# The Preparation of Love

By Steve Viars

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### Faith Church

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This morning I’d like to begin our time together by asking you a question: what if anything is the relationship between love and preparation? In other words, is one of the ways that you show love for another person making preparation, to care for them and to meet their needs? Love and preparation. When Chris and I were finishing my doctoral program out at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, we were asking the Lord to show us where he wanted us to serve him full time. I knew Pastor Goode, the former Senior Pastor here because his previous church had been up in Gary. That's where I grew up so I was a little boy in his church if you've not quite made that connection yet. I had also taken the biblical counseling training program here in Lafayette when I was working at my Master's degree up the road here at Grace Seminary in Warsaw and so Pastor Goode and I knew one another and one of the ministry opportunities after I graduated from Westminster was to come here and join this staff. We've probably all been in the situation where you're not sure where you're going to live next, you're not sure where you're going to work. That can be upsetting. That can be just a troubling time for sure.

What we remember the most about that period of time was Pastor Goode and this church's loving preparation. They really looked for ways to make it clear that they cared about us. It began even when Pastor Goode picked us up from the airport. He had thought ahead even about that trip back and so he had a church directory there on the seat next to him and he handed a copy to me and handed another copy to Chris and he started taling with us about the various people in the church family, the people that he loved, the people that he was so thankful to be your pastor and just the fruit of the philosophy of ministry here. He had thought ahead. What do Steve and Chris need to hear about right now?

We weren't coming to look at houses. We weren't coming to look at buildings. We were coming to think about whether or not God was at work here and because Pastor Goode was so loving to us that he took the time to prepare, it just immediately set our minds at ease and then it just seemed like each portion of the weekend had been so carefully planned. That next morning, Saturday morning, I was able to speak at Men of Faith which was a program that we had at the time. What an incredible encouragement that was and then they had planned a dinner for us that night with all of the pastors and wives and deacons and their wives and what Pastor Goode actually asked everybody to do was to go around and to talk about what they were thankful for regarding our church and also what they believed we needed to work on. Again, it's exactly what we needed to hear as we praised God for the things that were right but also enjoyed listening to the authenticity of the men and women in leadership in this church and how they were open to talking about ways we just needed to get better. Great plan at a marvelous Lord's day and then question and answer time with the church family. Each step along the way, the message was very clear to us: we love you and we want you to come.

Once that formal call was extended, that's not like when the preparation then died out, no it went into overdrive because we had about another month worth of responsibilities that we had to tie up back on the east coast. It was so funny, I would come home from work or come home from school and Chris would have a smile on her face and she'd say, “Well, Pastor Goode called again and wanted to know today whether I like a gas stove or an electric stove because they're trying to help us find housing and whether or not I prefer a gas clothes dryer or an electric one, etc. etc. Just making all the plans and being sure that we know that they still love us.”

Then we moved the weekend before Christmas and so we just assumed, “Hey, you're going to be on your own,” everybody is going to be busy during Christmas time. Well, it was the polar opposite. We had driven the moving van ourselves and we were tired when we pulled into town. There was a whole group of people here at the church with a meal ready for our tired, hungry family and then an army of volunteers all prepared to help us unload the truck and another army of people scurrying around just doing the cleaning in our apartment and all of that sort of thing. Of course, more food is showing up because, after all, we're Baptists and that generally means, “I love you. Have another piece of friend chicken.” It's like the pastor who said, “My belt is like a leather fence around a chicken graveyard.” I understand that whole thing for sure.

The crowing moment, I think, I was reaching up to do something as we were setting some things up in our apartment and I felt somebody reach around and put his hand on my pocket. You understand, I’m from Gary, that generally means somebody is robbing from you. I turned around and it was Pastor Goode and he had put something in my pocket and I reached in and there was a paycheck. I said, “What in the world is that?” He said, “That's your first check.” I said, “I haven't even worked a day yet.” He said, “Well, we know there's a lot of expenses at this kind of a transitional time and we wanted to just start your pay today in advance.”

Now, think about all the steps of preparation that were involved in that story. The message of Scripture is, that's what love does. That's what love looks like: it prepares. As delightful as I hope that story of the way the church prepared for our family was to you, that's just a foretaste of the way Jesus Christ is preparing for his children. With that in mind, open your Bible, please, to John 14. That's on page 84 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that.

