

# Beloved: Love

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, welcome to Church of the Advent, the Columbia Heights Parish. For those of you who are new, especially glad that you're joining us.

This evening we are coming to the end of a series that we started a few weeks back looking at an Old Testament book called The Song of Songs, or some people call it The Song of Solomon. This is a book of poetry. It is part of what we call wisdom literature, and it offers us a couple of things. It is about a marriage.

It's a vision, a divinely inspired vision of a marriage between Solomon and a woman that we know as the Shulamite, the Shulamite woman. And because it's wisdom literature, it's doing a couple of things at the same time as we've seen over the last few weeks.

In one sense, it is wisdom that helps us understand human relationships, human love, friendship, community relationships, and ultimately marriage.

[ 1 : 02 ] And it offers us wisdom primarily about the theme of intimacy. What is intimacy? How do we build it? What does it look like in these various relationships? And then beyond that, it also is a kind of window into the heart of God.

It shows us the kind of intimacy and the kind of love we were made to experience with God, our Creator. And so these are the things that we've been looking at over the past few weeks, focusing on different aspects of intimacy in our relationships with one another and with God.

And so this week, we are going to come to the final chapter, Song of Songs chapter 8. And the final theme that we're going to look at is, of course, love, which, being that Valentine's Day is just around the corner, feels somewhat appropriate.

We also couldn't do a series on intimacy without at some point talking about love. And so what we're going to do is read through the passage together, and then along the way, we'll draw out three points about love.

What is true love? And then what are some of the differences between human love and divine love, the kind of love that can only be found in Jesus Christ? So as we open God's Word, let's pray together.

[ 2 : 09 ] Our Heavenly Father, as we open Your Word, we do so not with hope for rhetoric or human wisdom or tips for how to live a better life.

But we do so with fearful expectation that You're a living God who is in our midst. And You've promised that when we open Your Word, that Your Holy Spirit will enliven and empower that Word to speak to us here and now.

We know that Your desire is to draw us more deeply into Your heart, to make us more like Yourself. And we pray that Your Word would do Your work, Lord, for Your glory in us.

We pray this in Your Son's holy name. Amen. So let's read this together. I'll unpack a few things, and then once we've read through it, we'll draw out a few points to consider together.

This is the beginning of chapter 8, and as this is a song, there are different parts. The woman has a singing part, Solomon has a part, and the chorus chimes in every now and then.

[ 3 : 16 ] So here it opens. The woman is singing at this point, and she's talking about her lover, Solomon. Oh, that you are like a brother to me who nursed at my mother's breasts. If I found you outside, I would kiss you, and none would despise me.

That's admittedly very weird. It's a cultural thing that we're not fully aware of. It's not the same in our culture. But in this culture, it was looked down upon for a husband and wife to show public displays of affection because there might be erotic undertones to that, whereas a brother and sister could freely hug each other or kiss each other, and it would not be thought strange or odd or out of place.

And so she's saying, I so wish that I could be affectionate with you that I wish that people thought we were brother and sister so that nobody would think it was odd that I was hugging you and kissing you in public.

So we move forward. I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother, she who used to teach me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, the juice of my pomegranate.

She's essentially saying that she desires intimacy with him. This is something that we've seen all throughout the song again and again and again. His left hand is under my head. His right hand embraces me.

[ 4 : 26 ] And then we see the refrain that has come again and again throughout the entire Song of Songs. It shows up again. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

She says, this is powerful stuff. Do not awaken this before you're ready, before it's time. You don't know what you're getting yourself into. Then the chorus says, who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?

And then she says, under the apple tree I awakened you. There your mother was in labor with you. There she who bore you was in labor. So again, language of desire and intimacy.

Incredibly intimate statement there. Now the woman begins to teach us about love. And this is the only place in the entire Song of Songs where we actually, instead of seeing a metaphor of love, we actually see a description of the nature of love.

And she says to her lover, set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm. For love is strong as death. Jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord.

[ 5 : 31 ] I guarantee you there's at least one wedding ring in this room with that engraved on it. And the reason is because it's an incredibly powerful, amazing romantic verse about love. We're going to talk more about that in just a second.

Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised. Amazing description of love that we're going to unpack in just a moment.

Now the brothers speak up. These are brothers that we have not seen since chapter 1. They show up again. We have a little sister and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister on the day when she is spoken for?

If she's a wall, we will build on her a battlement of silver. But if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar. These women are essentially saying we have a young sister.

She's prepubescent and in this culture, the responsibility to care for the younger sister, the daughters of the family, often fell to the brothers. They could almost be like father figures, especially when it came to protecting them and guarding them until the day of their betrothal.

[ 6 : 33 ] And so we'll talk a little bit more about that in just a minute as well. Now the woman speaks for herself. I was a wall. My breasts were like towers. In other words, now I'm mature when I came of age.

Then I was in his eyes as one who finds peace. Now she continues, Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Haman. He let out the vineyard to keepers. Each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver.

My vineyard, my very own, is before me. You, O Solomon, may have the thousand and the keepers of the fruit, two hundred. We'll talk about that in just a second. And then she goes on and addresses all of the bystanders.

O you who dwell in the gardens with companions listening for your voice, let me hear it. Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices.

And there ends the reading of God's word. So now we need to unpack this a little bit and ask, what are the things that this tells us about love, about true love, about human love, about God's love?

[ 7 : 37 ] The first point I want to make, the first thing that shows up as we read this passage is this. True love is extremely powerful. Now I know that sounds like a very sort of stating the obvious kind of point, but that is very clearly one of the things that is being emphasized here.

The first five verses are about the lover's desire for one another, for affection and intimacy.

Beginning in verse 6, as I said, we get this description of the nature of love. And listen to what she says about love.

Love is as strong as death. Jealousy is fierce as the grave. Now we hear jealousy and we think that that's a negative thing. But in this context, it's a positive thing.

This is saying that there's a quality to love that is possessive, but in a good way. Love says to the beloved, you belong to me. You're mine. And no matter what happens, no matter who tries to take you away, no matter what forces come against us, I will cling to you.

I will hold you in my embrace. You belong to me. You are my beloved. And no one else can have you. Even death. You need to understand that in this culture, death was revered as a god.

[ 8 : 49 ] The god, Mott, was worshipped and sacrificed to in other ancient Near Eastern peoples. And they thought death was a power that no one could stand against. It's an inevitability that death will come for all of us.

And she's saying there is a power as great as death, even greater. And it's the power of love. And love's jealousy says even when the grave tries to swallow up my beloved, I will cling to my beloved. And I will pull my beloved out of the clutches of the grave. Not even death can have my beloved.

This is an amazing statement to make about the power of love. And then she goes on.

It flashes are flashes of fire. The very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love. Neither can floods drown it. Love, the passion, the desire in love is like not just a fire but a holy fire.

The all-consuming fire of the Lord. You know, in the Old Testament, if you get too close to the presence of the Lord, if you were to behold unshielded the glory of the Lord, it would eradicate you.

[ 10 : 00 ] And this is saying that there's a passion at the heart of love that is like that. It is an all-consuming love that is almost dangerous in its fierce power. And it's saying that nothing can overcome or extinguish this love.

Floods can come against it but the flame will never go out. So, in other words, true love is like an unstoppable force. It cannot be killed. It cannot be quenched.

It never stops contending for the beloved. Now, when we hear this description of love, at least when I do, I find it very tempting.

And I think a lot of people find it tempting to hear this description of love. And you're sort of swept up into the clouds. This amazing description of love.

How incredible would this love be? And then I think it's very tempting for a lot of people to turn and to look at their own marriages or the people they're dating or their friendships.

[ 11 : 02 ] And you compare and it creates in you a kind of longing and a kind of sadness because you realize the love that I experience is nothing like the love that I'm hearing described in this passage.

And this brings us to a very hard truth that, nevertheless, we need to face. It's not a nice truth or a kind truth, but it's a necessary truth. And that is this, that you will never find this kind of love in a human relationship.

You will never find this kind of love in a human relationship. No human love can live up to the standards that we've just laid out. You know, some of us in this room are married and we are, by God's grace, in good marriages and we experience love.

And at times it may be an echo of this. Some of us are in very hard marriages. Or you will be in hard marriages.

