the Ephesian church went off the rails.

And that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and the length and the height and the depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Paul throws three metaphors in just a couple of sentences. First of all, he says that you would be rooted in love. Imagine a tree, deep roots.

[32:55] What do the roots do? A lot. They stabilize the tree. They draw nutrients out of the soil for the tree.

They're essential to its well-being. If it's the middle of the summer, and we've had a good summer with lots of rain, and you've got a tree that's all brown, you know there's a problem in the roots.

It's deeply rooted. And I'm going to take it a little bit further. In Colorado and throughout the Mountain West, there's this tree called an aspen. Aspen are beautiful trees.

Did you know the largest organism on planet Earth is a grove of aspen somewhere up in Montana? because aspen trees put down roots, and the roots go out underground, and then another one pops up, and another one pops up, and another one pops up.

They're rooted in each other, in community. That's what Paul's talking about when he says he wants us to be rooted in love. Our roots go down into the soil that is God himself.

[34:00] We draw our nourishment from there, but we're also mutually sustaining. We care for each other. Your well-being affects my well-being. My well-being affects your well-being.

We're rooted together. That's part of the design for us as a church family, is that we're rooted in love. So there's a tree. The next word he uses, and grounded in love.

Now we're going to talk about architecture, a building. When we lived in Seattle, there was a skyscraper going up. And for months, I saw all this activity, but where's the building?

There's no building. And finally, I happened to be walking in that neighborhood, and there was a hole in the fence. I looked in, and there is this huge hole. I mean, they had to have switchbacks to get the vehicles down to the bottom where they were doing their work.

Why is that hole so deep? Two reasons in Seattle. Number one, where they built skyscrapers wasn't designed to hold giant buildings.

[35:10] You might talk about a slippery slope. You know, Jesus said in Matthew 7, build your house on the solid ground, not on sand. Well, the entire hillside that is downtown Seattle is sand.

So they had to go down to the bedrock layer, and a skyscraper needs to be as deep as it is tall in order to handle winds and weather and earthquakes, or it will fall down.

And they're spending a lot of money on that building. So before they could go up, they had to go down. God wants us to be grounded in his love all the way to bedrock.

What's that old hymn? On Christ the solid rock I stand. That's where we stand. We're rooted like a tree.

We're grounded deeply so that we're standing on the bedrock that is Jesus Christ, his love for us. And the third metaphor is of the ocean.

[36:13] That you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ. So imagine, I'm sure we've all done this, you jump into a pool or jump into the ocean, and you're underwater, and there's water below you, there's water above you, all around you.

You're immersed. You're immersed. You're completely surrounded by love. That's where we live. We're rooted in love as a tree.

We're grounded in love like a skyscraper, and we're immersed. We're immersed in love. love. We just have to wake up and open our eyes and see it.

We are swimming in an ocean that is literally God's love. But we run the risk of taking His love for granted, just like we take for granted the air we breathe.

We don't think about the air we breathe, unless it stinks or it's gone. Then we care. Do we do that to God's love as well?

[37:26] Do we just assume it, we take it for granted, or something's not going right so we forget all the other good things that He's done for us? We have got to be consciously thinking about the love of God that is actively involved in our lives.

And if you're questioning, does God really love me? Spend some time in Romans 8. Go back to Romans 8. Paul wrote, Will not He who freely gave His Son, will He not also with Him, with Jesus, give us all things?

All the love that God has for us, we see it at the cross. Jesus chose to die for you there. He suffered so that we could live.

That was an expression of love. And we're immersed in it. We are literally surrounded by love at all times. We've got to open our eyes and look and see and be aware.

And then Paul goes on to say, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge. Or to paraphrase it, to know the love of God that's not knowable. Wait, what?

[38:43] Two different kinds of love. No. We can't understand God's love for us intellectually. Our brains aren't big enough. We're not smart enough.

We just can't comprehend it. It's not an intellectual exercise. It's an experiential exercise. It's relational knowledge, like we know each other.

It should continue to grow in our knowledge of one another. Not just that we know each other's facts, birthdays, anniversaries, kids' names. Those are all helpful. No, we know.

We get to know each other well enough. I can trust you. You can trust me. You know my idiosyncrasies. I know yours. I love you anyway. You love me anyway. But where God is concerned, what Paul is praying is that the people of Ephesus would experience what it means to be loved by the God who sent his son to die on the cross for their sins.

that they would literally experience in every part of their lives. That you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

[39:52] That's the offer that's on the table. To be rooted in God's love. To be grounded in his love.

To be immersed in his love. That was Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church. And now let's go back to Revelation chapter 2.

How on earth did you forget? They allow themselves to get distracted. There's a hymn that I love. Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Look full on his wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glorious grace. You can flip that hymn around. Allow your eyes.

It's not going to be rhythmic. But focus your eyes on the things of the world. The muck and the mire and the mess and the things of heaven will grow strangely dim.

[40:56] We'll forget our Lord. We'll lose track. That's what happened in Ephesus. They were doing good things. They recognized that they existed to bring glory to God.

They were striving to walk closely with him every day by having good disciplines. They read their Bibles. They probably had prayer meetings. They had Sunday school classes. None of those are bad. Until that becomes the end.

Until that becomes our focus. church. And that was the mistake that they made. They turned their eyes from looking at Jesus to looking at, oh, we've got to make this church work.

