
Hey, it has been so great to be with you guys for the past three weeks. Help me welcome all of the campuses: West, North, Downtown, Northwest—welcome guys. Online campus, great to have you guys with us this weekend, grateful we get to do this together.

My name is Mike in case we've never met before. And it has been an honor to be with you all for the past three weeks, little highlights of my summer, actually. We've been unpacking what we've been calling *The Big Three*: faith, hope, and love. If you missed the first two, you can catch them online.

We talked in week one how God's faithfulness is His gift to us, and our trust is our gift back to Him. And our God is faithful through every season of our life. Last week, we learned that there are a lot of things overrated in this world, but hope is not one of them. There is hope for every single one of us.

Today, I would like to wrap this up by taking us all to the optician's office and picking out some glasses, some corrective lenses. You've seen one of these, right? These eye charts in the doctor's office. Anybody like me when you're sitting in the eye doctor's chair, get really indecisive? When he goes, "Better or worse? A or B? One or two?" You go, "Can you go back to A? I'm not sure. It might have been two." Anybody else like that?

I was doing a physical, and the doctor was going to do the eye chart thing and he said, "I'm going to step out for a minute, and I'll be right back, and we'll start with your eye test." So, when he left the room, I memorized the bottom line of the eye chart. I mean, not even the bottom line, but the very fine print at the very bottom of the chart. I memorized that.

So he comes back in, and he says, "Okay, stand over here and tell me what line you can read." And I went, "Copywrite 1957, Milwaukee, Wisconsin." He goes, "That's amazing." That's all I've got man. That's all I've got.

I've been nearsighted for a good part of my life. Anybody else nearsighted? They call it myopia. Yeah, I've worn a pair of glasses or contacts since I was in the sixth grade. Near-sighted people can't see things far away. They can see things up close, but things in the distance are a little bit foggy.

I had Lasik surgery about 15 years ago, twelve seconds on each eye. I got up out of my chair and I could see. It was amazing. I could see the clock for the first time since the sixth grade. Myopia has been corrected.

However, from time to time I still struggle with a little spiritual myopia, let's call it that. It's where as long as it's about me I can see really, really clearly. I mean, I see pretty well up close. I get pretty self-absorbed. I get pretty self-centered, very self-focused because that's how spiritual nearsightedness tends to work.

Your life is pretty good, but those in the distance? I mean, come on. Their needs, their hurts, their desires, their issues they can just remain foggy, they can stay out of focus, because as long as I can see my stuff up close, as long as I can see my life clearly that's all that really matters. Who needs a worldview anyway? Who needs to think about global poverty and racial reconciliation and sex trafficking and hurting people who are out there somewhere? They've got their problems, I've got mine.

So through the years, I've had to ask God to do a little Lasik on the eyes of my heart and correct my spiritual myopia.

Anybody farsighted? You've got a pair of readers sitting around your house. Anybody got that going on right now? Even though, since Lasik surgery, I can read license plates like three miles away, I can't read a menu in a dark restaurant. My up-close vision has gotten worse. So I put on a pair of these readers. I got out my flashlight app on my phone the other night. I got the menu and, "Okay, I see what I want," like that. Anybody else like that right now? You can't see up close.

Now, again, spiritually speaking this is a condition where we can see other people's stuff from miles away. We can dissect their flaws and imperfections from 100 yards away, but we can't see our own stuff up close. Now you can see, clearly, the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye, but you're unable to see the log in your own. It's that inability to see your stuff.

And when you get to the point where you're no longer asking questions like, "Search me O God. Is there anything in me that is out of sync with You? Is there anything in me that needs to change?" If you refuse to pray that kind of humble prayer, eventually you're going to end up with, let's just call them blind spots. Those are things in you that everybody else can see but you. Maybe a little pride. Maybe a little envy. Maybe a little insecurity, some irritability.

My wife, Debbie, she has a car that has those blind spot monitors on the side mirror that let you know that something is out there that maybe you can't see. I'm telling you, they come in really handy when I'm in LA traffic.

