

Alright. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. So glad you're here with us today. And what a great Easter celebration we had together last weekend. I think it was my favorite Easter that we've ever had. And so, I just want to start by saying thank you. Thank you to every person that served, to every person that led, every person that gave, every person who worshipped and created culture, every person who shared on social media, every person who invited somebody and lived missionally, to every person who gave up their seat in a full service so somebody else could come in. Thank you for creating a great Easter experience for me and my family. And thank you for creating a great Easter experience for thousands of people that got to come in and have an experience and an encounter with the resurrected Jesus. I love the missional flame that's beginning to burn again in the soul of our church, the sense of we are on mission and we're reaching people with God. And so, it was my favorite Easter that I think we've ever had because Easter answers that really simple question, the deepest question of the human heart, and it's just simply this, "Am I loved?"

"Am I loved?" And it answers it with a resounding "yes, you are once and for all" – never to be questioned or asked again. Because 1 John 3:16 says, "This is how we know what love is: that Jesus Christ laid down His life for us." The cross answers the question that you are loved. And what I loved about this year is we took it a little bit farther and we said, "Yes, you are loved, but are you living like it? Yes, you are loved, but are you ready to live like it?" And so, we're going to start a new series today for the next few weeks just simply called "Living Loved." And I want us to wrestle through that reality, the reality of whether or not we are actually living our lives as if we were loved. Because there is a big difference between knowing you're loved and living like you're loved. And I think a lot of us know we're loved, but if you look at our lives, we don't really live loved. You see, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hear God's voice and make God's message their way of life." I love this verse. And if you've been here and you understand me, you should understand why I love this verse. Because this verse is the heart of our church. This verse is the heart of our church because we don't want to just hear what God has to say; we actually want to do it. Good American Christianity is all about hearing it. Kingdom come is all about living it. And there is a big difference between just hearing God's voice and actually making God's message your way of life. And a lot of us hear God's voice over and over and over again, but then never do anything with it. We want to be the kind of people, though, that have faith that leads to action, that hear and then obey. Yes, we want to hear that God loves us, but then we want to become the kind of people that makes that message our way of life and actually live as if we were loved. And that's where the blessing is. See, so many of us think the blessing comes in hearing God's voice. The problem is, is if we just hear it but we never make it our way of life, we get deceived and disappointed. If all I ever do is hear that I'm loved but never make it my message, make that message my way of life and live loved, I get deceived thinking I'm living in the message of God, and then therefore I will get disappointed because I will say, "It didn't work. I tried it and it wasn't enough." See, the blessing – which means to shalom, comprehensive flourishing, fullness of life, the abundance – is not found in the hearing you're loved, it's in the making that message your way of life. And I love what Paul says, talking to about a bunch of religious people. He just simply says, "They claim to know

God, but by their actions they deny Him." They claim to know they're loved, but if you look at their life, their life says anything but that they are loved.

And I think this verse, if we're honest, defines a lot of our lives. A lot of time, we claim to know that we're loved. We can quote it, we can say it, we have the knowledge, we have the information. We can give you book chapter and verse. We have it on knickknacks in our house. Oh, we know that we are loved. But if you look at the actions of our lives, they don't validate it, they actually deny it. Think about one of the last things you say every single week when you're at Valley Creek Church is I am loved. Say it every single week. So, I claim to know it. Do my actions support it? Because if we look at our lives and the way we think and the way we talk and the way we move in our relationships and how we deal with conflict and circumstances and handle situations and how we treat other people and how we do our time and our finances, if we're honest, a lot of those things would say we're anything but loved.

In fact, my question for you is this, is how free are you? Because that will show you whether or not you're living in love. Are you free from sin? Are you free from this world? Are you free from anxiety and depression and fear and performance? Are you free from worry? Because that's when it's moved from knowledge to experience. In fact, I love what John, one of Jesus's disciples says, it says the disciple whom Jesus loved was reclining next to Him. This is John writing about John. In the book of John, he never calls himself John. He only calls him the disciple. Calls himself the disciple whom Jesus loved. And at first, you could look at that and be like, "Man, that was one arrogant narcissistic dude. What makes you so special?"