And some of those marriages, despite everybody's best efforts, may end in divorce. And you may look back and with pain. Why didn't I have love like that? Why didn't it work out?

[ 12 : 14 ] Why didn't it work out? And then some of us in this room, and this is, again, a hard truth. It's not kind. It's not easy. But it's necessary.

Some of us in this room will never experience this kind of love in marriage. We will never get married. And that's not fair. And it's not just.

There's nothing right about that. But we live in a broken, fallen world. And that is simply part of what it means to live in a fallen, incredibly unfair, unjust world.

But the reason that we need to face that truth head on is because if we make the mistake of thinking that our only hope for finding this kind of love is to find it in another human being, then we are at great risk for turning this into an idol.

And that is what many people in our society have done. We live in the wake of romanticism, which has essentially taken love, human love, passion, and desire, and elevated it to the status of a god.

[ 13 : 21 ] We've said, no longer do we believe that God is love. We've come to believe that love is God. It is in human love that I will find my meaning and my identity and my fulfillment.

That's an idol. And if we do that, if we enthrone human love and say this is the end all be all, then either you will crush your marriage under expectations it was never designed to meet.

Or you will be crushed if you end up not married, crushed with despair over all that you believe you've missed out on.

And if that's you, you will then be much more likely to make very bad decisions driven by fear and desperation. And you may very well find yourself forcing a marriage that you should never have considered.

Driven by fear. A marriage that you may very well come to regret. So it is very important that we face this now and realize there is only one place that you can find this love.

[ 14 : 31 ] Married or unmarried. There's only one place that you can find it. And that is in the person of Jesus Christ. The way the Bible talks about the love of Jesus, that is the unstoppable force.

That is the thing against which nothing can stand. Right? That is the love that cannot be quenched. It cannot be killed. It never quits.

Because once Jesus sets his love on you, nothing can touch it. Not even you. It is there. It is as immovable as the forces that govern the universe.

When the heavens and the earth pass away and gravity and the constants that hold everything together. When all of those things are no more, the love of Jesus will remain. And we see Jesus ensuring that nothing can get in the way of his love for us.

Right? He dies to overcome and forgive sin. He rises from death to overcome death itself. He will be a good love for us. He is a good love for us. He is a good love for us. He is a good love for us. He is a good love for you.

[ 15 : 35 ] He is a good love for us. And we see Jesus. He is a good love for us. So if you build your life on that love rather than some idea or idol of human love, that will free you.

If you're married, it will free you to accept the very imperfect and yet well-meaning love of your very human fallen spouse, and it will free you to celebrate that in all of its imperfection.

And by the way, your imperfect love as well. And it will also free you from that crushing despair and fear over never being married. I'm not saying it won't hurt. I'm not saying it won't be hard, but it won't crush you in the same way if you know your life is actually built on this love that will never fail you.

So this is the first point. Love is extremely powerful, and this description would be hopeless hyperbole if it only spoke of human love. This is pointing us to divine love. As we move on, we see the second point that we can draw out. True love is not only powerful, it needs to be protected. It needs to be protected. It needs to be safeguarded, both from the outside and the inside. We see in verse 4 that it needs to be protected from the outside. In other words, love in the context of a covenant. It needs to be protected from the outside. She says this refrain, O daughters of Jerusalem, do not stir up or awaken love until it pleases. As we said before, she's saying love is powerful. You don't want to mess with this unless you have the protection of a covenant. You don't want to go down this road with somebody until there's a sense of commitment, until it's contained.

And we see that show up again in verse 8. We have a little sister, say the brothers, and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister on the day that she is spoken for? If she's a wall, we will build battlements. If she's a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar. As I said, these men are talking about their younger sister, and this may feel a little patriarchal, and we live in a very different culture, but there is wisdom here for us. Because they're saying, we want to care for our sister, and we want to shepherd her through until she's mature and able to get married and be betrothed to a man. And so how do we do that? And then they answer their own question. They say, well, if she's a wall, meaning if she's a woman of character who has refrained from sexual intimacy, who has kept herself until the day of her betrothal, if she's a wall, we will simply encourage and beautify that in her life. We will adorn her with battlements of silver. We will reinforce that commitment that she's made. On the other hand, if she's a door, which I don't think we have to go too far into the metaphor to understand that that might be a woman who is a little more lax and willing to engage in sexual intimacy before and outside of her betrothal, they say, regardless, even if she's a door, we're going to enclose her with planks of cedar. In other words, we're going to board up the door. You know, and I know that sounds strange, and it sounds patriarchal, but you know, cedar is a very nice wood. It's very beautiful.