And spiritually speaking, I think we all need a blind spot monitor in our life. We need an honest friend or two to help us navigate. I've got some guys in my life who I've asked to point out any blind spots they see in me. And they have. And honestly, it's kept me from wrecking my life and other people's lives.

Then there is this condition known as, I'm not sure about the exact medical condition, but it's astigmatism. It's a distorted perspective. And I don't know but it seems like a lot of people in

our culture suffer from this, where they are looking at life, they are looking at other people assigning people's worth based on size or shape or ability or disability or beauty or occupation or color of skin or financial status or political leaning.

It's judging other people based upon cultural norms or on our skewed thinking. And when we judge people, we stop seeing them for the priceless masterpiece that God created and loves. Jesus called the religious leaders of His day, the Pharisees, blind guides. Oh, they could see, but they had astigmatism. They had distorted perspective.

One day, Jesus heals a guy who was born blind. The guy was surviving on handouts that came his way. When Jesus stretches out His hand and heals this guy, all the religious leaders could see was a violation of their quote, unquote Sabbath laws. They could not see the presence of the Kingdom of God in their very midst.

They could not see a person of enormous worth and dignity in front of them. They couldn't see hope in his newly opened eyes. They couldn't see a reason to celebrate with some poor beggar. They only saw a threat to their religious system that propped up their own sense of spiritual superiority. They looked at the same man Jesus looked at, but they couldn't see him in the same way Jesus did.

Hellen Keller once said, "Eyes that cannot see, might be healed...but eyes that will not see cannot be helped." And that's why a self-righteous heart is the most dangerous of all spiritual conditions.

I love to do construction stuff. I've been renovating an old house for about six years now. And so I'll slip on a pair of these [safety glasses]. In fact, I just wore these a few days ago. I was ripping some lumber on a table saw. Debbie gets on me because she says I don't wear them enough.

But I think I wear them too often to be honest, again spiritually speaking. It's being able to see okay, but just remaining safe, because I'm not going to get involved, afraid to be vulnerable.

Afraid you might get scammed or used so you slip a pair of these on your heart to protect yourself from the messiness that compassion sometimes brings. Now, I think we need to be discerning and I think we need to be wise, but honestly, at least in my own case, sometimes it's just a coverup for a lack of courageous love.

See, no one has ever seen quite like Jesus. Not farsighted, not nearsighted, no astigmatisms, no blind spots whatsoever, tremendous peripheral vision, but even more than that, Jesus saw, I'm going to go old school here, He saw things in 3D.

Ever been to a 3D movie, you know what I'm talking about? Things are coming at you from the screen. Right now, you guys look like you're coming right at me.

But Jesus saw the world in 3D because he looked through the eyes of love. And according to God's Word, love is a 3D kind of thing. I want to give you three "D"s of love today. The first "D" is this:

Love is a DECISION...

Did you know that? Love is a decision. Contrary to popular belief, love is not an involuntary act of the hormones. It's a voluntary act of the will. Our culture is all about love, right? Bookstore shelves are sagging beneath the weight of all of the volumes of romance novels. Hollywood is cracking out love story after love story.

How many love songs are sent out every night over the airways by Delilah playing music for those who are looking for love? You know, love songs like Ed Sheeran's, "I'm dancing in the dark with you between arms, barefoot on the grass, you look perfect tonight." John Legend's, *All of Me*, "Love is all of you."

The *Klinger Song* by Katie Perry, "Just because it's over doesn't mean it's really over and if I think it over maybe you'll be coming over again." And one of my all-time favorites, "Ain't no mountain high enough, ain't no valley low enough, ain't no river wide enough to keep me from getting to you." I'm thinking, "You need a restraining order on that one, alright?"

Well, my journey of love started in the fifth grade. There was a girl sitting in front of me. Her name was Kathy, and I had the biggest crush on this girl. I was so in love with Kathy. And on Valentine's Day, they might even still do this in elementary school, but we would bring Valentine's cards for everybody in class, especially a special someone in our class.

