

What Kind of Church Do We Want to Be?

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[0 : 00] I want to begin a three-part series today that I'm going to call, What Kind of Church Do We Want to Be? And that's what it focuses on.

What kind of church do we want to be going forward? When you lose a pastor, especially a good pastor, and one that's been there a long time, one of the caliber of Fred Stone, I know we'd be just lying to ourselves to tell ourselves it doesn't make us real nervous, right?

We get an anxious feeling because what's the next guy coming in going to be like? And where is he going to take us? And how is the church going to change? And what's it going to look like? And all those kind of things. And a lot of times we worry about, well, who's going to take care of this or who's going to take care of that?

And how are things going to fall in place in the absence of a pastor? Because you realize I'm pretty much just a preacher, right? I live over in Greer, and I'm here one day a week. And Brian and the other staff members, Jeff and others, are carrying the load for the pastoral ministry.

But one of the things that happens when pastors leave, it's a good thing. It causes those who are in secondary roles to pick up their game.

[1 : 03] I mean, it means that deacons have got to pick up their game. It means the Sunday school teachers have got to pick up their game because a lot of times when a guy's been there a long time, we just kind of get used to that guy kind of carrying the ball and doing everything, right?

And so one of the things that happens is it makes people step up. And I hope you're doing that today, that you're not just leaving to the Sunday school teachers, to the deacons, to the staff that you're saying, boy, what can I do to advance the cause of the kingdom of Christ here at First Baptist Church of Pickens?

There's another thing, too, though, that happens. Churches begin to wonder, well, where are we going from here? And what kind of church do we want to be? And I want to tell you, whether you've lost a pastor or you have a pastor, that's always a good question from time to time to ask yourself, what do we want to be as a church?

So I've taken it upon myself. I didn't consult with the deacons, the personnel committee, or even the staff. I've taken it upon myself. I've invited in two experts to give us some advice about where do we go from here.

And I know some of you are thinking, boy, that guy has overshot the runway now. I mean, how did he go spend money? It's not going to cost you a thing, so don't get all anxious and all worried and fretful.

[2 : 11] The two I'm inviting in are the Apostle Paul, who would know more how to start a church and what a church ought to look like than the Apostle Paul. And the other is James, the first pastor of the church of Jerusalem.

So we're going to see what these two guys have got to say over the next three weeks about what kind of church should we be. This is not an all-inclusive message. It's not everything. This whole series won't be all-inclusive about here's everything you need to be as a church.

But I'm going to mention just three things that I think are right toward the top of what we ought to be as a church. So if you have your Bibles, turn with me to 1 Thessalonians 3.

1 Thessalonians 3. And let me just set up this passage for you so you'll understand what we're about to read. Paul is on his second missionary journey.

Okay? He's taking his second missionary journey. He's going to the city of Philippi. You know, the book of Philippians was written to that church in Philippi. You read about it in the book of Acts.

[3 : 11] When he gets to Philippi, a lot of people come on board and they trust Christ as Savior. But it's not without great suffering on Paul's part. He's beaten, put in jail. Even there, he wins a

Philippian jailer and his family to Christ.

But ultimately, he has to flee because of persecution. When he leaves there, he goes to another neighboring town by the name of Thessalonica.

And there in Thessalonica on the Sabbath, the Bible says he goes and he preaches. And he does that three consecutive Sabbaths, three consecutive Saturdays. He's there in the Sabbath.

He's there in the synagogue. And he's preaching the Word of God. He's giving them the gospel of the Lord Jesus. And many people hear that and they believe and become Christians. He develops in a short period of time a real strong relationship with these people.

Only there are three weeks. They come to him after the third week and they say, Paul, for your safety, you've got to get out of Dodge. And so he takes the next flat out and he's on his way to another place, right?

[4 : 14] At their insistence, he leaves. He gets to the next spot, though, and he still has these Thessalonians on his mind. And he's wondering, what's become of these young believers who had come into the church?

They don't have a pastor. What are they going to do? How are they going to make it? How are they going to survive? And so he's wondering about their spiritual future. And so he wants to go back.