What we need to see here, what we need to really understand is that they are concerned concerned. They're concerned because they understand that for her welfare, that they need to do everything they can to protect and encourage this in her, that they don't want her to awaken love

before it pleases, right? Now, we also see that love needs to be protected from the inside of a covenant, that a covenant relationship needs to be encouraged and protected from within. And that's why verse 6, the woman says, set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm. So this is the beloved, the wife talking to the husband. And a seal could have been made out of stone, it could have been made out of metal, but it was something that you would push into soft clay, and it would leave your mark on it. And whatever has your seal on it, if you put your seal on something, that's a symbol of ownership and identification. This is mine, it belongs to me entirely. And so the woman is saying,

I want you to put me as a seal on your heart. In other words, I want you to make it absolutely clear that your heart belongs to me. You're mine. And then I want you to put my seal on your arm, your body, and all that you do with it. That belongs to me as well. So she's saying, I want to, you know, now that we're married, I want it to be absolutely clear that your heart and your mind and your body and every part of you, it all belongs to me. And this is, again, this is what a covenant is. It is two people coming together and saying, I now belong to you and you now belong to me. It is mutual self-donation, entirely, completely, permanently giving yourselves to one another. You see this in the Anglican wedding liturgy, in the older version of the liturgy, which I actually prefer, when the couple, when they exchange rings and they put their rings on one another's fingers, the words that they say are, with this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow. You see, the ring is the seal. It says, all that

[ 21 : 02 ] I am and all that I have, I give to you. It's yours now. So that's what this woman is talking about. So the point is, love needs to be protected from the outside and the inside. And actually, all of that that I just said can be summed up in one word. Maybe you wish I had done that.

The word is this, chastity. That's the word. It's an old-fashioned word that doesn't get a lot of press these days and a lot of people misunderstand it. They think it's a negative or repressive view of sex. It's not a negative view of sex. It's actually a reverence for sex. It's a reverence for sex. And chastity summed up is this, don't act like you're unmarried if you're married and don't act like you're married if you're unmarried. It means regardless of whether you're married or unmarried, honoring and respecting the boundaries of a marriage covenant, right, from outside and from inside. There's a woman named Dawn Eden who's a survivor of sexual abuse. She was an agnostic rock journalist living in New York. And she converted to Christianity and then began to discover the beauty of the virtue of chastity. She wrote a book called *The Thrill of the Chaste*. Not a big fan of the title, but the book is amazing. And she says in this book, here's one quote, people who marry without understanding chastity are stunted. It will be hard for them to grow together as they should because they have yet to develop spiritual gifts that are best nurtured before marriage, like patience, faithfulness, and self-control. Chastity is a lifelong discipline based on the understanding of the nature of sexual intimacy, what sex is and what it's for. So what she's saying is this. I mean, chastity before marriage actually prepares you for chastity within marriage. Developing the patience and the self-control to honor the fact that you're not married actually cultivates virtues in you that will benefit your marriage, that will enable you to be more faithful in your mind and in your heart and with your body for the rest of your life with another person. And that's an amazing point that we need to consider. And one more thing I need to say about this before we move on. I know that as I talk about this, there are probably a lot of people in this room who you've slept with people, you have not saved yourself for marriage, so to speak. And so we got to make this point about chastity. Chastity is not the kind of thing that you have it and then if you lose it, it's gone forever. And, you know, the rise of what is called the purity culture in our society, I think it was driven by good intentions, but I also frankly think that it's done a lot of harm. Because I think that it's created a kind of what you would call a Pelagian heresy among Christians. The Pelagian heresy is that we are born clean, we are born pure, there's no original sin, and that if we make bad choices that somehow we are stained or soiled. And that's essentially what purity culture says. It says that you are like a pure snowflake, but if you give that away, you're spoiled. And that's simply not Christianity. I mean, it's not Christianity, that's Pelagianism. Christianity says the only way to be pure, we're born impure, we're born tainted, we're born soiled. The only way to be cleansed and to attain purity is through Jesus Christ. It's asking Jesus to forgive and cleanse us, what we prayed at the very beginning of this service together. Cleanse our hearts, O Lord, right? Through the grace and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That's the only way to attain any level of purity spiritually. But then chastity is a virtue that we can begin to live out and to cultivate here and now. Regardless of your past, it's

