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Good evening. I'm going to start by reading a little excerpt from a book that I bought in 1998. How many of you were alive in 1998? Oh good. That's not bad. I don't feel too old. It says this. Joanna Vingstra went as a single woman missionary to Africa in 1920. She lived in a primitive hut with dirt floors plagued with white ants and rats. When having my evening meal, she reported, here were those white ants in swarms, sticking fast in hand, dropping in on food, and I concluded a plague was upon us. There was no shutting them out because in these native huts we have no ceiling. But there were no complaints from her lips and in spite of very little initial success, she had no second thoughts. She said, "There has never been a single regret that I left the bright lights of New York City and came to this dark corner of his vineyard. There has been no sacrifice because the Lord Jesus himself is my constant companion." Today, this morning, we talked about the nature of Christian service. We talked about how it is sincere and sacrificial, thorough and joyful, honorable, humble and faithful. And what Christian service looks like is loving people who don't deserve it, loving people who can't repay what you give them and what you do for them, and doing it for little to no fame or reward in this life. And I don't know about you, but when I hear that, that sounds difficult. And I mentioned that this morning and I asked you to think about that. Tonight, we are going to discuss how it is possible for us to do the service that God is calling us to. There are basically two keys to it. Number one, the power of love and number two, our new nature. So to begin with, let's talk about love. So love, as you may be aware from songs and movies and poems, is a powerful thing. Love can make people override all of their other base impulses. People have gone without food for love. They've gone without sleep for love. People have even laid down their lives for love. Humans have gone to war for love. My parents tell the story of how when my dad proposed at that time, he smoked and my mom said, "I accept your proposal if you stop smoking." And from that day on, no more smoking. A lot of people say they struggle with quitting smoking, but for the sake of love, my dad did it in a day. Love is a powerful thing, but what is it? Well, this is maybe an oversimplification, but I say that love is our heart's natural response to loveliness. When we come in contact with something lovely, we feel love towards it. How does this work in relationships? Well, you're going through your life and you maybe come across a beautiful person, a lovely person, and you think to yourself, "Oh, that's a lovely person," and you feel a slight measure of love in your heart towards that person. But then one of two things happens. Either they say or do something lovely and your love goes up. There's a story that someone shared on Facebook about the actress that plays Hermione Granger who was walking down the street when she saw a little kid dressed like Harry Potter, and so she just stopped and immediately said, "Are you Harry Potter? Well, I'm Hermione Granger and we're best friends." We hear a story like that and we smile and it makes us feel good, and that's love in our heart towards something lovely. That's why we share stuff like that on Facebook because we love love. We love hearing about that kind of thing. The other thing that could happen is maybe you see someone and they're a beautiful person. Maybe they're a supermodel and then you see them treat someone just awfully and whatever little love feeling was in your heart for that person, it's gone now. You're like, "Oh, they were beautiful on the outside but they were ugly on the inside," and our love drops once we see what kind of person that they really are on the inside. But maybe this person you've met is your future soulmate. You see them and they do something and it's lovely. You're like, "Oh, I really like that. That's beautiful to me." You are beautiful to them. You do nice things and then you show them kindness or something and their love goes up towards you. It's this cycle where I do something to them and they feel love and they return you something to me and I feel love and it's cycle and it builds and builds and people develop relationships and they get married. But sadly, in the society we live in, in the world we live in, I should say, we have sin. Unfortunately, what happens is at some point we're going to do something stupid. We're going to mess up and when the person we love does something that we think is unlovely, suddenly our love begins to drop a little and they notice that and they feel like you're being a little cold and then their love kind of drops and then you notice it and again, this cycle that built and built is now suddenly building its way down. It's now destroying itself and that is the standard human love cycle and it's broken because of sin. Sin gets in there and it poisons what should be this thing that just grows and grows and instead it tears itself down and that's why we sadly see so much broken relationships and divorce in our society. That's why we see people nowadays who just don't even bother getting married because they just assume it's going to end in tragedy and so they say, "Well, we'll stick it out as long as we can but it's inevitable so let's not even bother with the marriage." For those of you who have