And he even tries to go back. But the words he uses in 1 Thessalonians are these. Satan hinders him in going. He tries numerous times, but every time Satan blocked his ability to go back.

So I want you to read in chapter 3 and verse 1 with me what he now does. Look at chapter 3 and verse 1. Therefore, when we could no longer stand it, we thought it was better to be left alone in Athens.

Now you understand, persecution is always not far away from the door of Paul. That's what he means when he says, I thought even though it was dangerous, it'd be better to be left alone. And he sends Timothy back to get a report on what's happening with these people in Thessalonica.

[5 : 23] Look at verse 5. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, fearing that the tempter had tempted you and that our labor might be for nothing.

Now what's he got in mind? What's he fearful of? Why is he so anxious? You would readily understand without me even telling you why he would be anxious in the circumstances I've outlined. These are young believers.

He's done everything he can in the three weeks to disciple them and give them the information that they need. But they were like us. Do you always get things right the first time?

Do you ever have to be reminded of anything? And so Paul has said to them some things, even about the second coming of Jesus, they kind of get mixed up about. We're going to see that at a later time.

But they were confused about some things. And so he worries that in the absence of somebody to preach the scripture to them and to preach the truth to them, they're going to just fall apart.

[6 : 23] That's a natural concern, right? So what does he do? He sends Timothy back to check on them. Look, if you will, at chapter 3 and verse 6, and we read the report of Timothy from 6 through 10.

Now, Timothy has come to us from you and brought us good news about your faith and love. So look up for a minute. Not bad news.

Timothy gets back and says, Paul, relax. It's good. I mean, they're growing in love. They're growing in faith. It's good. And that you always have good memories of us wanting to see us as also we want to see you.

They miss you as bad as you miss them. Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution, we were encouraged about you through your faith. For now we live if you stand firm in the Lord. How can we thank God for you in return for all the joy we experience because of you before our God? As we pray earnestly night and day to see you face to face and to complete what is lacking in your faith.

[7 : 28] Boy, I cannot wait to get back with you and all the things that you need bolstering up in. I'm going to do that. I can't wait for that day. I'm praying for that day. I anticipate that day. And then he gives them this prayer.

And let me just tell you before we read it, this is going to be our focus for the next three sermons. Just these three verses, okay? We'll bring in some other verses, but these are the primary verses we're going to look at. And it's a prayer.

And because we're reading it this morning, guess what? It's a written prayer. It's one he prayed, no doubt, verbally, but it's a written prayer.

Now, I just want to help you where you're thinking about that for a minute. When I was a kid coming along, I'm 69 years old. When I was a kid, and I don't think this mentality prevails today, but when I was a kid, if you grew up in a conservative church, the conservative church had a kind of way of looking down at prayers that were read.

Do you all remember that? I can remember hearing people say, well, you know, they just read that prayer. They didn't mean it. It wasn't from the heart. They read that. How many of you ever wrote a love letter? Anybody here?

[8 : 33] None of you are romantic at all. You all have written love letters, right? You started about third grade, right? Sent that little note, you love me if you ask, check the box, you know? Did you mean what you wrote?

Of course you did, right? So that's just foggy thinking to think because I write something, and I don't mean it, you know? That's a foolish notion. In fact, what it reflects to me is this.

You've had a chance to think about it. And I don't know about you, when I start writing things, sometimes I'll write it, and I think, yeah, that's not it, and I'll scratch it out, or I'll tear it up, and I'll start over, right?

We hit the delete key, and we do it again. And so Paul has the opportunity to think, what am I going to say to these Thessalonians? What is the prayer I really want to pray for these Thessalonians?

This is a written prayer, and so I've got to tell you, to me it must be really important. It's what he thought about and concluded. It's what I want to say. So look at verse 11.

[9 : 30] Now may our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. Let me come to you as I've said I want to and as you want me to.

Verse 12, and here's the heart of it. And may the Lord cause you to increase. What does it mean to increase? Get more, right? And may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow.

You know what it is to overflow? You start pouring something into a container and you get to the top and it just spills over. There's more than even you can anticipate. And may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow with love one for another.

