

**“Nothing But Love”**  
**By General Pastor Peter F. Paine**  
**Sunday, January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014**

Your verse for this month is (let’s read it out loud together):

***John 13:35***    *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

If you have love one to another, then people will know that you are Christ’s disciple. If you don’t have love one to another, then people won’t know that you are Christ’s disciple. Now, this idea of loving one another is a very interesting thing, isn’t it? In the church, we can get to a place where we find fault with each other. You know, to a great extent, that’s part of the Christian experience because we live by a set of rules. Let’s just say that you’re on a football team and practice starts at 4:00 P.M., after school, and you show up a 4:05. Your other teammates say, “Hey, you’re late.” Are they finding fault? Yeah, well, they’re pointing out that you’re wrong, right? In the church, it’s like that, too, because the Bible gives us a set of guidelines, doesn’t it? But, if we love one another, we’re going to be able to work with each other in a way that shows the love of Christ. Yes, we’re going to see each other make mistakes. Yes, we’re going to see each other slip and fall. Yes, we’re going to see each other have moral failings, and all that goes with living life, because life is messy. I love this verse, because Jesus said that others will know that we are His disciples if we love one another. Let’s talk a little bit about love.

I’d like to talk to you a little bit today about this idea of living a life that is nothing but love. Have you ever been so mad at somebody that you just couldn’t love them? One hand up, two, three, ten, thirty... You ever been so mad at somebody, you just think, “What were they thinking?” You ever been so mad at somebody that the idea of forgiving them just seems... wrong? “They don’t deserve forgiving!” I’ve been told—I don’t know if it’s true—that there’s still a law on the books in Texas, the “They needed killing” defense. “Yeah, I killed them, your honor; they needed killing.” I kind of get that idea, and I can see some of you do, too; I see some of you smiling and nodding and saying, “Yeah, I know somebody who qualifies for that, and I’d be glad to try to convince the judge that I was very well within my rights.” I understand that we can be hurt or betrayed or treated in such a way that, that makes perfect sense to feel that way. Let’s talk about his idea of nothing but love.

***John 3:16***    *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

You see, love gives. Love gives. God so loved the world that He gave. Also, I’d like to say to you this morning that love sacrifices. God so loved the world that He sacrificed. If you’re here today and you say that you love, then it’s going to require some giving. If you’re here today and you say that you love, then it’s going to require some sacrifice. You see, as we go through this life, and we live with human beings, and we share this journey with others, sometimes, someone will have to go the extra mile for you, and sometimes you’ll be the one going the extra mile for them. That’s just the way it is in life’s journey. I don’t know how many times—even if I was aware, that I could see it—I would still have to tell you today, I don’t know every time that someone went the extra mile for me, every time someone prayed me through a challenge, every

time somebody lifted me up in prayer, every time someone was patient with me when I didn't handle something the right way. Anybody else here ever have to have somebody go the extra mile for you? I'm not talking about if you went the extra mile, I mean somebody had to go the extra mile for you. That's the human dilemma; we live in this world, and sometimes we need people to carry our burdens. Sometimes we need somebody to be the extra-miler for us. Sometimes we need somebody to love us when we need killing. Maybe you're her today and you've never made a mistake. Maybe you're here today and you're perfect. I don't know what that would feel like. I just don't know what that would feel like. I don't know what it would feel like to be perfect, I don't know what it would feel like to be so justified to be able to say, "I've never done anything as bad as you." I think that's why we get comforted by the evening news. Anybody here—I've got to be careful what I'm asking; maybe you don't want to pop your hand up if the answer's yes—anybody here ever rob a bank? Anybody here ever shoot your neighbor? Anybody here ever hold up a Seven-Eleven? I mean, we see those things on the evening news, and we say, "I must be pretty good; I didn't do that."