John wasn't arrogant and narcissistic. He had just figured out that God loved him, so he actually started to live like it. The big difference between John and the other 11 is they all knew that God loved them, John just decided to make that message his way of life. And he was more focused on Jesus's love for him than his love for Jesus. He was more focused on the fact that Jesus loved me, and He allowed that message, that reality to change and transform every other aspect of his life. And this is how John goes, from the guy with the anger problem, the son of Thunder, the guy who wants to call fire down from heaven to burn up a village, the guy who wants to sit at the seat of honor at Jesus's right hand, to becoming the apostle of love. Because he heard that he was loved and he decided by faith to make that message his way of life, and it changed everything about him. And John gives us a really important secret here that most of us forget and it's this, discipleship starts with being loved.

Discipleship starts with being loved. If you're going to try to be a disciple of Jesus without living loved, it's an exercise in futility. In fact, it's the birthplace of religion because you will try to conform, shape, mold your external realities through fear and duty and obligation and this constant pressure and burden, which by itself is the very nature and definition of religion. External confirmation without an internal transformation. But discipleship is internal change that leads to external change. And so, if I actually want to be a disciple, a student, a learner, a follower, one who becomes like the one that I am following, I have to first live in His love and

that will change me from the inside out. And what I love about what John did is he was a student of Jesus's life. And when he studied Jesus's life, what he figured out was that Jesus lived loved.

That was the unique defining characteristic of Jesus's entire life. He didn't just know that the Father loved Him, He lived in the Father's love. And so, if John is a student of Jesus's life and that's how Jesus lived, then John understood that's how he had to live. To make that voice become the message that became his way of life, and that's why he got to recline next to Jesus at the last supper. Literally says he's resting on Jesus's chest. Because when you're living loved, there is no distance between you and God. You are the disciple whom Jesus loved. Loves. Are you living like it? See, Paul says, "I pray that you, being rooted and established in love." Rooted and established. Think of a plant. It has to first be planted, rooted, but then its roots actually need to go out and get established into the soil.

And when it's rooted and established, it has everything it needs for life. Everything of sustenance, all of its nutrients, everything it needs to grow and flourish and become fruitful is right there in the soil. And the same thing is true with you and me. The human heart was created to live in the soil of love. And when it says rooted, that's knowing. Established, that's living. I have to be rooted, I have to know it, but then I actually have to establish myself in it. Actually put my roots into the love of God and draw everything I need into my life. "And that you may have the power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." He says, "That you may be capable to grasp or take a hold of the limitless love of God." See, the human soul is so needy that it can only be filled by the limitless love of God.

And the human soul has so much desire that it can only be satisfied by the limitless love of God. This is why everything else will never fill you, nor satisfy you because your soul was created to be so big that it can only be taken care of and filled and satisfied by the limitless love of God. "And to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God." He says, "That you would know this love that surpasses knowledge." In other words, that you would know a love beyond information that would become experience. That you would know through experience that which cannot be understood through comprehension. See, love is not supposed to be studied, it's supposed to be experienced. Love is not information to know, it's not a concept to break apart, it's not a principle to parse out. No, love is something that you're meant to experience and encounter beyond information, beyond knowledge.

And it will change you from the inside out. This is why love heals, and love frees, love transforms and creates and blesses and provides and moves and gives and honors and serves and is patient and is kind and meets all your needs. It's love that changes us from the inside out. And it's not a message I'm supposed to hear, it's an experience I'm supposed to have. So, here's what I want to do in this series. I just want to talk to you about living love, but I'm not

trying to talk to your mind. I'm not trying to give you any new information. I don't really care if you take notes. What I'm going for in this series is revelation and encounter. That the Holy Spirit will reveal to you the love of God and that you will have a personal encounter with the love of God.

That your heart will be filled and full with the Father's love for you. And so, we've dimmed the lights, we've changed the atmosphere a little bit because I want you to have a revelation and an encounter with the love of God. And I want us to start by just simply, in your own way, just saying, "Maybe, Father, I open my heart to your love. Father, I open my heart to your love." Because love is not head to head, it's heart to heart. And so, Holy Spirit, would you pour out the Father's love into our heart and help us open up all those combination locks that lock the love of God out of our heart. May we be open to receive. You see, one day, Jesus was hanging out with a bunch of sinners and tax collectors. And the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, they saw this and it offended them.