Now, a lot of you say, well preacher, that's us here at First Pickens. We got it down, right? We are having a love fest. We just love each other. Boy, we love one another.

We love everybody whose name is on our roll, right? We just love, love, love, love, love each other. We're good to go. Boy, wait a second. That's not where he ends. He says, and for everyone just as we also do for you.

[10 : 45] Hmm. Okay, we'll do that. That would mean we would love the First Presbyterian Church, right? We're okay with that. Presbyterians are good people.

We'll okay love the Methodist people behind us here, right? We'll love them too. We'll love the Pentecostals and the Church of God. Okay, we're good.

We'll love the Mormons. We'll love Jehovah's Witness. We'll love the Charismatics. We'll love the Catholics. We'll even love the Jews.

We'll love the Muslims. We'll love the Mormons. We'll love the Jehovah's Witnesses. We'll love the folks who frequent the bars and never come to church.

We'll love those who stand in the streets and say, I'm an atheist and I hate your God and don't even believe He exists. You see, everybody's everybody. That includes people from Pickens, right?

[11 : 48] I don't know what you call people from Pickens. I said in the first service, the first service, Picanites, and then Tim came and said, well, actually they're Pekingese. It means you love all the people from Pickens who grew up in Pickens.

They're born and bred here. It also means you love those from out of town. You love them from Greenville, from Greer, from Travers Rest, and from Anderson, and from North Carolina, and from Virginia, and yes, Yankees.

You love even Yankees. And that's what he's praying, right? He says, I pray you will love everyone in the church and everyone else.

Everyone outside the church as well. And notice what he says. Verse 13. May He make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. Amen. Now there are three things he prays for. He prays for them to begin to love in an increasing fashion and for that love to overflow and to love everybody including those in and out of the church.

[13 : 04] For them to be blameless in holiness before our God. That's what we'll look at next week. And to be ready for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we'll look at that two weeks from today.

Now here's the big question. He's had a chance to think about this and to know what it is he wants to say in this prayer what he's asking God to do in their lives and what he's wanting them to be. And it becomes apparent the first order of business is that they love one another and love everyone else and you have to ask why do you think that was the top priority in his prayer for this church at Thessalonica.

I want to share with you three reasons real quickly and then I want to share with you some ways in which we do what it is he's asking us to do. I believe he prays what he prays because Jesus said so clearly that love is the mark the badge of someone who is a disciple.

Right before his death in John 13 34 and 35 you know what Jesus said? He looked at his disciples and this is what he said I give you a new commandment that you love one another even as I have loved you.

[14 : 23] He tells them how to love as I have loved you I want you to love others. And then he says this this is how they will know that you're my disciples by your love for one another. So what you can quickly see is this love is the badge of discipleship.

It's the telltale indicator. It's the sign of somebody who's a believer. Let me ask you how do you know somebody's a believer? Some folks think the way you let them know you're a believer is you get a tattoo on your arm it's got John 3.16 and I want to tell you something if you've got a tattoo of John 3.16 or anything else that don't bother me in the least because some folks will use that as an opportunity to be a witness for the Lord but understand this having the tattoo doesn't make you a believer.

Do you understand that? It's not a real sign that you're a believer. It's okay to have a tattoo if you want a tattoo put whatever what you want on your arm but understand this it doesn't translate into you being automatically a Christian any more than having a bumper sticker that says honk if you love Jesus right?

You can get that on a bumper sticker but that don't make you a believer you could have bought the car from somebody who had put the bumper sticker on the car right? And so none of those things some of you I'm sure today are wearing gold earrings or a necklace that has a cross around it or a cross on it and there's nothing wrong with that because it says to people man I believe in the cross and the cross is important it's the centerpiece of my life but I don't tell you something having the necklace having the earrings doesn't make you a Christian Jesus says the way you'll know somebody's a Christian is because they have love one for another it's by how you love now I want to ask you something have you ever been in a department store in a neighborhood you're walking you meet somebody and you spend four, five, six minutes with them in conversation maybe not even that long and you walk away you didn't talk about anything theological but you walk away from and you say to yourself this I just bet you they were a Christian you ever had that happen?