I was going down Dugdale—not this trip—and I saw the officer doing speed checks on the side of the road, and I saw—actually, I waved as I went by—and then I saw him pull out, and I saw the lights go on, and I heard the siren. I thought, "I wonder who he's after? I'm the only one here." When he pulled me over, he said, "Do you know what the speed limit is, here?" I wasn't trying to be a smart-aleck, but it might have come across that way, because I said, "No, sir, but I have a feeling I'm about to find out." He said, "It's twenty-five." I said, "Twenty-five?" I asked another question that I probably should have kept to myself, I said, "How fast was I going?" He said, "You were going fifty!" I said, "This is going to be an expensive conversation, isn't it?" He said, "For one of us," and he was right. So, the reality is that we all make mistakes, and we all miss the signs, we all, at times, need to get someone else to tell us, or to love us through it, depending on the circumstances. Sometimes you can't just pay the ticket and outlive it. I was fortunate, because I had a good driving record and when I went to court, I was allowed to pay the fine and get whatever—I don't remember, this was a while ago—and I may not have all of the numbers right, it's an old story... The point is, I thought I was doing everything right. He told me, and I went to court, and paid the fine, and the judge said if I don't get a ticket in six months or a year, it won't go on my record. So, it didn't go on my record, but somebody had to stop me and tell me I was wrong. I remember that experience that day, and that officer didn't treat me like I didn't deserve to share the planet with him; he treated me like a fellow human being. Sometimes we have to tell our brother or sister that they're wrong. We should treat them with love, even if we're telling them that they're wrong.

I came here today to talk to you about love. I want to share something else with you, and it comes to us in the Christmas story. This is a verse that we're very familiar with, when Mary is found with child, and now Joseph is getting the word, and Joseph didn't know yet what the source was. Joseph just knew that Mary was with child. Joseph knew it wasn't his. Mary also knew it wasn't Joseph's, but Mary knew something that Joseph didn't know, and that is that it wasn't any man's. She knew that. So, Joseph is getting word that Mary's expecting a child, and look at verse 19:

**Matthew 1:19** *Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.*

He was going to put her away privately; he was going to be discreet. He was going to say, “You know what? this is a horrible thing, and I don’t think that we can get married, but I don’t want to embarrass you. I don’t want to hurt you. I don’t want to make a public example of you. I’m going to be discreet about this.” He must have loved Mary. I know some of you will want to talk to me after the service about how marriages were arranged then, and maybe they didn’t know each other, but I’d like to think that he loved her. I know he loved God, or he wouldn’t have been chosen for the task. Listen to how he reacts when he finds out she’s with child, “We’re going to do something real discreet, here.” Do you know that he had the right to make her a public example? He had the right to call the Jerusalem Gazette, and say, “You know what? Let me tell you about Mary.” He had the right to make a stink about it, but he chose not to. He treated it with love. The Bible says that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). As Christians, sometimes we have to do something that’s uncomfortable; sometimes we have to put someone in their place. Sometimes we have to tell someone that they’re wrong. Just like parents have to tell their children. I can remember my father telling me more than once, “Peter, there’s no way that you’re right about this. There’s just no way that you’re right about this,” but one thing I never felt from my father is that there was no way that loved me. Even when my father said there was no way I was right about this, I knew that there was a way that we were going to continue to have a father and son relationship. No matter how disappointed he was with me, no matter how upset he was with me.. I remember the night that the State Police followed me into our driveway. He wasn’t happy that night. But you know what I still knew, in spite of that? That he loved me. He wasn’t happy with me, and, at that point, I think he was ready to give my motorcycle away, but I knew he loved me. Do people know that you love them when they’ve violated your trust? When they’ve hurt you? When they’ve disappointed you? I don’t know who I’m talking to, today. Maybe it’s one person, maybe it’s two, maybe it’s ten... I don’t think this message is going to apply to each one of us at this moment in our life, but somebody needs to hear this message today that love is possible, no matter what the circumstance, and no matter what the situation. I came here today to say that we can live a life with nothing but love. We can live a life where we rise above it and we say, “What would God do? How would God react to this? Is there a way for love to cover this multitude of sins? Is there a way for love to have it’s way here, and for love to win?”