And we would take these sacks and we would cut out a goofy looking doily heart and paste it on the front and stick the sack on the front of our desk. Then they would play love songs and we'd walk around the room and put our Valentines in everybody's sack.

Well I grabbed my sack at the end of the day, and I took it home and I dumped it out on my bed and guess whose I'm looking for? Yeah, I'm looking for Kathy's. I found it. I opened it up, and there it was in number two lead pencil, "I love you, Mike." Oh my goodness. I mean, the next day I chased her at recess. I threw rocks at her. You know, the way you show affection when you're a fifth-grade boy. That's all I knew, you know?

Well, my dating techniques changed, thankfully, when I got into high school. And I remember going to a movie with this girl and sitting in the movie theater. I wanted to hold her hand so bad. She was sitting there with her leg crossed, her hand kind of sitting on her knee. And I looked over at her hand and I was like, "I've got to hold her hand."

But I was shy. And honestly, I would go into countdown mode in my head I'd go, "Come on, bro. You can do this. Come on. Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one. Ten, nine..." It would take me for forever before I had the courage, but I reached over and grabbed her hand

and when we interlocked fingers and we rubbed thumbs together, oh man, I was so in love with this girl.

I remember the first time I kissed her. It didn't last that long. I didn't care, man. I kissed her and I floated all of the way home. I don't know to this day how I got in my driveway. You ever done that? I just got home and went, "Wow! I'm home. I don't know how I got here." I was so in love with this girl.

Three years later, that same girl walked down the aisle of a church. We walked up on a platform; the preacher asked a question. I said, "I do." And she said, "I guess." And we kissed each other, and we walked out of that church as husband and wife. And I thought, "Oh my goodness. This is what love is like." Three years later, I watched that same girl go through 36 hours of labor to bring our first child into the world. And that's when it hit me, "Oh, I think that's what love is like."

See, love is not based on warm feelings. Love is based on your will. Love is a decision. It's not just a feeling that you fall in and out of. It's a verb that you choose to do, even when it's hard. You know, Jesus saw the blind beggar or the outcast leper or the paralyzed, the broken, the outcast, the left out, the confused, the oppressed and not only did He feel compassion for them, He chose. He chose. He decided to love them because love is a decision.

You know, Jesus warned us about the last days. He said this in Matthew 24:
"Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold..." (NIV)

He was just saying, "People are going to become more and more nearsighted, more and more myopic." Because, unless you and I intentionally focus our lives outwardly, we're going to become more and more self-centered, self-focused—that's just the way that the old sin nature gravitates. I'm just thinking, "May that verse never be true of us."

When evil and consequences associated with evil bring pain and suffering into a family, into a city, into a nation, into a global community, the people of God step up and choose to love even more fervently and more selflessly. The early Christians were known for this. The thing that was most written about the early followers of Jesus was this: These people love everybody.

Now, you may have seen this before, but a second century historian named Aristides sent this investigative report back to the Roman Emperor about these people known as Jesus followers, as Christians. This is what the report said:

They do not keep for themselves the goods entrusted to them. They do not covet what belongs to others. They show love to their neighbors. They do not do to another what they would not have done to themselves. They speak gently to those who oppress them, and in this way they make them their friends. It has become their passion to do good to their enemies. They live in the awareness of their smallness. Every one of them who has anything gives ungrudgingly to the one who has nothing. If they see a traveling stranger, they bring him under their roof. They rejoice over him as over a real brother, for they do

not call one another brothers after the flesh, but they know they are brothers in God. If they hear that one of them is imprisoned or oppressed for the sake of Christ, they take care of all his needs. If anyone among them is poor or comes into want while they themselves have nothing to spare, they fast two or three days for him. In this way they can supply any poor man with the food he needs. This O Emperor is the rule of life of the Christians, and this is their manner of life. 137 AD

And gang, these people didn't even have a Bible yet. All they had to go on was that Jesus, the One who came back from the dead, said, *"A new commandment I give you. Love others as I have loved you."*

These people internalized what the apostle Paul wrote in Galatians, chapter 5, when he said: *"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."* (NIV)

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love.