we all have right? again that's yes and no y'all gonna get that down before I leave here you know so we've all had that experience what was it about them that made you reach that conclusion did you say I saw the tattoo I saw the bumper sticker on his car I saw the the necklace around their neck no it was always this it was something about their attitude something about how they treated you something about how they responded they were so helpful they were so kind they were so patient they were so loving you just thought to yourself that guy that guy has got and it was because of their love the very thing that Jesus said he said you'll know that they're believers because of how they love one another there's a second reason from Paul's experience he knew this a church that doesn't love the way Jesus loved it's all for naught now like I said in the first service I'll say it again now I know I'm gonna offend somebody and this is a bigger crowd so I know I'm gonna offend somebody here

[17 : 32] I don't intend to do that I'm just trying to be honest with you okay why would anybody ever name a church car rent I know in this many people in the room somebody here has belonged to a car rent at some point in time I have preached in several car rents car rent number one car rent number two in another place you just wonder is your car rent number three and four because they couldn't get along with each other either but why would you name a church car rent it's like did you not have a copy of the bible I mean this is a hot mess of a church I mean they're just they're just a mess and Paul writes to him and says man I can't believe what I'm hearing about you and I believe

it's true you're divided and you're fighting among yourselves and there's dissension in the church and there's a guy who's sleeping with his father's wife are you crazy what's going on and you're suing one another taking each other to court and you get upset over the Lord's Supper and there's all kinds of problems about the spirit of God and how he works in your life so much so that between chapter 12 which is about the gifts of the spirit and chapter 14 which is about tongues he sandwiches in chapter 13 that says you can have all the gifts in the world but if you don't have love it's useless right you're just like a loud set of symbols or a gong it means absolutely nothing unless you have love now I want to tell you something

I've seen churches that try to build ministries around somebody who's a great great great preacher or musicians who are great great great musicians but I want to tell you something antagonism and division and dissension and lack of love always trumps all that you can have every bit of that but unless you have love in a church unless people know that first church of Pickens boy I'll tell you this about them their preacher may not be much that guy they got for the interim their music's okay but I'm going to tell you something friend they do love people if you will be known as a church that loves I mean really loves well people will be the path to your door so I think that's one of the reasons Paul said what he did there's a third reason and it's the most obvious of all probably how can we represent Jesus and not epitomize love because he did John said this of God he said God is love I've been here now about 15 or 16 weeks I'm not sure but about 13 of those weeks the first 13 of those weeks you know if you were here I preached just about every message around a narrative of Jesus and I did that with purpose because I wanted you to see boy Jesus is a loving Savior he loves harlots he loves the lowly he loves the down and outers he loves the publicans he loves every manner of sinner he's helpful he's compassionate he's healing he's raising the dead he's doing all these miracles I'm going to tell you something Jesus is the epitome of love how crazy is it for us to think that we can go into the world and declare to the world there's this God who you've never seen who is invisible who exists who sent his son who you've never seen and he came and he lived and he died on the cross and he rose from the dead and he gives you eternal life and he loves you and then be angry with the world have you ever seen churches that you get the feeling when you listen to what they say and what they do and how they flesh out their ministry boy they are angry with the world you know more for what they're against than what they're for have you ever seen that Jesus says I want to tell you something or Paul says if you want to be the church that God would have you to be then by all means you've got to be a church that increases in love and overflows with love now let me ask you is that who first pickings is well I hope it is I really hope it is because that's the first step in becoming a great church you are increasing in love and you absolutely exude love and overflow in love now some of you say well we're working on it but how do we do that you got a sheet of paper and a pencil I'm going to give you five quick ideas and I'm done you ready here's five things you need to do if you want to be a church that overflows in love and is increasing in love and the first thing you may not like you ready you got to get over yourself you just got to get over yourself you say preacher what in the world you mean look with me to Philippians chapter 2 and verse 3 and 4 turn there real quickly