These are Paul’s words to the church. Paul often had to tell the churches, “Hey, you’re not doing this right. Hey, you need to do this better.” Sometimes they were being too lax about things; sometimes they were being too harsh about things. Sometimes they were being too lenient about things, sometimes they were being too... Read First Corinthians chapter 14—we’re going to stay right here—but, if you read in First Corinthians chapter 14, he’s talking to the church in Corinth about the gift of the Holy Spirit and how it’s being expressed in their worship. He’s saying, we’ve got to change some things, here, folks. That’s the nature of leadership, isn’t it? That wasn’t God speaking to the church, directly, that was Apostle Paul speaking to the church as he was led of God.

**Galatians 6:1-2** *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*

By the way, for those of you listening to this message right now, and you think, “Well, this is good news. This message isn’t for me because I’m already doing this. I’m perfect here.

Really, on this one thing, I'm really good at this. You know, on this one thing, I got it. On this one thing, put my picture up, because I'm the one that people should look to for example on this." You may be, but I didn't leave you out of this message, because there's something here for every one of us. I said I might be speaking to just one or two, in this part of the message, but I'm going to get to you, if I haven't gotten to you yet. This idea of living a life of nothing but love causes us to step up. It causes us to live better; it causes us to do more. It'll wake us up out of a sound sleep and say, "Hey, that's not what I have for you to do." So listen to this message in a way of saying, "God, am I loving like You love? Am I living like You'd have me to live? Am I going through life in a way that pleases You?"

By the way, in our society, we sometimes think—this is not actually part of the message, I'm just throwing this in for free—we think that if God's blessing us, it means that we'll have a nicer car, nicer home, nicer clothes, better children, better parents... Not always. Sometimes, and I'll pull one example, there's others I could choose: Who's thinking of an example where, not always? Job, sure. So, Job's doing everything right, and God sends some challenges his way. It's an interesting story, and that's an oversimplification of it, but God allows some major challenges to go his way, doesn't he? We're still talking about him today. Is that a good thing or a bad thing for Job? In case you're not familiar with the story, basically there's a guy who's living right, and God says, "Okay, he's going to have some real trouble, and, in the trouble, show others how the faithful live when it isn't going well." That's an oversimplification, but that's the essence of the story, in the fifteen seconds that I gave it. How about Paul when he's talking about his thorn in the flesh. He starts out talking about this problem in his life that was never removed, according to the references in Scripture (it might have been later, but we have no reference in Scripture of this problem in his life being taken away). He, after a long period of time, and challenge, comes to the conclusion that it was a good thing.

Nothing but love. You see, if we're going to live this life of love, we're going to get things in the right perspective. We're going to see things the way God wants us to see—it may take a while. We might have to go through some hurt to get there.

**Galatians 6:1-2** *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*

Sometimes love has to go the extra mile. Sometimes love has to do more than its fair share. Sometimes—you know life isn't fair—and sometimes love isn't fair. My wife, Debbie, and I have been married 38 years, and sometimes I've gone the extra mile for her, and sometimes she's gone the extra mile for me. Sometimes she's gone the extra mile for me and I didn't even know it. Sometimes I've gone the extra mile for her, and she may not have known it. That's what love does, right? You know, I talk about Debbie and I being married 38 years and most of you know that we've never had a problem, never had an argument, never had a fight, never had a disagreement, she never burned the rice... I mean, everything's been perfect in our marriage. Three perfect children—never did anything wrong. Did I say that out loud, or did I just think it? Of course, we've had troubles, we've had challenges, just like you. Maybe not just like you, but just like you.

**1 Corinthians 10:13** *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

Here, suffer means to allow. Sometimes we're tempted to give up. Let's just spend a moment right there: Sometimes we're tempted to give up. Sometimes we're tempted to throw in the towel. Sometimes we're tempted to say, "You know what? this is so unfair, I've got a good excuse to quit." Hello? Some of you have felt that way; I can see it on your faces. But, what do you want your outcome to be? How do you want your story to end? How do you want it to end? I mean, how do you want your story to be written, and what do you want your win to look like? The only thing that will get us there is love.