come from broken homes and broken relationships, I want to say that God hates that. He hates divorce. He doesn't want anyone to be a part of that. He doesn't want anyone to suffer from that and I know in my youth group how many of the kids have divorced parents and that breaks God's heart. If you're from a situation like that, I don't want you to think that that's normal and I don't want you to be cynical and become one of those people who just says, "Marriage is for someone else." That's not real because that's not what God says. God says that there is marriage, there is true love, there is lifetime relationships. But if we can't even get our marriages and stuff right, like with the lovely people, the people we think are the best people in the world, how on earth can we carry out the command to love the unlovely people? The answer is that we have to bring God into this equation. So now, instead of my love feeding off your love, feeding off my love in this cycle, instead I go to God and God loves me and I receive my love from him. And then I can go out to the people in the world, whether they're lovely people or whether they're terrible monsters, and I can show them love because I'm no longer dependent on getting anything from them. I can show love to the worst people because it's not about what they can give me anymore because I am now receiving everything I need in my heart from God. And we have this love cycle with God where we love him and he loves us and the love that he shows us makes us love him even more. And it's that same cycle. But then, of course, we're sinful and we bring sin to the equation. But you know what? God took care of that on the cross. And so instead of his love dropping or going down or anything, he just shows us more forgiveness and more love. And when we see that we've messed up and God loves us anyway, that increases our love for God. And that builds the cycle and builds the cycle and our love towards God grows and grows. So the key is your love for others becomes an extension of your love for God. Has anyone in here ever loved someone? Okay, good. I hope so. Have any of you think about a person specifically that you've loved? Have you ever, as time has gone on in your relationship with them, have you ever noticed that there was a thing that they love, that they're passionate about that when you first met them, maybe you just didn't care or maybe you just outright didn't like it, but through your relationship you've learned to love it? Does anybody have that experience? Have any of you fallen in love with something because the person you love introduced it to you? You don't have to give examples. Just nod your head. Okay, good. I know that personally my, a lot of the music that I love is because of my parents. I love my parents and they've introduced me to music that they love, which a lot of my friends and stuff aren't into, but because I love my parents, I love a lot of the stuff they love. I love a lot of the movies they love. And the point of this is it's the same with God. As we begin to love God, we begin to read His Word and we start to realize He loves other people and as our love and our passion goes for Him, we start to love other people because that's what He loves and we start to care about other people because that's what He cares about. So that's what I mean when I say that our love for others becomes an extension of our love for God. We love Him and we get excited and passionate about the things that He loves. Now I need to pause right here because it's important to talk about something. You have to cultivate your love for God. It's easy to talk about loving God and stuff, but it's much easier to miss out on that. We live in a world with so many distractions and so much heartache and stuff going on that it's easy for us to take our eyes off God and begin to start to doubt His love for us and to begin to question how many of us have had that friend who started a conversation, "Well, if God loves us so much and then they go off with some excuse or whatever, it's very easy in our life, in our society to get our eyes off God and to begin to forget who He is and to forget how much He loves us." And so we have to cultivate our love for God the same way that you cultivate like a garden. You don't need to get out there 24 hours a day, 7 days a week taking care of the plants, but it is also something you cannot simply neglect. So how do we do it? First of all, you can read your Bible. Now when I was your age, someone would tell me, "Read your Bible." The thing that entered my brain was, "Do your homework." Like, "Get there, study. Read the book. It's a bargain. Read the book." And I'm not saying, "Do your homework." That is not what I'm saying. In fact, that will probably kill your love towards God. So what I'm saying is, in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Bible is ink on paper, but it is a snapshot of the One who loves you. It is the love letter from Him to you. And so when I say, "Read your Bible," what I'm saying is, "Take this book and before you open it, sit there and think there is a love in this universe that is more beautiful than any poet has ever been able to describe. There is love specifically towards me that I cannot even comprehend how amazing and how great it is. And that love has been captured in here. And once you understand what it is you're about to read, that it is the love letter from God to you, then open up and carefully read. Read