You know, a lot of us set personal goals and to reach those goals we have to get intentional about them, right? We say, "I'm going to eat right. I'm going to exercise." "I'm going to read more." "I'm going to get better grades this semester." "I'm going to spend more time with the family." "I'm going to learn something new." "I'm going to quit smoking." "I'm going to quit drinking." "I'm finally going to get organized." "I'm going to get out of debt." Whatever. Good goals, worthy goals, noble goals. But check this out, 1 Corinthians, 14: *"Let LOVE be your, what? "HIGHEST goal!"* (NLT)

It's saying, with careful thought and intentional plan of action, let love be your highest goal. Work harder at that than anything else in your life. Whatever choices you make throughout the day, start your day by asking, "What would love have me do today?"

Get intentional about it because love is a decision. And then along the way, look for opportunities to do that because the second "D" is this:

Love is a DEMONSTRATION...

Love is a decision and love is a demonstration. It says in Romans, chapter 12, verse 9: *"Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them."* (NLT)

My son, Derrick, when he was in fourth grade, I went to school to eat lunch with him. I show up, my wife, Debbie, is working the cafeteria as a teacher's aide at the time. I walk over to Deb and I say, "Hey, what's up with Derrick." Because I looked at a table and there was Derrick and this girl sitting there at the table all by themselves. And at first I thought, "Way to go, Derrick. It took me to fifth grade. Way to move. A fourth-grader, way to go."

And Deb was like, "I can't even look over there. I'm going to start crying." And I go, "Why?" She goes, "That's the girl that everybody in class makes fun of. They say that she's poor, doesn't

have nice clothes, doesn't smell very good, she doesn't make good grades. Everybody makes fun of her. Derrick is the only one in the class who will eat lunch with her." Oh, man. I looked at the other table and all of the kids are crammed together at the table.

So I didn't go over and sit down. I just waited for him to get home. And I met him at the school bus stop. He got off of the bus and I walked him up the street. I said, "Son," I remember this so vividly, I put my arm around him and walking up the street I said, "Hey, man. I stopped by school today and I saw you sitting with that girl at lunch. I just want to tell you, buddy, I am so proud of you." I said, "Why did you do that?"

He looked at me with the most innocent fourth-grade look and said, "Well, Dad. Didn't you say in your sermon that you're supposed to love everybody?" I went, "Yeah. Yeah, I said that. I didn't think anybody would do it but, yeah, I said that." He just figured it out. Don't just pretend to love others, really love them.

Let me show you the Greek word for compassion. It's the word:
Splagna

Say that with me "splagna". Now you've got to say it from way down here [from your diaphragm] "splagna". It sounds like you had some bad Taco Bell and you splagnaed all over the place, right?

That's where the word comes from. It's that stirring in your gut, that pit in your stomach that moves you to action. It moves from your eyes to your heart to your gut to your mind to your hands to your feet to your wallet and you go, "Man, I've just got to do something."

Jesus tells a famous story known as the parable of the Good Samaritan. It's about a guy who has splagna. He comes upon this dude who has been beaten up, robbed, and left for dead on the side of the road to Jericho. And a couple of the religious folks see the guy and they cross over to the other side and pass by him. But the Samaritan guy comes on the scene, and he feels that churning in his gut, that splagna, and he stops and helps the victim. He actually does something.

So, at the end of the story Jesus tells He asks a young lawyer in the crowd, He goes:
"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had,' splagna, "...who had mercy on him.' Jesus told him, *'Go and do likewise.'* Luke 10:36-37 (NIV)

Because love is a demonstration.

You know, like many of you, like we did in our service, I've been praying for the people of Afghanistan, and the people of Haiti this week. Both are going through so much. And I think we are all looking for effective ways that we can actually, tangibly, help in those situations.