Philippians just a few pages to your left Philippians chapter 2 verse 3 and 4 Paul is telling us how Jesus lived and this is what he says do nothing out of rivalry or conceit but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves everyone should look out not only for his own interest but also for the interest of others now I want to tell you something that's the way kingdom people live but I want to warn you about something that's the opposite of how people of this world live people of this world the biggest difference between you and them outwardly as we look at your life should be this we should recognize quickly that guy is a kingdom person and so he's thinking of others before he thinks of himself and I want to tell you something that's sacrificial that requires real humility not fake humility to put others ahead of yourself but the way the world looks at situations is this it's me first I take care of me first

[23 : 26] I may take care of others later but I got to take care of me in fact I see commercials I tell my wife yesterday we were watching television I saw a commercial where they actually justified that kind of mentality it's me first I need to take care of me humility is not thinking lowly of yourself it's not thinking less of yourself it's thinking of yourself less you see the difference in those two ideas it's not thinking less of myself that I think poor me how bad I am it's just not thinking about me it's just not being really concerned so much about me now I'm going to tip you off on something if you haven't already noticed it we're pretty self-centered creatures you know that by nature I mean we all have

this tendency to focus more on our problems than we do other people's problems I'm pastoring at Brushy Creek years ago there was a man in our church in his early 70's he develops what they fearful is cancer he has to go in for an operation

I'm sitting there with his wife in the waiting room they do the procedure they come out wasn't going long just struck a note of fear in me because he wasn't in there very long at all and the surgeon comes out and he says I've got to tell you some bad news he kneels down there in front of the guy's wife and he says your husband has a cancer that's just inoperable we got in there and it spreads metastasized and he's not going to live long I'm real real sorry he pats her on the knee asks if she's anything she can do she looks just dumbfounded and he walks out as soon as he gets out she turns to me and she says to me these are almost her exact words what am I going to do when he's gone how am I going to make it who's going to take care of me what's my life going to be like when he's gone you know what I couldn't help but think he's the guy with cancer you're going to be the one living your life's going on he's getting ready from the earthly perspective getting ready to end have you ever noticed how when tragedies occur so often times we don't even realize we do it we make it about us we become the center of the universe and they become almost secondary how does this impact my life not how does it impact his life you might think if she really loved him she'd be thinking and I know she did she's just self-absorbed but she might be thinking how am I going to help him through this difficult time well he's facing some dark days ahead he's facing a real message here when he wakes up that no one wants to get that you're dying but instead right now in the moment she's consumed in herself can I ask you something is that kind of indicative of your life your problems matter so much that other people just don't matter as much so first thing you need to do is get over yourself second thing you need to do is empathize begin seeing others and their hurts and needs before you do your own now turn with me quickly to 1 Corinthians chapter 12 look at 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 26 so if one member suffers all the members suffer with it if one member is honored all the members rejoice with it you know what he's saying he's saying when you're in the body of Christ and you feel for others the way you should and you're not putting yourself first it's always about you you've gotten over yourself and you learn how to empathize with others when they rejoice guess what you get happy with them and when they're sad and they're broken and their heart aches man your heart aches right along with them because you put yourself in their shoes that's what it means to empathize

I take myself out of my life and I insert myself into somebody else's life I'm going to tell you when you begin to do that well you'll begin to feel for people and love people in a way you never have before here's the tragedy most times we see people with needs who are hurting and we just go oh that's bad that's bad boy I wish I could do something about that and we just walk right on I'm pastor of Western Avenue Baptist Church when this happened I'm about 34 years of age there was a lady in our church who was chronically going in and out of the hospital all the time and she wasn't sick a whole lot of times she just loved doctors and hospitals and so she's about 45 miles away and I got to go see her and it's been one of the most horrendous weeks in my life to that point in time as a pastor so I'm just wore slap out I've slept very little this week and I'm in my car and I'm driving to Winston-Salem and I can remember the conversation it's been many many years ago about half a lifetime ago and yeah I remember very distinctly