Our church's theme this year is “Loving Our Neighbors” and so we started the year by talking about the question: why should I care? Why should I care about my neighbors? Why should I care about anybody but me? We tried to address those issues of apathy and indifference head on because often what hinders us from loving our neighbors well is that. Then we turned our attention to this delightful passage of Scripture known as the Upper Room Discourse in John 13-17 organized around the idea of loving the way Jesus taught it. We know there is plenty of truth here for us about how we can act on our annual theme in part because of the way John even introduces the section of Scripture, John 13:1, “Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” Well, surely listening to someone like that, a person who loves that much is going to teach us all sorts of principles that can help us get to a better place as we try to grow at loving those around us.

So, we're just going verse-by-verse through this intimate conversation that we have been invited to and wringing everything out of this that we possibly can. So far we've studied the position of love because Jesus' first act in this section was to get down on his knees and wash the disciples' feet. That's the position of love and then the loyalty of love as we saw the contrast between the treachery of Judas' betrayal and a Savior who loved his own and who loved them to the end. Then, last week, the new standard of love where Jesus explained that he was giving his disciples a new command. New in the sense that they were to love one another even as, just as, he was loving them.

This morning we now want to move into chapter 14 which I understand is probably for many of us on our favorites list. If you're going to talk about the passages of Scripture that you love the most, passages that have brought great comfort to your heart during difficult times, the direction to your life when you felt like things were all scattered, John 14 is certainly one of those passages because now Jesus is going to explain and also exemplify the preparation of love. You see friends, love prepares. Please follow the argument of this text carefully as I read the first 15 verses of John 14, Jesus said,

“1 'Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. 4 And you know the way where I am going.' 5 Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?' 6 Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. 7 If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.' 8 Philip said to Him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.' 9 Jesus said to him, 'Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, “Show us the Father”? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. 11 Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves. 12 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father. 13 Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. 15 If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.'”

We're talking this morning about the preparation of love and with the time we have remaining, let's work our way carefully through the argument of this text and look for three ways Jesus showed his love by preparing for us. By preparing for us. First of all, the preparation for your future. Think about the context of the verses that we just read. Even while these words of Peter's three upcoming denials were hanging in the air, Jesus still goes on to affirm his unconditional love for them by explaining what he is going to be doing while he's gone, “I'll be preparing.”

Let's break this down systematically. No question that they and we experience the troubling nature of life in this world. Jesus actually chose a very fascinating word when he said, “Let not your heart be troubled.” It's the Greek word tarasso and it means “stir up” or “disturb” or “unsettle” or “throw into confusion.” Earlier in the same book, John had used that exact same word when he was talking about the pool at Bethesda where the water, the Bible says, “was stirred up,” it was agitated, it was tarrassoed. Peter would use that same word later when he would say, “But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness,” 1 Peter 3:14, “you are blessed and don't fear their intimidation and don't be tarrassoed.” Do you see that sense of being disturbed? Being shaken up? Being agitated? Being unsettled? Well, why would that have been true? Why did Jesus need to talk with the disciples about the possibility of their hearts being tarrassoed or troubled?

Several reasons: they had just experienced the triumphal entry a few days before when they thought that maybe Jesus was going to deliver their nation from Roman dominion even though he had clearly taught otherwise and now he's told them again he's going to die. He's going to have to suffer and then be resurrected and now their desires have been turned upside down and their hearts are troubled. Then the revelation in the Upper Room that one of their own was going to betray him. Then even Peter, one of their strong leaders, would deny him three times. It's fair to say, I think, that their hearts would be troubled. Their hearts would be tarrassoed.

Well, think of it from a different perspective: how about for you and me? Let's face it, the Bible is very clear about this: many times life in this sin-cursed world is tarrassoed. Job said it like this, Job 14:1, “Man who is born of a woman is short-lived and full of turmoil.” Wow, there's a happy verse, huh? You want a companion, here it is, Job 5:7, “For man is born for trouble as sparks fly upward.” Have you ever seen sparks go anywhere but upward? For man is born for trouble.

What's fascinating about all of this is that Jesus – remember he could have been thinking about the pain of the betrayal, he could have been thinking about how terrible it was Peter would deny him, he could have been thinking about the pain of the cross but what this portion of the text tells us is – Jesus even at that very moment cares about their trouble. Is it any surprise that the prophet Isaiah said that Jesus would bear our sorrows? Not always take them away but bear our sorrows. And the writer of Hebrews would later affirm that he was what kind of high priest? He was a sympathetic high priest, “Let not your hearts be tarrassoed,” be disturbed, to be stirred up and agitated and thrown in confusion. Let not your hearts be troubled.