through that filter that the One who loves you is trying to send you a message. If one of you, if a parent or someone you love sends you a message, you would read it in the same way that you're supposed to be reading the Bible. Someone who cares for you more than you can understand is sending you a message. And so when I say, "Read your Bible," I'm saying, "Open up the love letter that has been sent to you." Prayer is another way that you can cultivate your love towards God. Again, I'm not saying, you know, you have to check off a bunch of boxes every day. What I'm saying is I have a prayer journal, I'm going to bring it out and I forgot. It's just a cheap little notebook that I picked up at Target. But what I do is I write the date and I write, anytime someone gives me a prayer request, I write it in there and then I leave a blank line because I know that there is a God of love who exists and that He hears every word that comes out of my mouth and I know, I am certain that that blank line is going to be filled in with a response to my prayer. And so I keep that journal as evidence and those blank lines have been getting filled in because God is real and God answers prayer. And maybe not every single prayer gets answered the way I want, but when I go back and I read through that prayer journal, I realize that a lot more prayers get answered than I remember and that is why it's important to write that stuff down. Prayer is coming to the one who loves you and takes care of you and you should speak with him and he hears you and he takes care of you. That's what prayer is, it's not some rote homework assignment, it is speaking to the one who loves you. Worship is a way that you can cultivate your love towards God. God inhabits the praises of His people. When we get together and when we sing, God inhabits those praises. And if you are finding yourself coming to church and just rolling your eyes, not more worship, then something is wrong and possibly it's the church you are going to, but possibly you are coming in with the wrong heart and the wrong attitude. Worship should be the highlight of your week because it is your chance to come to the one who loves you and to spend time with him returning that love through an outward expression. And also fellowship is a way that you can cultivate your love towards God because when two or more are gathered in His name, He is there among them. And so when you come together as brothers and sisters in Christ and you spend quality Christian time together, I mean there is time to hang out and do puzzles, but there is also time to say, "Hey, what's going on in your life and how can I be praying for you?" And honest folks fellowship with one another is a way that you can grow the love in your heart towards God because as we begin to learn how to love each other, as we begin to learn how to pray for one another, we become the family and the community as we talked about that God created us to be. We become more complete and that heals our heart and that brings us closer to God. We can serve the people of this world, even the worst, most difficult situations, hostile countries, hostile people. We can serve these people if our hearts are full of love towards God. Our love towards Him is our motivation. His love towards us is our strength. And the second part that I said, the first part was love, the second part, which I'll just mention briefly here is that as we develop this love, as we spend this time with God in the Word and in worship, we develop a new nature. His Holy Spirit actually transforms us and day by day, maybe just little by little, you become less and less like that person you don't want to be. And you find more and more joy in being the kind of person that you never thought you could be, the kind of person that talks about in the Bible. Those heroes in the Bible were just ordinary people like you and me who have been transformed by the Holy Spirit. And as we spend time in the Bible and in prayer and in worship and in fellowship, our natures get changed and we become those people too. So I didn't feel like we could talk about something like that without worshiping. So I'm going to say a prayer right now and then we're just going to spend a little more time worshiping. And as we do, I want you just to block out the distractions and I want you to focus on the one who loves you and just concentrate that the greatest love in the universe is focusing on you right now and just spend time focusing on him. And as we're doing this, if there is something blocking your worship, if there's something blocking your heart, then find one of these adults around the room and just say, "Can you pray for me about something? Something is blocking my heart." And even if you don't know what it is, just ask for prayer. In the meantime, for the rest of us, we're going to stand up and we're going to worship God together as soon as I pray. Amazing, heavenly father of love, we thank you that we can't even understand how good you are and yet you have created us to be in your image. We thank you that you have put us into these families and into these relationships and given us this way to regain what we lost through our sin, to become the creatures, the people that you made us to be. And so God, we come to you now and we ask you to meet us here in this moment. Please put your love into our hearts and transform us, empower us to be your servants in this world. In Jesus' name, amen. Stand up.