I'm having a pity party have any of y'all ever done that I'm the only invited guest and I'm just wallowing in it I'm just thinking poor me I'm so tired I'm hungry I haven't slept they're just running me ragged I'm going over to see somebody who I need the bed worse than they need it and I'm riding over there and I pull up into the parking lot and I have to park two floors up and that's an aggravation and I get out and I'm walking a long way to the hospital big huge hospital in Winston-Salem and I get to the back door of the hospital and it's got these electric doors you know and I'm in a hurry because I just want to get in there and see her and get out of there bless the Lord Jesus and I'm just I'm just getting in and getting out and just doing my job right and just as I start in that door and the electric door opens there's a lady with a kid in a wheelchair and she's pushing him out and I just nearly run right over the top of him so I did like any of you I stop I apologize and I back up and I just get out of there and wait and wait and she pushes this little boy out she's about my wife's age and the little boy is about the age of my little boy about seven years of age and he's sitting in this wheelchair and he's got hospital gown on but a baseball cap one of these plastic baseball caps and you can't help but notice all his hair is gone and he's got those marks that indicate he's a radiation treatment patient and so

I just stand back and she pushes him out and they go out here to that divider and there's a little wall and she sits on the wall and he's there in sunshine and they're just out soaking up sunshine and I stand there for about 30 seconds and watch that lady I remember just big tears just pouring down my face and I thought you big baby you're complaining about this and about that and how hard you got it you don't know what trouble is that's trouble or can you put yourself in that mama's shoes she's sitting there saying nice things and smiling and trying to cheer up her boy but on the inside can you imagine the turmoil and the heartache and the hurt and the fear and the anxiety that's going on inside that lady and that's what empathy looks like it's when you don't just see it when you stop long enough to just insert yourself in their place and I'm going to tell you something every one of you got friends right now who've got cancer they got a heart problem they don't have money a lot of us in this room most of us in this room you may have had this experience at some time where you didn't know where your next check was coming from your next meal was coming from how you're going to pay the rent at the end of the month but most of us get through life without that it may have happened once or twice but most of us we live free of that but I'm going to tell you something there's some folk out there they live that way every day of their lives there are folk out there who have prescriptions this morning that they need to have fill but they can't get them filled because they don't have the money to do it they're making choices about do I do this or do I do that and that's something a lot of us we just don't know anything about that and that's the beginning of love if you want to have love that increases and overflows you've got to get the place you can empathize with people you see them and you live in their shoes for just a few minutes until you can get your head around here's what I need to do here's the third thing

[32 : 05] I think you can do if you want to increase in love and overflow in love and that's to pray for one another James remember I mentioned James we're going to look at it more closely next week but James in chapter 5 and verse 16 says pray for one another do that continually and look up and listen I don't want to beat up on anybody this morning but you know so often what we take that to mean that in Sunday school we hear about somebody who's sick and we say yeah I'll pray for them oh yeah I'll pray for them a lot of times we never give it another thought we say sometimes when we say I pray for you it just means you crossed my mind I thought about you but I didn't really pray for you and even how we pray when James says that he didn't mean just to let them pass through your mind to allow their name to fall for your lips okay I mentioned them I'm done with that you know how I think he meant for us to pray that we stop and put ourselves in the shoes and right now well I got a lot of friends that have cancer

I'm getting older and a lot of my friends are getting older and they're getting sick I mean close friends to me and I'm going to tell you every night when I pray and in the morning when I pray I try to think what's it like to be and I won't call their name but this particular person what's it like to be their wife what's it like to have to go get chemotherapy and radiation what's it like to be so sick you think you're going to die and then you're fearful you might what's it like to be like what's it like to see your spouse slipping away from you what's it like and to pray from that perspective God give them peace let them think of something other than their cancer or their problem or their sickness or whatever it is that's wrong in their life they got problems with their children or their marriage is falling apart God just let them get free of that for a few minutes would you do that would you intervene somehow and help them I'm going to tell you if you'll begin to do that more folks will begin to notice the first baptist picking the boy those folks they don't just say they pray for they really pray for you they really love you they're growing in their life and they're abounding in their life which leads me to the fourth thing and this is something