The Pharisees, the religious guys, the guys that knew that God loved them, they just didn't live like God loved them. And they looked at Jesus hanging around all these sinful people and it really bothered them that He was a friend of sinners, that He let unclean people touch Him, that He gave time and attention and affection to, in their opinion, the least deserving people. And watching all of this happen, Jesus told them three really simple stories. The first story He told them was about a good shepherd who had a hundred sheep. And when one of them wandered off, he left the 99 behind to go and get the one. And when he found that one, he rejoiced and brought it back home. He then told a story about a woman who had 10 silver coins and she lost one in her house. And when she lost it, she lit a lamp and cleaned her entire house and looked for it everywhere until she found it. And when she found it, she rejoiced greatly.

And then, He told them a story about a father who had two sons. And this is probably the most famous story in Scripture in a lot of ways. The world is familiar with this story, but we have probably misnamed it. We call it "The story of the prodigal son." Prodigal means recklessly extravagant. And while the son was recklessly extravagant with his life, the story should really be named "The prodigal father" because the father was recklessly extravagant with his love. The story of the prodigal son is not a story about a son's sins, it's about a father's love. So, I'm just going to read it to you. There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the estate." So, he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had and set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So, he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's

hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death. I will set out and go back to my father and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired men.'" So, he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him.

He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick. Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate, for this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found." And so, they began to celebrate. What a story. What a story. Here's a father and he has two sons. And one day, the younger son comes to his father and says, "Hey, I want my share of the inheritance, and I want it now." And in that moment, the son closed off his heart to his father. We don't know why. We don't know exactly when.

We just know in that moment he closed off his heart to his father. And the moment he closes off his heart to his father, he takes on the orphan spirit. The orphan spirit of I'm going to do what I want, when I want, how I want. I don't want to submit and surrender to you or to anyone. I'm going to go my own way and do my own thing. I'm going to live independently because I know what is best. And when he asks for his share of the inheritance, you understand in that moment, he was wishing his father dead. Because you don't get an inheritance until someone passes away. And so, in that moment, he is wishing his father dead. The only problem is, is when you wish your father dead, he doesn't die, you do. And in many ways, this is our story, is it not? Somewhere along the way, we close off our heart to the Father, for a variety of different reasons.

Maybe trauma, sin, brokenness, pain, disappointment, unmet expectations, situations, circumstances, the storms of life. Things just haven't gone the way we wanted them to, what we see out there in the world that everybody else is enjoying. Somewhere along the way, we close off our heart to the Father. And the moment we do that, we take on the orphan spirit. I'm going to do what I want and when I want and how I want. I don't want to be submitted or surrendered to anything. I'm going to go my own way and do my own thing. I'm going to make my own path. The only problem is, is in Proverbs, it says there is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. And I think, like this young man, we often wish the Father dead. And I know some of you are sitting there, you're probably thinking, "I don't ever wish the Father dead." Well, you may not wish Him dead, but you often wish that He would just go away.

And when I wish the Father away, I go astray. And when I wish the Father dead, I'm the one that dies. He doesn't die, I die, because the Author of Life can never die. And when I close off my heart to Him, He doesn't die, I begin to die. And like this boy, we often want God for what

He can do for us, not for who He is. We want His hand, we don't want His heart. We want what He can provide us, we don't actually want a relationship with Him. So, we close our heart off to Him and set off to live on our own with the orphan spirit. And the moment this young man closes off his hearts to the father's love, his heart becomes full of love for the things of this world. When he closes his heart to the love of the father, his heart becomes full of love for the things of this world. This is why John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, tells us, he says, "Do not love the world or anything in the world."

"If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, craving for sensual gratification, and the lust of the eyes, greedy longings of the mind, and the pride of life, assurance in one owns resources or in the stability of earthly things, these do not come from the Father, but are from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever." Do you catch it? If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. It doesn't say love for the Father is not in him, the love of the Father. The moment I close myself off to the love of the Father, my heart will be full of love for the things of this world. If I close myself off to the love of the Father, my heart will be open to love for the things of this world. But if I open myself to the love of the Father, my heart will be closed to love for the things of this world.