the kind of thing that you can commit to doing right here and now at this very moment.

So the question is, well, what does chastity look like in practice? Well, a couple of things. Until you're married, chastity means this. Live like a wall. Live like a wall. What do I mean by that? Well, guard your heart, guard your body, guard yourself emotionally, guard yourself physically. That doesn't mean don't hang out, get to know people, develop friendships, date, explore relationships. But what it does mean is don't sleep together. Don't crash at your boyfriend or girlfriend's house over and over and over until you establish residency there. Don't allow yourself to get overly financially enmeshed. Don't allow yourself to go too far down the road of making plans for the future together.

[ 25 : 35 ] Don't get overly emotionally enmeshed. And for all that is good, do not move to another city for somebody unless you're at least engaged. It's just unwise, right? Because you're not married. So live like a wall. Protect yourself. Protect the other person. Honor marriage and allow it to be marriage.

If you are married, chastity means not being a wall. Chastity means what the woman says. Place your spouse as a seal on your heart and on your body, right? Don't allow yourself to even fantasize or imagine about being with someone else. It's very tempting to do that, especially when you're having a hard time in your marriage. But place your spouse as a seal on your heart and on your body, on your mind, anywhere you need it, right? It's an interesting image that is used in this passage of love or passion as a flame, as an all-consuming flame, because that is a very, very appropriate image for desire, right? We hear about these wildfires out west, you know, where a family's just sitting in their home and everything is fine and the kids are there and the mom and dad are there and everything's great and life is, you know, totally normal. And then all of a sudden, boom, a wildfire sweeps down out of nowhere. The entire home and all their possessions go up in smoke. And they're looking around saying, where did that come from? What happened? Their whole life falls apart.

How often has the same thing happened with desire? When desire was not contained within a covenant, when it becomes a wildfire, right? And you have a family and they're sitting in their home and the kids are there and mom and dad and everything is fine and life is totally normal. And then boom, a major extramarital affair gets uncovered and the whole house goes up in smoke, so to speak. And the whole family is torn apart and people look around and say, how did that happen? Where did that come from? Right? This is why it needs protection. This is why covenants matter so much. This is why Hebrews 13 says that marriage should be honored by all people, not just for your own good, but for the good of society as a whole. Society does not function when homes are going up in smoke.

So this is the second thing. Love is not only extremely powerful, but love needs to be protected. The last point I want to make is this, that true love can only be given freely. True love can only be given freely as a gift. Notice in verse seven, the woman says, if a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised. In other words, if you tried to buy love, love would turn up its nose at you. What a ridiculous idea. Then in verse 11, Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Haman. He led out the vineyard to keepers. Each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver. She's saying Solomon has big holdings in the wine business. He owns lots of vineyards. He owns lots of a thousand shekels, a lot of money. Then she says, my vineyard, my very own is before me. Another way of translating that would be my vineyard is mine to give. And so she says, you Solomon, you can keep your money. Don't you dare try to buy my love. It's not going to work. It's not for sale because love can only be given as a gift. True love by definition can only be given. It can't be bought.