Well, the disciples' hearts were troubled and you and I certainly face trouble but what about for those around us? Here's what we're going to be doing with this text: there really are at least three different perspectives, I think, through which these verses can be helpful to us today. You could think about how troubled Jesus' disciples were. We already talked about that. And how this truth that he gave them would have ministered to them at that moment then. Or, nothing wrong with you thinking about how troubled your heart is right now and how the truth that we find in this text because of God's preparing love for us, could also minister to you right now. But I would also suggest that you could think about how the Lord has placed people around you right now who are also troubled. Here's how these verses can help us, at least in principle, love others in their trouble the way Jesus loves us in ours.

So, we're going to try to weave those three perspectives through everything that we're talking about this morning but the big picture so far, the troubling nature of life in this world. Well, what's the antidote to that? The answer is: thinking about Jesus' loving preparation, “In my Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; I am going to prepare a place for you.” That's what love does, prepares.

Between now and Easter you might want to do some additional study on the subject of heaven, on the place that Jesus is preparing for every person who will repent and believe in him. Let me just mention just a couple of resources that might help you: one is this book called “Heaven” by Randy Alcorn. It's a marvelous, marvelous book. We have them available if you want them. You say, “What are you saying? That thing looks big. You're expecting that I should read a book?” Yeah. Many of God's people would have less trouble and more comfort if they would shut off the idiot box and read a book. Okay? You say, “That wasn't very nice.” Well, the guy sitting next to you didn't need it very nicely, okay? You say, “That would just kill me.” Okay. You can't really tell it from this PowerPoint slide so I have a copy, this is the pamphlet version. You say, “I want the little boy version to get started,” that's alright. Seriously, this is available too and there is nothing wrong. God will meet you wherever you are. He doesn't want to leave you there, but he'll meet you wherever you are but I’m suggesting that one of the things that might be very helpful between now and Easter for many of us, is to do some additional study from the word of God on what it tells us about the place that Jesus is lovingly preparing. Lovingly preparing for us.

John MacArthur reminds us that there are many different ways that heaven is described in Scripture. It's a country due to its vastness. You say, “Will there be room for me?” You'd better believe it. I promise you there will not be overcrowding in heaven. Jesus is a really good designer. It's a city emphasizing its large number of inhabitants. Think about the great friendships you're going to be able to establish in heaven from people of all nations and all times. It's a kingdom because God is its King. There is some good news, huh? It's paradise because of its indescribable beauty. It's a place of rest. You say, “I'm so tired right now.” It's a place of rest where the redeemed are freed from the wearying conflict with sin, Satan and the evil world system. There is so much more that could be said about that this morning but the most important issue from this text is what? That Jesus is the one who is in charge of the preparations and I can promise you this: if Jesus is the general contractor, if Jesus is the one who is in charge, we know that what awaits us is at some point beyond description or comprehension. I promise you this: there's a lot we don't know about heaven but if you are going there, you will not say when you arrive, “This was a gyp.” There is a promise.

You might want to review Revelation 21:9-27. You could do that this afternoon or some time this week and just drink in Scripture's description of the sheer beauty of what awaits us. Here's just a little sampling, “And the 12 gates were 12 pearls. Each one of the gates was a single pearl and the street of the city was pure gold like transparent glass. I saw no temple in it for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.” Now, hear this: “And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it for the glory of God has illumined it and its lamp is the Lamb.” Its lamp is the Lamb.

Here's the big point, this is part of what John meant when he said, “Having loved his own who are in the world, he loved them to the end.” He's demonstrating that love by making preparations for their future and we can be encouraged that he loves us in exactly the same way today which means the heart of a Christian does not have to be troubled because of the assurance of our eternal home. Again, I recognize there are people in this room right now and you are going through some deep water. It doesn't mean you don't have trouble, but it means that those troubles can be balanced by the thought, the joy, the promise, the love of Jesus' preparation for your eternal home.

Now, let's turn this diamond around a little bit and look at it from a slightly different perspective. Think about what this teaches us about the way you love others. There is a clear relationship, is there not, between love and preparation? That can flesh itself out in all sorts of ways. For example, by being concerned for their eternal destiny. Think about the people that God has placed in your home, think about the people he's placed in your neighborhood, think about the people he's placed at work and then think about this verse, Ecclesiastes 3:11, “God has made everything appropriate in its time. He has,” here it is, “also set eternity in their heart.” Please think about that. What that means is that every person has a knowledge of and concern for their eternal destiny. You cannot turn that off and one of the ways we love those around us is by helping others know about the potential of being forgiven of their sin and having assurance of a home in heaven when they die. That's love. It helps others be prepared for eternity.