You see, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, they don't come from the love of the Father, they come from love for the things of this world. And when I close my heart to receiving God's love, there is now this vacuum, this void, this space that it has to be filled, because your heart was created for love. And if it's not full of the love of the Father, there is an empty space that must be filled, and it will be filled by love for the things of this world. The lust or the cravings of the flesh. You say, "What is that?" That's your cravings. That's, I'm going to do what I want, when I want, how I want. I'm going to get what I need, when I want it. I'm going to say what I say. I'm going to do my emotions and my feelings. I'm going to get it my way. I'm not going to have any self-control or any sense of reserve. I'm just going to satisfy every need, desire, feeling, emotion, thought, thing I want to say. I'm just going to do it. Lust of the eyes, what's lust of the eyes? Well, the difference between love and lust is love is goodwill, lust is my will is to use you for my good.

Love is my will is for your good. Lust is I'm going to take you and use you and consume you for my good to satisfy things that I have in my life. And then, the pride of life, I want to put myself in the center and make everything revolve around me. And he says, "Those things don't come from the Father but are from the world." Which means when my heart is full of the love of the Father, my heart will not be full of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. What will it be full of? The character of the spirit, the eyes of Jesus to see things the way that He sees them and the humility to serve in the secret place. Why? Because I don't have to be known. I'm glad to take the backseat and to just make it about everyone and everything else. Why? Because the love of the Father is so filled my life. I don't have a desire for anything in this world.

See, here's what I'm trying to tell you. What I'm trying to tell you is that holiness flows from love. Holiness is the fruit of love. If my heart is full of the love of the Father, there won't be any room for love of the things of this world. Holiness is the fruit of love. And I say, what is holiness? Holiness just simply means set apart, other, different. And we know that God is holy. He's set apart, He's other and He's different. But why is He holy? Because He is love. And because He is love, He has goodwill towards everyone and everything around Him. So, there is no room inside of God for love for the things of this world. See, love cannot sin. If love is goodwill, it's for your – my will is for your good, then love cannot sin, which means love doesn't sin.

Love can't miss the mark. Love doesn't steal, kill, and destroy. Love does not delight in evil. Love doesn't hurt other people. Well, if that's who God is, then God can't sin. He can't miss the mark. He doesn't steal, kill nor destroy. He doesn't delight in evil. He doesn't hurt other people. See, God doesn't walk around through His creation and struggle with not sinning. Not sinning. It's not like He walks by the things of this world and He's like, "Oh, I wish I could, but I just can't. I'll ruin my reputation, and I've told them they shouldn't. But it's so tempting." There's nothing in this world that has a hold on Him because He is love. So, there's no room for love of the things of this world. And when our heart is full of the love of the Father, there won't be any room for love for the things of this world. I don't know about you, but I don't struggle with the temptation to drink motor oil.

Do you? Do you ever walk by a jug of oil and just think, "Oh, that looks so good. I need to call a Godly relationship right now for accountability. 'Bro, don't let me do it.'" I don't struggle. I've never thought that thought in my life until trying to put this together for you this week. That is so far below my humanity, that it's not a temptation. Okay, when you are full of the love of the Father, the things of this world are so far below your humanity that they're no longer a temptation. It's no longer a struggle. It's no longer a try. It's no longer a wrestle. It loses its appeal. It loses its desire. It loses its interest, why? Because you've opened your heart to the love of the Father, so there's no room in your heart for love of the things of this world. So, I naturally and effortlessly walk by them and I become a person of holiness. And we don't like the word holiness because we think it's religious and it's all about what you can't do.

Holiness is the most freeing word, maybe, in the Bible because it's not about what you can't do, it's about what you are empowered to do. I'm empowered to not drink motor oil in Jesus' name. I'm empowered to not live by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes or the pride of life. Why? Because they don't come from the Father. Those are the things of this world. And when I'm open to His love, those things are no longer in me. So, they no longer have a hold on me, so I become free from the world around me. And that's why it says, those things will pass away but the will of God. The man who does the will of God lives forever. God's will is that we would live in His love. It was true for Adam and Eve. It was true for the Israelites, true for Jesus,

true for the disciples, and it's true for us. That's His will. Because here's what happens, when you start to receive God's goodwill for you, your will becomes good.

When I open my heart to the goodwill of the Father, my will changes, my desire, my choices, and it becomes good. And I naturally start doing that which is good and that which is true and that which is right. This is why Jesus says, "If you love me, you will obey my commands." But it also tells us that we love because He first loved us. So, it's His love for us that fills our heart with love. And when our heart is full of love, I naturally and effortlessly start to live out His commands. In other words, a holy life. Does this make sense to you? See, this is the plague of humanity, and you go all the way back to the Garden. This was Adam and Eve's struggle. Adam and Eve were created as beloved sons and daughters. They lived in the love of the Father. Everything was love. Everything in the sinful list of the world was so far beneath their dignity and the glory that God had made them in. And then, Satan came along, and he tempted them. He tricked them, he deceived them.