[ 29 : 07 ] It can't be earned. It can't be coerced. It can't be manipulated. It can't be coerced or cajoled. It can only be given. If it's not given freely as a gift, it's not really love. It's one of the many cousins of love, but it's not true love. So how do we apply this? Well, I think we could go in a number of ways. I'll just say this. I think in every marriage, and for those of you who are not married, God willing, most of you who want to be married will be married. In every marriage, times will come when the emotion that we call love fades. It's just going to happen. And it'll probably happen a number of times over the course of a long, decades-long marriage. That feeling, that desire, that enjoyment of the other person will simply fade. There will be a moment when all that kept you in the relationship, you know, the attraction, the friendship, the mutual enjoyment of hobbies and things, that none of that is enough. That none of that is sufficient. And it'll fade. Right? And many people

will experience that, and they will see that as a sign that they need to go elsewhere and find their true love somewhere else. But again, the idea that there's one soulmate out there who will meet all your needs, that's not Christianity. That's Greek mythology. It's a pagan myth.

Right? But many people will think that. Well, you must not be the right one. And I think that there are a lot of people, maybe some people in this room, who are afraid to get married because you're afraid of falling out of love. Spoiler alert. It's going to happen. So how do we make sense of that? Well, the reason that we are so fearful of that experience is because most people don't understand how love works. Our culture influenced by romanticism says love is a feeling. And therefore, what happens is, I should feel love for you. And once I feel love for you, then I will treat you with love as an overflow of that feeling. That the love as an action flows out of love as a feeling. That's the way it's supposed to work. But the fact is, it's actually the exact opposite, which we're going to see in just a moment. It's the exact opposite. Love begins not as an overflow of emotion, but it begins as a choice.

It begins as the choice to give someone the gift of love, to act in a loving way toward them. And see, that's a very important shift because if you think that love begins as a feeling and you're in a loving relationship with somebody else, you're going to be very concerned to do things to make sure that person feels that for you. You're going to make sure that you are lovely, that you are desirable, that you are attractive, that you're interesting, that you appeal to them, engender those feelings in them so that then they will love you. You're going to be very, very, very concerned about being lovable. But the Bible says that God loves us completely differently. The way God loves us could not be further from that.

God's love is a pure gift. It is pure grace. You know, God says to us what the Shulamite woman says to Solomon. My love is mine to give. Don't even try to earn it. Don't even try to buy it. It's mine to give. And I choose to give it to you as a gift. God does not love us because we are lovable. Your parents think that you're lovable. Your friends think that you're lovable. God does not love you because you're lovable. God loves you because his love is his to give and he's chosen to give it to you. And good people need to hear this way more than bad people. Because what we need to be reminded of is that there is no amount of moral excellence, no amount of religious devotion that can ever earn God's love. We will never merit God's love. We can never repay God's love. And this is the thing that makes Christianity so radically different and unique as a religion. Because most religions in one way or another say, make yourself lovely. You know, live by the rules, live by the code, live by the creed, accept these principles, all of that. Make yourself lovely according to these standards and then God will love you. And Christianity turns that on its head. [ 33 : 28 ] And it says, God will love you, give his son for you, draw you to himself. And then by being loved, you will then become lovely. But it begins with his intervening gracious love, right? And so back to the example of the marriage where we lose our feelings of love, the more we experience this kind of free grace love from God, the more that begins to change how we love other people. And so if we go back to that example of the marriage, instead of seeing that as a sign that the marriage is over, well, we fell out of love, we need to look elsewhere. I would encourage everybody in this room, if you ever come to this place in your life, see that as an opportunity to maybe for the first time in your marriage, experience true love. True love, which is not a response to somebody's attractiveness or lovableness, but the gift of love, where it is you choose to extend it because it's yours to give. If you're waiting to feel love before you act out of love, you have it backwards. Give your love.

Even if you don't feel it, give it. And the secret is, and what many people actually discover is, the feelings will often follow. The heart was not meant to lead us as we often like to think. The heart needs to be led. And the heart will love what you give it to love, especially if the power of God is at work in you. So this is love. This is what we've learned about love, just to pull all of this together. It is extremely powerful. It needs to be protected within the context of a covenant, both our love with one another, especially in marriage. We've also talked about covenant friendships. We've also talked about the kinds of membership covenants that church communities make. Those are all ways of safeguarding and protecting love, allowing it to thrive. And then finally, love can only be given freely. That's exactly the kind of love that we receive from God. And so the great hope of the gospel, as we move forward together, is that every single one of us in this room has the chance to know and experience that kind of perfect love. Because the good news of the gospel is this. Love has a name. And that name is Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Amen.