I'm talking to you about love, today, and in Galatians 6:1-2, I think we just read there that love is a verb. Love is action. It's seeing our brother or our sister overtaken in a fault, and restoring them in a spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we're in the same place. Years ago—and I think I'm going to choose just not to say names on this--there was a high-profile TV evangelist that was caught in a moral failing. Another high-profile TV evangelist was just really going after him on his TV show, because of that moral failing, then a month later he got caught in the same moral failing. I thought of this verse, because I thought, "I wonder if maybe if he had handled it differently, maybe he wouldn't have had to fall so publicly." You see, when a leader falls, it doesn't just hurt the leader, and it doesn't just hurt his family; it hurts everyone that they serve with leadership. I thought, "How sad," because he probably hurt thousands of people because he didn't let God lead him with love. It got quiet in here, didn't it? Could somebody just say, amen? I know I've preached more evangelistically, more enthusiastically, maybe even more funny, but this is the message that God laid on my heart today. Just like the two Ed's deliver the mail, you know, sometimes you deliver letters that people want, and sometimes you deliver letters they don't want. You've got to deliver it, because it's addressed to them, and I've got to deliver this today. For some you, it's just what you want, and for some of you, it's just what you don't want. Here I am, doing my best to deliver the message.

**John 8:1-11** *Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, **He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.** And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, **Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?** She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, **Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.***

Some would like to take that verse and say, "See? When someone is wrong, we should just always look the other way," but I don't think that's what Jesus is teaching us here; I think

He's teaching us to have nothing but love. To have love and to look and to say, "How would God handle this?" Now, He knew the hearts of those who brought her, and some of you probably want to talk to me after service and tell me about the real motives of the Pharisees and the Sadducees and that it really had nothing to do with her committing adultery, it had to do with them wanting to accuse Christ, and I know that. There's also a message here is about how He deals with people when they haven't found the right way to deal with life. Should we have a strictness about us? yes. Should we do our best to live right? absolutely. Should we say to a brother or sister, if they've slipped and fallen, and they're wrong, "Hey, we need to work through this together."? There's Scriptural references for how to do that. Here's my question today, "Is it driven by love?" Is it driven by love? Is it driven by love? I sometimes think that some of the mistakes that I've made in my life since I've been a Christian are the best classrooms, because I've thought, when I've seen others in that same place, "Hey, I know what that feels like." I know what it feels like to lose my temper. I know what it feels like to answer quickly, and not think it through. I know what it feels like to be so discouraged with someone else that I haven't made them feel loved. I know what it feels like to hurt somebody because they've hurt me. Yep, I said it out loud, didn't I? Maybe you've done those things, too, and that's how you've learned to love better, to live better, to do better.

Those of you that I didn't get in the first half of the message, now I'm coming to you. Parrish, I don't know if you've ever heard me preach this quietly. In Matthew 22, Jesus is asked a question. A lawyer's asking it. I think the Scripture is telling us that it's a lawyer because it's someone who's going to want to cross T's and dot I's. I don't mean that as criticism, I just mean that this is someone who's going to say, "We're going to go by the letter of the law, here."

**Matthew 22:36-38** *Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.*

That's the great commandment for you, and that's the great commandment for me: To love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your soul.

**Matthew 22:39** *And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

Some of us are better at loving our neighbor than we are at loving ourselves. I want to talk to you today if that's you. Stop letting the devil tell you that you're worthless. Stop letting the devil tell you that you're worthless. You are so worth it that Jesus went to Calvary for you, and He shed His blood. He died on the cross to pay a price for your sins, and my sins, that we could never repay with all our good deeds. There's somebody here who just needs to hear me say it one more time: Stop letting the devil tell you that you're worthless. You are worth it; you are so very worth it, and God loves you. God loves you.

I'm going to take a moment and just talk about—I'm not going to turn to it, I'm just going to talk about it—the prodigal son. I know it's a parable, and I know why it was written, and those of you who are students of the Scripture know that the purpose of this parable—and let me back up just a minute just in case: A parable is a story that is not based in history or in fact, it is just a story that is told to make a teaching point and Jesus used parables a lot—this is a parable in Luke chapter 15, that we often refer to as the parable of the prodigal son. It's about a father who had two sons. The younger of the two sons said, "Father, give me my inheritance. Give me