And he says to Eve, "Did God really say you can't eat from the tree of the knowledge and good and evil?" Eve's, "Oh, yeah, no. We can eat from any tree in the garden, but we can't even touch that one. If we touch it, we will die." "You will not surely die," Satan says. "For God knows that when you take of it, you will be like Him, knowing good and evil." And in that moment, Satan was trying to trick them to trade sonship for the orphan spirit. See, remember, Satan is the original orphan spirit. Satan is not God's rival. He is not God's equal. He was a created being. And he was made beautiful, holy, adorned. He was a son of God. And he had this amazing place in God's family. But one day, we don't know why, he closed off his heart to the love of the Father and took on the orphan spirit. And he said, "I no longer want to be under you. I don't want to submit and surrender. I want to do my own thing and go my own way." And literally, in Ezekiel and Isaiah, you can read about it. He says, "I will ascend my throne above you."

And in that moment, when he closed off his heart to the Father, the Father didn't die, Satan died and was cast to earth and became the father of death, the father of the orphan spirit. And now all he tries to do is get the sons and daughters of God to live in his orphanage. In fact, that's why it says, when the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food, cravings of the flesh, pleasing to the eye, lust of the eye, and desirable for gaining wisdom, pride. I'm going to put myself in the center. She took some and she ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who is with her, and he ate it, and they hid from the Lord. They became naked, ashamed and afraid and hid. They closed off their heart to the love of the Father. Their heart was now full with love for the things of this world. And if this is what would happen and that's how it would have left, you and I would have no chance of ever living in love again. But Jesus came. And Jesus came and did what Adam and Eve did not. And when He was tempted by Satan, same three things. He's baptized, "This is my beloved son."



He goes into the wilderness, three times, Satan tempts Him. "If you are the Son of God," trying to get Him to trade sonship for the orphan spirit, "tell these stones to become bread," cravings of the flesh. Shows Him the kingdoms of this world. "If you bow down to me, I'll give them to you," lust of the eyes. And then, takes Him to the highest point and says, "Throw yourself down and make the angels come and do something spectacular so we can all see who you really are," pride of life. But Jesus walked all three of those and passed the test, because to Him it was like drinking motor oil. It was so far below who He was. His heart was so full of the love of the Father that there was no room for the love of the things of this world. Here's what I'm trying to tell you. Every unholy thing in your life comes from a place where you are not receiving the love of God. Every unholy thing in your life is a place where you have closed off your heart to the Father's love.

Every unholy thing in your life, here's the positive, is a place where you long for the love of God in your life. Listen to me, unholy sex, immorality, pornography, adultery, that's a longing for the intimacy of God's love. Unholy finances, greed, hoarding, cheating, stealing is a longing for the provision of the love of God. Every unholy controlling place, where you control and you judge and you try to force and shape and make it happen and get your agenda and your will done, is a place where you long for the protecting love of God. Every unholy place of fear and anxiety and depression and worry in your life is a place where you long for the loving peace of God.

Every unholy place of anger in your life is a place where you long for the loving justice of God to make things right. Every place where there's unholy words coming out of your mouth is a place where you long for the loving blessing of God. Are you catching what I'm saying? See, we look at sin and we think the antidote for sin is I need to go to recovery, counseling, addiction programs, the medicine, spiritual practices, all those things, and they all have a place. But until your heart is full of the love of the Father, it is still full of love for the things of this world. So, at best, you're working through your willpower, external behavior modification. But when I receive the love of the Father, it changes me from the inside out and I no longer have the lust of the eyes, the cravings of the flesh, and the pride of life taking a hold of me. Does this make sense?

Since you are all set apart by God and made holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with a holy way of life. You can't live a holy way of life until you first live as if you're dearly loved in Jesus' name. And this is why you'll watch all throughout Scripture this juxtaposition. Tree of the knowledge of good and evil, tree of life. Law, grace. Flesh, spirit. Orphan spirit, sonship. Self-righteousness, the Lord as our righteousness. All of these things, the tree of life, grace, sonship, God as our righteousness, all of these things, the Spirit of God, all of these things, they're just simply an invitation to live loved because they change us from the inside out. So, back to our story. His son takes everything that he's got and he goes off into the world because the world looked good to him. His heart was closed to the love of the father. It's now full for love for the things of this world.