The other day I was out riding my bike and I stopped at a stop sign and a car pulled up next to me with a dad having a conversation with his son. The son appeared about maybe 9 or 10 years old and they were just obviously having a delightful time with one another in the car. As the car pulled away, there was a bumper sticker on the back that said, “Real men love Jesus.” Real men love Jesus and sure our children have to make up their own minds about such things but how could a parent do anything more loving than live in a way that helps his or her child want to come to know Christ as Savior and Lord? And to be sure that the question of their eternal destiny in their heart had been settled. There's a daddy and it doesn't matter if somebody at work or someone in the neighborhood is going to ridicule him for his bumper stickers, there's a daddy who is doing his all to love his son by helping him be prepared.

The same is true with those in our neighborhood or those at our work place. You know, we're enjoying these verses on heaven but the Scripture also has some very clear instruction about the nature and existence of hell, a place of eternal torment and separation from God for those who have rejected his Son. I realize in this day, in a university town, in this culture, some people might scoff at that, “What are we? Some sort of a hellfire and brimstone church?” We're a biblical church. We're a biblical church and we do believe that there is a real heaven to be gained and a real hell to be shunned. I believe it's terribly unloving to live around or work around people for any significant period of time without raising the question with them about where they will spend their eternity.

Earlier I quoted from 1 Peter 3:14, the very next verse says, “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts always being ready to make a defense to anyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” Practically everybody here could tell a story of how the Lord brought somebody into your life who impacted you spiritually. In many cases they did it tastefully, they did it appropriately but they did what this verse says: they sanctified Christ as Lord in their hearts; they were ready to give you an explanation of why they had hope in their hearts. They did it with gentleness, reverence, but they did it and in some cases it might have been a risk because, frankly, some of you before you came to Christ were just a little bit snarky. That would have been a good time for “yeah.” It might have been a risk but God used that person to bring you to Christ and you would say today that you count that person among those who have loved you more than most people in your entire life. Why? Because they pointed you to the possibility of benefiting from the preparations that Jesus is making for the eternal destiny of each one of his children and today your heart is not troubled about what's going to happen to you when you die in part because of the way that person faithfully and sacrificially loved you.

Can we pause there and just ask ourselves a few questions? Do you think we should? Do you think we ought to ask the Holy Spirit to help us apply what we're reading from this text to our own heart and life? First of all: do you know for sure that you're on your way to heaven? Jesus said, “I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life. No man comes to the Father but by me.” And I would just ask you this morning: do you know that you know that you know that you're on your way to heaven because there's been a definite time in your life where you admitted your sin and you placed your faith and trust in him? Friend, if you've not done that, we would urge you to do that today. Wouldn't it be a terrible thing if persons listened to a sermon on heaven and weren't sure that they were going there and did not accept the free gift and make sure that they had benefited from the provision of Jesus' preparation? So, I would urge you to make that decision today while you have the opportunity to do so.

I would also ask you this: when's the last time you thanked the person who loved you enough to be prepared to tell you about Christ? And you helped you benefit from the preparations that the Savior is making on your behalf? I kind of joked a little bit a moment ago about saying how some of you before you came to know Christ were a bit snarky. Well, let's come back around to that idea for a minute: some of you were and that person kept loving you anyway. Do you remember how snarky you were? Do you remember how mean you were? Remember all that? And yet that person kept loving you and kept loving you and kept loving you? Why? They were trying to help you be prepared.

Love prepares. And maybe one of the take-aways from this message would be for some of us to make a phone call today and thank that person. Or here's something, I know this culture knows nothing about it, but they have pens with ink in them and they make this paper thing and you can actually write a note on it and send it to somebody. There's a miraculous thing and it's called the post office and you can actually mail someone a handwritten note expressing your thanks to them. I would encourage you to consider doing that if it's been a while since you thanked that person.

Here's a question: let the Holy Spirit do his work on you right now. How concerned are you on an average day about finding opportunities to help those around you process the question of eternity that resides in their hearts? Is it possible that we don't love people as much as we want to think that we do? And what specific steps could you take in the days ahead to act on this biblical relationship between love and preparation? I would encourage you to plan to serve in the Passion Play. I would encourage you to plan to invite friends to the Passion Play. That is a great opportunity for us to do exactly what this text is talking about: love prepares and love helps people be prepared.