the portion—I'm paraphrasing—give me the portion of goods that is mine. Give me my inheritance, and I'm going to leave; I'm going to go, because I don't want to be here under your roof, under your rule, under your charge. I want to go live on my own, and I know that you've got great wealth, and I want my portion of it, because I'm out of here." Here's what's interesting to me: in this parable, the father said, "Okay." If my son came to me, and said, "Hey, dad, I want my inheritance now, because I'm leaving." I would have said, "Well, my heart's still beating." You get the point. I don't think I would have given him the inheritance, but, even if I had, I don't think I would have done what the father did next, and that is that he waited for his son's return. He stood there, and he was looking for his son to return. We know that, because, after the son came to himself, and he was headed back, the Scripture tells us that when he was still a great way off, the father saw him. The father didn't put his hands on his hips and say, "Ha, ha, ha! I knew it! He's going to have to eat some humble pie now!" The father, the Scripture tells us, ran to him. He kissed him, and then he called those servants, and said, "Get a robe for his back, a ring for his finger, sandals for his feet... Kill the fatted calf; we're going to have a party. He's home. He's home." If you're the one today that needs to hear that you're worth it, know that your Father is looking for your return. He's looking for you to come back and say, "Not because I deserve it, but because I'm Your child. Not because I deserve it, but because You're my Father. Not because I deserve it, but because You said You had nothing but love for me. I'm ready to come home. I'm ready to be in Your house. I'm ready to act like Your child. I'm ready to live by Your guidelines. I'm ready to let You love me up close and personal, and be with You again." Some of you have gotten so far away from God that You've forgotten what it feels like to be in His presence. Oh, I don't mean the presence of the church, you're here today; you know what it's like to sit next to somebody and say amen, but you don't know what it's like to feel God say, "I love you!" It's time to feel it again. It's time to know it again. It's time to embrace it again. It's time to take that gift He's got for you; He's holding it an open hand. All you have to do is accept it. It's bought; it's paid for; it's yours. You don't have to earn it. Some of you...

I'm going to tell a story, because I think it will help illustrate this. I told you earlier, for those of you that don't know my story, My mother got sick when I was ten years old. It was in December, it was shortly before Christmas. For whatever reason, just the emotion of the whole thing, we didn't do Christmas morning; there were presents already under the tree. My father, and my brothers, and sister, and I just really couldn't bring ourselves to do that. Part of it was, I think, hope that somehow mom would get well and come home, and part of it was we just didn't feel like celebrating. It was just a tough time. She was still in a coma, and it was day by day, and none of those days felt like Christmas to us. I remember that we got to mid-January, and my dad said, "Well, what are we going to do? Are we going to open gifts, or are we going to put them away until next year? What are we going to do?" I remember we were sitting at the big round table in the kitchen and we were talking about it, and my dad said, "You know, I know what a lot of those gifts are, and some of them are clothes, and if we wait until next year, we'll be giving them away, so, let's open them up. After all, they've got your names on them." We went in the family room, and we opened gifts. It didn't feel the same, because mom wasn't there, but here's what I want you to know: Those gifts had our names on them. You've got a gift that has your name on it. Its not just a generic gift that you're going to go through a line, and, "Next person, next gift." You've got a gift with your name on it! God wants you to have it. Maybe it's forgiveness; maybe it's feeling loved; maybe it's the gift of forgiving someone else and setting yourself free; maybe it's the gift of finally feeling like you're worth it for the very

first time. God's got something for you. We're talking about love today, and some of you haven't received all the love that God has for you. You know, I've stood in the altar, and I've said, "God, I want everything that You have for me." For those of you that might think that sounds selfish, let me tell you: It's the right way to stand in the altar. Say, "God, if You've got it for me; if its got my name on it, I want what You have for me!" Don't try to be modest! Don't try to be humble, and say, "God, I don't know if I want everything You've got for me." Say, "Yes, Lord! Yes, Lord! I want all You've got for me; I want all the blessings You've got for me! I want all the love You've got for me! I want all the comfort You've got for me! I want all the understanding You've got for me! I want all the mercy You've got for me! I need it all, God! I can't live like this any longer!" Some of you are living outside of God's privilege. It's time to come home. It's time to come in. It's time to let go of the past; stop beating yourself up for yesterday's mistakes. God knows what you've done; God knows where you've been, and He's still waiting for you to say, "I'm ready, God. I'm ready."