And he goes out and he wants to taste and see. And when he first tastes it, it tastes incredibly sweet. But when it goes down, it becomes incredibly sour. See, sin always over-promises and under-delivers. Sin will take you further than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay. Sin will steal your soul, kill your heart, and destroy your life. And he finds himself at rock bottom. And I love that it says, when he came to his senses. When he came to his senses, the love of the father was still echoing in his heart. And when he was quiet enough for a moment to hear that echo, kindness led to repentance. And he got up and he turned. And he had his little speech and he started heading home. And when he was still a long way off, the father sees him, which means the father has been looking for him every day since he's left. And the father bursts off the porch, runs to the son, the pig-smelling, dirty, unclean, broken son. And he grabs him and he hugs him.

He just holds him. And he kisses him on the cheek. Have you ever kissed anybody on the cheek? You smell everything they had for breakfast, lunch and dinner in that moment. The father smelled the last however long, but he didn't care because his love was greater. And when that boy starts this little speech, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son," the father interrupts him because he refuses to validate a lie. And he says to the servants, "Go get the best robe, a ring and sandals for my son. Kill the fattened calf and we're going to party." You see, in that moment, when they put a robe on that boy, it was a sense of this royalty, this covering of the sin and the filth and the brokenness of his life. When they put a ring on his finger, it was a representation that he had full authority in the father's estate, in the father's kingdom. And when they put sandals on his feet, it was a sign of sonship because servants didn't have sandals, only sons did.

So, he was empowered for the life in the kingdom with that father. And that is the story of the journey with Jesus. When we hit rock bottom and we come to our senses, His kindness leads to repentance. The echo of God causes us to turn. The Father bursts off and runs to us and puts the robe of righteousness on us. See, the scarlet robe was put on Jesus. Scarlet representing the deep sin and shame and stain of your life. Those things that you can't get out, those things that even when you're in the shower and you're trying to scrub yourself off, they're so deeply stained in your soul, you can't get them out. Yeah, that was put on Jesus. So the robe of righteousness could be put on you. You are fully forgiven and completely healed in Jesus. He's forgiven your wickedness, remembers your sin no more. There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ. And then, He puts the ring on our finger, a ring saying there's authority. Once again, Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given unto me, therefore go, I give it to you." He gives us His power and His authority.

And if death reigned through Adam and Eve's failure, then how much more will those who receive the abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign, have power and authority in this life, reestablished to our place in the Father's family? And then, He puts the sandals of sonship on us because we are no longer an orphan, we're a son. And those sandals

allow us to walk in the spirit, to follow Jesus and to become a hope carrier. Because how beautiful are the feet of those who carry good news. And the fattened calf is killed because blood has to be shed for the forgiveness of sins. And the Father celebrates because He delights in you and rejoices over you with singing. And He has no greater joy than to see His children walk in the truth. There is no greater joy for the Father in heaven than for His children to come back home and live loved.

See, Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. And Jesus literally died on the cross and went to hell to get the authority back from Satan that we gave to him to give it back to us. And Jesus poured himself out, took on the nature of a servant and got down on His knees and washed the feet of orphans. So we can have the sandals of sonship and once again walk loved and free in the Father's family. That's why it's a celebration in Jesus' name. The problem is, is if that's all the boy experienced, he still would have lived with the orphan spirit. If all he would have got was the robe, the ring and the sandals, and the father would have turned around and walked back in the house, he would have spent his life as an orphan, thinking "I'm not worthy of love," trying, performing, behaving, trying to earn the father's love, trying to do all these things to make up for the past, knowing he was no longer worthy to be called his father's son.

See, the most important thing in the story that is often missed is the hug. It's the hug. The best thing in this whole story is the hug. It's the father's embrace, that chest to chest, filled up the son's empty heart with the love of the father. And in that moment, removed the love for the things of this world and reminded him not in knowledge but in experience. In that moment, it wasn't just the father's voice, that message became that son's way of life. In that moment, he became the disciple whom Jesus loved, the son whom the Father loved, and it's that Father's love that changes everything. The question is, is have you received it? Sure, robe, ring, sandals, yep. Restored identity, reconciled relationship, redeemed purpose, yep. Yep, I know I'm forgiven. Yep, Jesus loves me. Great.