Here's a secondary application I would like to talk about while we're just in the neighborhood. I'm not saying that as soon as the disciples heard these words they would have gone in this direction but I think we can extrapolate this from this text: how do we love those around? It's by planning for the future in all sorts of ways. Here's why I raise that this morning: in the counseling that we do with the people in our community, I am amazed at how many women say to me, “You know what? I have no idea what my husband makes. We do not have a budget. We do not have a plan for how we spend our money. We're constantly in turmoil. I have no idea if we have insurance or not. I have no idea if we have any kind of a retirement fund. I have not idea and I am very concerned/troubled/agitated about the future simply because no one is planning.” Men, I would say to every one of you if you're married: that's part of your job and one of the ways you show love for your wife is by preparing financially. I'll tell you why some men don't want to prepare: it's because they don't want to limit their spending; they don't want to develop any kind of self-discipline in their own heart and life. Because, after all, we have to have a new bass boat, it's time for that, blah, blah, blah. So, because they don't want to rein in their thing, they're not going to have a budget and so they leave their family in constant turmoil. Here's the lesson: love prepares and if you've left your wife to live – and I’m not talking about some sort of unforeseen financial hardship, I’m not talking about that – I’m talking about the unwillingness of a man to love his wife and love his family enough to prepare.

Here's the other side of it: some of you wives and some of you kids, you live in homes where your husband and your father does prepare and you fuss about it. He's put a budget into your home and you fuss about it. Or he sat down and he's talked with you about college savings and you say, “Yeah, I was in second grade and he was talking to me about college savings explaining that's why we're not going to waste money right now on this, that, or that because we're saving for your college,” and you rebelled against that. Or he sat down and talked to you about the insurance that he has or he talked to you about the retirement funds and you kind of rolled your eyes. Here's today's lesson: that's the characteristics of a man who loves and if you're married to a man like that, you need to start recognizing it for that. Some wives, they don't realize what they have. They compare their husbands to that Flavio guy. Do you know who I’m talking about? I may have that not quite right but I’m talking about the guy with the long flowing blond hair who rides around on the horse and so you look at your husband at the dinner table and say, “Why don't you come on your horse?” I rode my Toyota over here, what are you talking about, honey?

Listen, that Flavio guy, he hasn't planned a day in his life. Why would you compare your husband? I realize your husband is probably starting to get a droppy chin, starting to get a pooch belly and all that sort of thing. Listen, if he is the kind of man who has faithfully planned for your family, here's what you ought to do right there at the dinner table, you ought to start looking at him so longingly at the lunch table today, kind of giving him the stare. Do you know what I’m talking about? And he ought to say, “What?” And you ought to say, “You know, I’m just coming to realize how hot you are. As I think about the way you plan so faithfully for me, you are a hunk, a hunk of burning love.” You might have to say to your kids, “You know kids, you probably need to go to your rooms because I’m gonna have to smooch him right over the meatloaf.” I'm just simply saying, are we going to have a biblical view of love or are we going to let the world define it and ruin it? I was totally off my notes but I thoroughly enjoyed that. I actually broke a sweat on that one right there.

It's about the preparation for your convictions. Let's go further, better get back in this text, huh? It's interesting, Jesus actually began this part of the discussion by talking about a clear command to believe. He said, “Believe in God and believe also in me.” That's a very important theological point. Yes, salvation is a gift to be received, it's a decision to be made but, friends, at some point it is a command to be obeyed. Paul said this on Mars Hill, he said, “Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent.” That's what Jesus is saying in this discussion. There are reasons to believe and he loved us enough to give us reasons to prepare our convictions like his clearly attested deity. You saw that phrase, “I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life,” well, Bible students would understand that as a claim to being the Son of God. They would have thought of a passage like Exodus 3:14 probably, “God said to Moses, I Am Who I Am,” and he said, “Thus shall you say to the sons of Israel, I Am has sent me.” And that's why John is very clear to detail the multiple times that Jesus used that phrase “I Am” because Jesus is trying to help us be prepared to have firm convictions by proving who he is.