I really like it's pretty simple you ready do something do something I want you to listen as I read 1 John chapter 3 and verse 17 listen to what John says 1 John chapter 3 and verse 17 if anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need but shuts off his compassion from him how can God's love reside in him boy I don't know how you'd make it any clearer than that Bob Goff remember that book I mentioned four, five, six weeks ago Bob Goff I'm telling you that again so you can write it down Bob Goff Love Does is the book he authored I told you about that book several weeks ago one gentleman in the crowd came and said to me the following he said I bought that book I'm not a reader I want to tell you something I finished it in two days he said one of the greatest books I've ever read if you haven't read it you ought to get that book I'm telling you you'll laugh you'll cry it's a great great great read

Love Does and the whole basis of it is this that love is not something you look at somebody and say with goo goo eyes when you love somebody you act love is an action it's not a thought it's not a suggestion it's not a word it's not a proposal it's an action you love folk by doing so do something go cut somebody's grass if you love them take them a meal this afternoon if you love them pay their light bill if you love them take care of that prescription for them if you love them keep their kids and give them a night on the town if you love them you understand what I'm saying that's what real love looks like it acts it does something the church every day it exists has tons of opportunities to show the world to demonstrate the world that we love them but can I tell you something we just seldom take those opportunities we let them come and we let them go instead of seizing the moment and I'm going to tell you something every time I see the church be the church boy my head swells with pride and every time I see the church not be the church as a pastor it always broke my heart I'm preaching revival about 23 or 24 years ago best I can remember in a community a number of miles from Greer the guy who calls me and asks me to preach I've never met pretty unusual I got a few invitations like that but usually there were guys that I knew guys like Fred would say would you come over and would you preach for me this guy that I'd never met didn't know his name didn't know anything about it he calls me out of the blue and he says I've heard about you could you come and preach I said yeah he gives me the dates I'm going to be there Sunday night through a Wednesday so I go and I preach I preach Sunday night Monday Tuesday and when Wednesday comes I get there and he comes over to me and sits down and he says tells me he's enjoyed it and he says could you go with me to supper tonight after this is over I said I'd be glad to so when it was over his wife couldn't be there that night and he and I go to supper in this little fish camp we're sitting there we're ordering our meal and we're just waiting on the waitress to bring our food it's kind of awkward it's just real unusually silent and he says has anybody told you about me my situation [37 : 59] I said no I felt a little bit odd I said no I don't know what you're talking about he says you don't know anything about my situation at all no he says you're probably the only preacher in South Carolina who doesn't I want to tell you something I really didn't I didn't know him from Adam other than I'd met him for those three days he says can I tell you my story I'd be glad to to listen he tells me short as I can make it a few years back a couple years back from when this happened years ago he said I got a 19 year old daughter she just got out of high school she's dating our youth minister and she suddenly begins to develop these health problems my wife asked her what's going on she just evades it leads us down this rabbit trail but she's not changing in size any that we can tell she's camouflaging it with her clothes and one Saturday night she's so deathly ill we think it must be a gallbladder appendicitis so at 3 in the morning when we can't manage it anymore we rush her to the hospital local hospital we get there and she's back there just a few minutes and this doctor comes out and he says pastor can I talk with you he says yes sir and he sits down he says I don't know how to tell you this he said but your daughter is about 8 months pregnant and she's in labor and she's going to have this baby tonight he said me and my wife look at each other and we cannot believe what we're hearing and I'm going to tell you I've sat across from a lot of people pretty good about telling me telling when people are telling me the truth and they're telling me a lie

I've done this so long I can look in his face and just tell I don't understand that but he's telling me the absolute truth he says we're grief stricken he said we're just in shock the baby's born a few hours later it's a Saturday night so I haven't been to bed all night long I've been up with my daughter now I have a baby about 8 in the morning I show up at church and the clothes I worn to the hospital the church service begins but I tell the guy I'm going to take charge and I just got something I got to tell the congregation he stands up and he tells the congregation just what I told you and he says I want to tell you I didn't know about this I'm embarrassed about this but I understand if you want me to resign he said we haven't tried to hide anything from you but I'm just I'm finding this out for myself and I'm tired and I can't do this this morning so there's not going to be any preaching brother so and so is going to come and he's going to lead us in a song or two you're going to pray and then you're going home but if you want me to resign I'm not going to be here you can talk openly about it among yourselves and I'm going to leave and go back to the hospital be with my wife and daughter he walks out the door he goes to the hospital he stays till about 3 30 in the afternoon he gets in his car and he and his wife are going home they're just dead tired he says when I get to the pastoral I start turning in the driveway and as I turn in the driveway I look and they're under our carport it looks like the whole church has gone to Walmart and they bought out everything Walmart had to sell on babies he says the carport is just packed from top to bottom with things that baby could use