We've got all these converts coming in. We've got to have Sunday school. We need to build a building. We've got missionaries going out to Asia. And all of a sudden the business of church completely eclipsed the love of God functioning toward and in and through the church. church. We have got to guard ourselves against that brother and sister. Every day. Every day. As we talk about our mission of values, we exist to glorify God, walking closely with him, striving together to become more like Jesus every day.

[42:15] Do not lose sight of the fact that the defining statement about God's identity in the Bible is God is love. If we are becoming like Christ, we are learning what love is.

We are learning how love behaves. We are doing the things that love does. And we see that in the life of Jesus. We have got to be consciously, deliberately, consistently engaged in thinking about what does this love look like?

And so we have our values. following Jesus because he's our role model. And we need to be careful. You've seen the ads, I've seen the ads.

Love allows, love, love is love. People can do whatever they want. We just need to love them.

There's not a parent in the world who loves on those terms, loves their children that way.

What happens when our kids misbehave? They get punished, they get disciplined. Why? Because we want them to become better. We love them. We need to see that in Jesus. Oftentimes he would heal somebody and go, hey, go and sin no more.

[43:33] He identified sin in their life. That was an expression of love. He fed people their time of need. He went out of his way to connect with people. He was kind and gracious, but he was also firm.

All of that is love. So as we follow Jesus, we're learning what does love look like? And do that. Here first, it is the world.

I'll come back to that. So we're following Jesus. We're loving God. We're cultivating a love for God. You want to learn about cultivating?

Talk to Joe about a garden plot. I have a friend in San Antonio who got intrigued by the whole idea of cultivating. He was looking at John 15. And so he and his wife converted their entire backyard, which isn't as big a task as you would think.

Their backyard was as big as this section right here. But they made it into a garden because he wanted to learn what it meant to cultivate something. The work that was involved, the effort, all the different components.

[44:35] And so he made that his objective. His garden was beautiful. He had really cool plants back there. They had these gourds that were hanging from tunnels that he built.

It was really cool. But he learned about cultivating. We need to cultivate love for God. Look around. When you sit down for lunch today, pause for a minute and realize this really tastes good.

That's an expression of God's love. Look around the table as the people that you're eating with. They are an expression of God's love. And just continue with that mindset.

And certainly, look to the cross often. That's testament to you of God's love. We need to cultivate that. Because if we don't, our hearts will grow cold.

And we're guarding against that. So we're following Jesus. We're cultivating a love for God. We're cultivating love for others. First here, we are a family. We are a family first.

[45:36] We are not an organization. When churches shift their focus for being a family to be an organization there on the path, just like the Ephesians were, that leads away from the love of God into being very efficient.

Do I like efficiency? Oh, yeah. But efficiency without love is empty. We need to be cultivating love for each other. Go out of your way to connect with people in this body.

Meet for coffee. Meet for lunch. Get together. Go catch a Saints game or baseball season. Drive to Chicago and watch the Cubs or Milwaukee to watch the Brewers.

You got three hours each way to talk and get to know each other. Help each other in your yards.

Here's a novel idea. Take a meal to somebody who's not sick and then eat it with them.

But we need to be cultivating love for each other because when we do that, when we're getting to know each other really well, we will pray better. We'll pray more focused. We will see God at work and the people you know at work, as you go shopping, as you go to the coffee shop, they're going to recognize something and they're going to want some of that because everybody wants to be loved and they will be drawn to you because they see Jesus in you and then you'll have an opportunity to share why you are the way you are.

[47:07] Got to be honest, not me. This is Jesus. You want to know him? Can I introduce you to him? So we're following Jesus. We are cultivating love for God.

We're cultivating love for others. We're making disciples. We're not making converts. We're inviting people into a relationship with God and with our family.

We're always adding new people by adoption. we want to make disciples. What does that mean?

That means we are teaching people the basics. A new believer comes in.

They don't know anything. We teach them how to read the Bible. We teach them how to pray. We show them what community looks like in the family of God because it's fundamentally different than outside or it should be.

We show them then how to go and meet people and make further disciples because that's God's plan for the church. Along the way, as you're connecting with people and making disciples, guess what happens?

[48:11] You follow Jesus more closely. Your love for God grows. You fall in love more deeply with this community as you introduce it to people outside and you fall in love with those people that you cross paths with every day if you just pay attention.

Lastly, we're seeking unity. We are working hard to be together. And what is the centerpiece of unity? Look down a few verses at Ephesians 4.

Verse 2, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love. Because we're always going to get on each other's nerves.

It's inevitable. But if we practice these things in love, we begin to experience that. But brothers and sisters, I cannot put this strongly enough.

You are going to hear, woven through every message, references to our mission and our values. But the core is love.

[49:21] We cannot forget our first love. we need to do the other things. Jesus did say, verses 2 and 3, great, yeah, 2 and 3, good job, guys, love this, but I have this against you.

We want to be a church that is Revelation 2, verse 2, verse 3, and Ephesians chapter 3, that is rooted and grounded and immersed in the love of God.

because when we are that, that is what God designed us for, not efficient organizational management. Amen? That is not done from the pulpit.

It's done as we determine to do these things together. Our mission is built, rooted, grounded, immersed in the love of God for us.

Let's pray. God, as I think about your love for me, your love for us as a people, you sent your son to die.

[50:35] While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While we were your enemies, Christ died. And now we know the love of Christ.

God, I pray for us as a body, that we would echo Paul's word in 2 Corinthians 5, that your love for us and our love for you would compel us to live the way that you want us to live, to be the people you want us to be.

Lord, be glorified in us. Let us be rooted and grounded and immersed in your love for us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.