We've got to move forward. First Corinthians chapter 13—I'm going to move through this quickly, but if you're the type of person that makes notes and then goes and studies, spend a lot of time right here. I would encourage you to read this whole chapter. Spend a lot of time in this chapter—it's sometimes called the love chapter. This study today, I'm not going to break down the different types of love, but, for the purposes of this study today, I'm just going to say that charity is love. The Apostle Paul starts by writing to the church, and he said:

***1 Corinthians 13:1*** *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.*

You can have all your church trappings. You can have your best suit, your best you're your best whatever. You could look like Mr. and Mrs. Church all day long, but if you don't have it inside, it's all window-dressing, it's all fluff. It's all empty. By the way, you like this tie? Adam gave it to me for Christmas. I'm blessed. I get a lot of ties as gifts; so, a lot of times, when somebody compliments me on a tie, I give it to them, because I'm blessed, I get a lot of ties. I want you to know, I'm not giving this one away. Actually, this morning, I got dressed, and I took a picture—I think they call it a 'selfie'—and I sent a text to our son Adam and I said, "How do you like this tie?" He sent back something fun, like, "IT looks good on you," or something.

***1 Corinthians 13:1*** *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.*

If you don't have love, it's all for naught. Come down, and see some qualities of love:

***1 Corinthians 13:4*** *Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,*

"Vaunteth not itself," means it doesn't push forward, it doesn't cut line, it doesn't take someone else's place. It lets God be God and decide how it all flows. So, when I said I had come to the Altar, and I said, "I want all that You have for me, God," I don't mean that I've stepped in front of someone else and said, "I want their blessing." So, for those of you that might have heard it that way, let me take this moment to clarify that: I'm talking about wanting



what God's got for *me*. Amen? I'm not talking about getting someone else's blessing; I'm talking about wanting what God's got for *you*. Amen? Some of you are so humble that you would take someone else's pain, you would take someone else's suffering. That's an enormous amount of humility, and I respect that, I admire that. So, when I talk about coming to the altar and wanting all that God's got for you, don't mishear it; I'm not talking about getting something that belongs to someone else. I'm talking about don't leave a wrapped gift at the altar that has your name on it. Take it and open it, and use it, and receive it because God's got it *for you*.

***1 Corinthians 13:5-6*** *Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;*

"...Not easily provoked..." let me spend some time... If you've got a temper/// Debbie has finally convinced me that other drivers don't hear me when I talk to them. Now, I'm fifty-nine ears old, and I told you that so that I could tell you that—really, I am—I'm over it. I don't remember—and I'm not saying this to be humorous—I don't remember the last time a bad driver—and, by the way, everybody's a bad driver but me; anybody else feel that way? Three of us. That was an attempt at humor—but the reality is, I can't remember the last time another driver has upset me to the point where I banged the steering wheel or yelled at them or called them a heathen, or some other appropriate non-Christian title. I don't remember the last time that happened, but when I was younger, up until I was fifty-(pauses as if to remember the exact age)—You know, when I throw a little humor at you, then I'm about to get you; you know that, right? so get ready—I would let people upset me. I would love to tell you that it was only other drivers that I would never meet. Sometimes it was people that I worshipped with. Sometimes it was—I know there are books on leadership that say a leader should never get up in front of people that he leads and admit that he's made a mistake, or have a weakness or a problem—but, yeah, I've let people upset me. I've lost my temper. I wish that wasn't true. I'm getting better, and if the Lord let's me live a long time, I can't wait until you present me to the congregation, Parrish, and you say, "Here's our perfect pastor, Pastor Pete..." Until then, I'll just be one of you, who's taken all the love that God has for me. Can you hear me taking some pokes at myself so that the message comes through?

***1 Corinthians 13:5-8*** *Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.*

There's going to be some things that will fail. There's going to be some things that won't always be there. There's going to be some things that you can't count on a hundred percent of the time.