he said I can't tell you how I felt in my heart I'm going to tell you I sat there listening and I just began to cry I mean I'm emotional I just began to cry you know why I cried not for the hardship he endured I cried because I thought to myself what a beautiful picture of what the church ought to be that's when the church acts like the church right I've seen it so many times be so judgmental and we want to just preach to people and beat up on people and tell them how you shouldn't have done this and you shouldn't have done that when many of us ourselves have found ourselves in sin's path boy we need the mercy and the grace of God bestowed on us and thank God he showed us mercy but why is it we're so slow sometimes to show mercy and grace to other people it's a beautiful thing when the church acts like the church it's a sad thing when the church doesn't seize the opportunity it's been given to be the church there's one last thing and I close with this if you want to love to increase in your life and in your church and to overflow begin forgiving people who have hurt you now Brian has not had a single conversation with me and I had dinner with

Fred Stone about 10 days ago or nine days ago Fred has not said a single word to me I don't know if anybody in this church has had a riff with anybody else that's the honest truth before God but I want to tell you something in a church this size it would seem almost impossible to me that you could be members here for a long long long time and somebody not get crosswise with somebody else and I'm asking you if you want love to abound to forgive them right now today to make a choice that going forward I'm forgiving them I'm going to live as though that never happened I'm going to put it out of my life and some of you are thinking already I know what you're thinking because I've been where you are you don't know what they did you don't know how inexcusable their action against me was and boy I get that because I'm going to tell you I've had some folk do some pretty mean stuff to me through the years hard to get by hard just to get past that I don't tell you something they nailed

Jesus to the cross and as they're nailed him to the cross the first words out of his mouth were these father forgive them for they know not what they do I think that prayer included pilot who like a coward found him guilty when he should have found him innocent I think it included the Jewish leaders of that mob who made false accusations knowing they weren't true I think it applied to the Roman soldiers who brutally drove those spikes through his hands and I think it included all those folk out there for whom he had done good who failed to stand in his behalf even the disciples who betrayed him and who denied ever even knowing him and I'm going to say to you if Jesus can forgive us that what's anybody ever done to you you can't forgive remember Joseph in the Old Testament chapter 45 his brothers you know how bad his brothers disliked him they wanted him dead they threw him into a cistern we're going to kill him later to make a few bucks and to allow their conscience to be a little at ease they sold him to slave traders he ends up in prison because of a lie that

[45 : 25] Potiphar's wife told about it all that because of what these brothers did and yet when they come years later in need of help you know what he does instead of turning them away or being angry with them he literally literally drives all the Egyptians out of the room and reaches out and embraces them and hugs them and even says this don't blame yourself you didn't put me here God put me here he did everything in his power to restore a broken relationship and I'm going to tell you something when your love grows and when you abound in love that's exactly what every one of us need to do we need to come to the place that we forgive others even inexcusable hurts in our life so let me ask you have you ever done that can you think of somebody right now at First Baptist Pickens or somebody in your family or somebody at work and you say you know I have trouble loving them because they did this to me right here would you let it go today would you just let that go you say I can't yeah you can you got a choice I want to tell you something they don't even hold the keys to that you do you're the only one who can forgive them you're the only one who can let it go so would you do that this morning we're going to have a hymn of invitation and Brian's going to sing it lead us in it but if the Lord's spoken to your heart and there's something you need to deal with God about would you just get up out of your seat right now and just come and you can just stand here at the front or kneel or you can do it right there at your chair if you don't want to come forward just maybe be seated again follow their stand just say I got some business I got to take care of God I haven't been loving the way I need to love let's stand this

Brian leads us you you you you you you