Have you ever been baptized in the Father's love? Baptized, which means to be immersed. Have you ever been immersed in the Father's love? You say, "What does that mean?" There's four types of baptisms in the Bible. You say, "I've never heard this before." First is, when we put our faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit baptizes us into the body of Christ. We literally become included in Christ as He is, so we are. Second is water baptism. We baptize each other in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, representing the old you as dead and gone. You've been raised to a new life in Christ. You're now a new creation. Third baptism is, is that Jesus baptizes us in the Holy Spirit. He literally immerses us and clothes us and fills us with power from on high. But then, the fourth baptism is being immersed in the Father's love by the Father himself. It's the hug, it's the embrace. You see all four baptisms at Jesus's baptism.

When he's baptized, He's immersed in himself. He gets baptized in water. Spirit descends upon Him from heaven, baptizing the Spirit. But then, the Father's hug breaks heaven open. "This is

my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Have you ever been baptized in the Father's love? That is not knowledge, that is experience. And you say, "Well, what do I do?" Just open yourself up. You're like, "The whole point of this message was open yourself?" Yes, yes. Because love is not a concept. Love is not something to be studied, love is an experience and an encounter. And a lot of us, like this boy, say, "I'm not worthy to be loved. I'm not worthy to be loved." See, worthiness has a question to do with value.

I'm not worthy, which questions our worthiness, which says we don't have value. And we can look at something and we can give it a value by opinion, by preference, by experience. But listen to me, something is only worth what someone else will give you for it. That's the definition of value. Something's worth is only what someone else will give you for it, regardless of your opinion, your perspective, your preference, okay? Well, if the Father gave Jesus, for God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, He who did not spare His only Son, but gave Him up for us all. If He gave Jesus to get you back, then your worth has been declared once and for all is that you are worth Jesus, regardless of how you feel, regardless of your opinion, regardless of your preference. But you have to be the one to move it from here to here.

By how? Just opening yourself up. See, I don't really care if you got anything new teaching. This is not about teaching, this is about experience. That you would know this love that surpasses knowledge. We will never live free from this world until our heart is full of the love of the Father.

In fact, even right now, can you just say, "God, I owe them a heart. I owe them a heart to your love. I don't know what to do. I don't know how to do it. I don't know that I even want to do it, but I hear the echo." Holy Spirit, would You come and pour out the Father's love into our heart? Move it from knowledge and information and chapter and verse and just foolish churchy talk to an experience and encounter with you. See, people who live loved don't have to declare it because they just demonstrate it. You say, how will I know? You'll know because you won't have to tell everybody. You won't have to tell everybody. You won't have to claim to know it. You just demonstrate it because it's changed you and it is changing you. And like water being poured into an empty vessel, as that water is poured in and it displaces the air, the love of the Father will displace the love for the things of this world. So, Father, I am unable to give your love to my friends, but you are. And so, would you burst off the porch? Would You run to us wherever we are? Would you pick us up in a way that allows us to experience and encounter the immersion of the Father's embrace? Holy Spirit, would You bring us to our senses that we might turn? I pray for the sin in our lives that, literally this week as we go about it, may we see a jar of motor oil in our hand as we're doing it and think this is so far beneath me. I was created for the glory of God. And I can't stop this on my own, but I can open myself to love. And that love will set me free. We live in a world that worships knowledge and demeans encounter. May we be the kind of church that doesn't want to just hear God's voice, but wants to make God's message our way of life. We don't want to worship love, we want to live in love. We don't want

to know about love, we want to experience love. So, Jesus, thank you that your cross tells us once and for all that we are loved. Thank you for the robe of righteousness, the ring of authority, the sandals of sonship, the shed blood and the celebration and the party because there is a resurrection when we come back home. But we need your love to fill and flood our hearts, to change us from the inside out. So, Father, this was my best attempt to help us open our hearts to your love. Would you do that, which only you can do?

May you experience and encounter the love of the Father from the deepest to the shallowest, from the widest to the longest, from the farthest to the nearest. May that love fill your body. May that love fill your soul. May that love fill your mind. May that love fill your heart till it becomes an experience that goes beyond knowledge because of Jesus and who He is and what He has done. In His name we receive it. Amen.