One of my favorite “I Ams” is later in the Garden of Gethsemane. “So Jesus knowing all the things that were coming upon him went forth and said to them, Whom do you seek? They answered him, Jesus the Nazarene. He said to them, I am he.” Judas also, who was betraying him was standing with them so when he said to them “I am he,” the soldiers in the garden who were there to arrest him, drew back and fell to the ground. That goes along with the song we were singing earlier about the power of the name of God. One of my favorite theology professors, John Whitcomb, used to say, “The most foolish thing those soldiers in the Garden ever did was to get up,” because when somebody says the words “I am” and it's so powerful that it knocks you to the ground, the wisest course of action is to roll over, get on your knees and start worshiping him.

Jesus speaks about the exclusivity of his claims: I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life. The point is: he's loving us enough to give us reasons to develop convictions. It's the beauty of his words. He says, “Don't you believe that I’m in the Father and the Father is in me. The words that I say, I don't speak of my own initiative.” You say, “Why do you keep telling us to turn off our televisions and to read our Bibles?” That's why, because of the power of the word resonating deeply into your hearts.

The power of his works. “Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.” Who else could give a blind man sight? Who else could cure a group of men of their leprosy? Who else could raise his friend from the dead? The point is: Jesus loved his disciples and he loves us so much that he did everything imaginable to help us be prepared to believe with compelling and concrete evidence to support his claims of deity. No wonder the gospel of John would end with the words, “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing you may have life in his name.” He loved us so much he gave us reasons to develop convictions.

What about the implication to the way we love? How concerned are you that the people in your life are developing biblical convictions? For example: Dads, when your child has a question about God or his word, please tell me you don't answer and say, “Go ask your mom. I'm watching the game.” Please tell me you would do whatever is necessary to, if you have to go offline and study the answer to that question, and be sure you're coming back and answering your child. An opportunity to show that you love him by helping him or her develop inner convictions.

What about the other people who are around you? Are you concerned that the way you live gives evidence that Jesus is truly alive and therefore they should have reason to believe in him? That previous passage that I mentioned from 1 Peter 3:15 about being ready to give an answer to any person who would ask you a reason for the hope that is in you, you say, “Why in the world would anybody ever ask?” Well, if you read the context in 1 Peter 3, he answers that. He talks about being a godly influence in the workplace. Living for Christ there. He talked about wives who are living for Christ even when their husbands don't believe. He talks about husbands being godly examples even when their wives are hard to understand. And when we choose to let Christ make a difference in our hearts and lives, that's right for a zillion reasons one of which is: it's loving because it makes it easier for people around us to choose to believe in him. It's an old saying but it's true: if you are on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? And as that evidence is there, it is loving because it helps others believe.

Lastly is the preparation of access. Jesus says that because he's the way, because he's the truth, because he's the life, when a person comes to the Father by him, he's demonstrated his love in part by giving us access to the Father. “Whatever you ask in my name,” Jesus said, “that will I do so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.” Sam Storm said in his book “One Thing,” “You're in the hands of an omnipotent God whose ability to act on your behalf is only equal by his passionate affection for you as his child and whose strength is without end and whose sovereignty covers the expanse of heaven.” Praise God that we have access to the very throne. That's how much he loves us.

You know this text ends by saying, “If you love me you'll keep my commandments.” You say, “Oh my, that's hard.” You know, a lot of what we've talked about today is hard. That's why God loved us so much that he gave us access, because we can pray for ourselves and one another, asking God to help us do these very things. Yesterday I was in the airport in Minneapolis waiting to come back. Typically that is often my schedule where I’m somewhere Friday and Saturday and so I take my notes for Sunday and kind of go over them the last time. It's amazing how many of these have been done at 33,000 feet but yesterday I was in an airport and I had all my stuff all spread out and I was studying and it was in a food court kind of place and there was a woman who was there and she had some kind of airline attire on so she either worked for the airport or the airline, I wasn't sure. She had come out into the nonsecure area and her husband had met her there. It appeared to me, I don't know for sure, that he had met her there for lunch because she was working for the airport. What was delightful, they set their food down and then right there in the food court, they joined hands and they prayed together. What a delightful picture of love for one another. What a delightful picture of love for God. What a delightful picture of them understanding how much God loved them in giving them the privilege of having that access.

Friends, the message of the Scripture is that God loves us incredibly. He's loved us by preparing for our future. He's loved us by preparing to help us develop convictions. And he's loved us by preparing access to him. Let us love him for what he's done and love others in a similar way.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

*Father in heaven, Lord, we do thank you for loving us so much that you prepare for us. Lord, I pray that that would balance some of the challenges that we may be facing. Lord, I pray that that would give direction and focus and I pray that we would seek to love others in a similar way. We pray this asking for your help in Jesus' name. Amen.*