***1 Corinthians 13:8-11*** *Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*

That's what I've been trying to share in these last few minutes: It's time for some of us to quit acting like children and start acting like adults. Love is a way of life. Love is the greatest gift of all, so choose love. Brother Parrish, I'm getting ready to close, so I'm going to turn it over to you in a few moments. I wrote some things down as I was praying this last week, what God would have me to tell you: Love's not lazy, so, if you're lazy—if that's where you go to when you're not on you're a-game—let love replace laziness. Love goes where it's sent; if you find yourself resisting going where the Lord would have you to go, doing what the Lord would have you to do, sometimes the best blessings I've ever had in my life have been going somewhere that I really felt, "God, can't You send someone else to do that?" Some of you know what I'm talking about. And they were the best blessings I've gotten in my life. Love grows where it's valued; if you value love, you'll have more of it. Love doesn't prosper where it's not appreciated. Love is never fully spent; don't worry. You ever run out of money? I have. I ran out of money on the toll road, and I'm looking in the cracks of my seats—maybe none of you have ever done that—I'm looking for one more coin, you know, to pay my toll, but love is never fully spent. You can spend all the love you have and God will give you more. As a matter of fact, the more you use, the more you give, hello? When love is invited, it always comes. Love's never met an enemy it couldn't conquer.

I'll close with this: Some of you have lost your sweet spot in ministry. There was a time in your life when you were very effective. You know, I stand before you today, and you don't have to tell me that I'm overweight. I'll come out from behind the podium so that I'm not hiding anything. I'm a full fifty pounds overweight as I stand before you today; that's embarrassing for me to say, but it's no secret. Stevie Wonder could look at me and say, "That man's fat." I'm just saying, you know, but I can tell you there was a time when I swam five miles a day. That two-a-day thing I was talking about earlier? I was on the team and we were doing good. I was a distance swimmer, so two miles before school and two miles after school, five days a week, when we were in that part of our training. I wasn't fat then. I could spend the rest of my life telling you, "I used to have a forty-two inch chest and a twenty-eight inch waist," or, I could realize, "I've got to get back in my sweet spot. Now, I used my physical size as an example so that some of you could use your spiritual fatness, hello? If you're overweight, I wasn't picking on you, I was picking on me. Some of us have become spiritually fat, and we haven't worked out, spiritually, in a long time. We can remember when; we can show you the trophy, we can show you the blue ribbon, or whatever it is, our letterman's jacket, right? we can show you the picture of us being on the team, or whatever, but how about now? Are you in your sweet spot of ministry? I came to tell somebody today that the way you get in your sweet spot of ministry is to let love have it's way. Let love have it's way. For some of us, it's receiving forgiveness. For some of us, it's giving forgiveness. For some of us, it's stepping up to the plate and stop being lazy. For some of us, it's getting back in communication with our leadership and saying, "Where do you need to send me? Where do you need me to go?" For some of us, it's to stop feeling sorry for ourselves. I know it's quiet in here, and I know that this is a hard message, if you're the one that needed to hear it. Please believe me when I tell you that I'm trying to deliver it in love, so that you can receive it and say, "Tag, I'm it. It's time for me to do better." If you think I came here to chew you out and say, you're wrong, but I'm going to tell you how to get right. I suppose in a sense, I did. I suppose in a sense, I did. Isn't that what Scripture is for (2 Timothy 3:16)? Isn't that what preaching is for, to show us where we can do better? I suspect that if you're here today, it's because you want to do better. I suspect that if you're here today and you

haven't done better in a long time, it's because you need to know where the path is. Maybe, for someone today, the path is pointed out. Maybe, for someone today—I'm almost done—Maybe, for someone today, you saw how to get back in your sweet spot of ministry. Maybe, for someone today, it's for the very first time, "Yes, Lord, I'm going to let love have it's way, so that I can be what you'd have me to be, and do what you'd have me to do, live how you'd have me to live, and love how you'd have me to love, and love can have it's way."

Let's pray. God Almighty, I thank you for the privilege to be here with my brothers and sisters today. I pray that what comes from this message is each of us—starting with me, as the messenger, because I know this message was for me as much as anyone—will hear how we can do better, how we can live closer to you, and those who see us will know that we are disciples, because we have love, one for another. Amen.