Our family spent time in Haiti through the years. My daughter, Jodie, actually lived there for a year. And we have a deep affection for those folks. I remember a few years back taking a group of business guys and some student athletes to Haiti. We were laying block at an orphanage. And we were covered in concrete and sweat, and dirt and we were playing with kids. It was so cool to watch these guys serving other people.

And lots of little kids were waiting in line to visit the dentist for the very first time. There was a little bit of fear and trepidation there. And this guy, Brian, sits down next to one little girl who was just crying, he puts his arm around her, and he pulls her up on his lap and holds her. And before long, he began to cry as well. He said, "I looked down at her little green dress and I notice all of these tear stains, but I couldn't tell whether they were hers or mine."

And I listen to some people like some of you who sponsor kids through Compassion International, through World Vision, how you talk about those kids just like they are your own. I watch friends of mine who sponsor a fellow struggler in AA just being available all hours of the day, love people with a humble, patient, unconditional type of love. I see foster families open up their homes to embrace a family in crises. I see students standing up for and including those who have been bullied or made fun of. And when I see that I think to myself, "They are seeing like Jesus sees. They are seeing in 3D."

See, whatever you choose to do, just get out in the community, and put yourself in a position where you can actually see the needs, where you can observe injustice, where you can feel people's pain, create some space for the Holy Spirit to move in your heart. Not everybody can travel great distances, but you can take the first step. You can maybe work in a food pantry, or take a pet to a nursing home, or swing a hammer on a Habitat house, or just donate somewhere generously.

Cross socio-economic lines. You may be going to India or someplace, or you may just go across a cul-de-sac to serve an elderly neighbor. It just means getting up and doing something, because the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. The Bible is pretty clear about our responsibility. In Psalm 82 it says to:

"Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." (NIV)

Jesus' brother, James, writes this in James, chapter 1:

"Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you." (NLT)

I love this one. The very lips of God in Isaiah 58 say:

"Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help." THEN, when you do that, "then

your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind.” (NLT)

I love that “then”. It’s just saying that when you get your eyes off of yourself, and you start to see the world through 3D, then your own salvation, your own healing, your own light begins to break through.

Jesus’ best friend, a guy named John, writes to a bunch of brand-new Jesus followers and he tenderly refers to them as little children. He says this in the fourth chapter. He says little children:

“We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.” 1 John 4:19-21(NIV)

The kitchen smells like supper and the table is ready and waiting and someone says they thought we ought to pray before we eat, and would I thank the Lord for all of He has so bountifully bestowed, but please don’t pray too long because the meat is getting cold. On the other side of town a mother sets another table for herself and several children just as well as she is able but there’s not too much because last night’s man didn’t pay so well. Will there be enough for breakfast? Well, it’s really hard to tell.

Am I passing by the man on the side of the road to Jericho? Have I cruelly snubbed the woman there as to the well I go? Am I my brother’s keeper? A cup of water did you say? Is the second mile outside my door or somewhere down the way?

The news is over now and there’s football on the other station and at the door appears my aunts and half of our relation and we all remark, “How nice to have the family here this way.”

It’s our love that binds us all so close. We’d love to always stay. While in a dark and dingy room a young girl eyes the walls around her, and she wonders if one soul would care if in three weeks they found her. All of her life she’s been rejected. Never had an honest friend. Is it life or mere existence? Who would care if it should end?

Am I passing by the man beside the road to Jericho? Have I cruelly snubbed a woman there as to the well I go? Am I my brother’s keeper? A cup of water did you say? Is the second mile outside my door or somewhere down the way?

The family is gone. It’s quiet and the bed is soft beneath me. But instead of sleeping dreams my restless thoughts creep up to meet me. And somewhere in the distance I hear hungry children cry and a girl unloved and uncared for brings a tear to my eye. If they saw me weeping, they’d think that I was mad. I tell them it’s a nightmare, the dream I dream was bad. I must gain

my self-control. Tomorrow is Sunday school and so, bloodshot eyes on a Sunday morning folks might talk a lot, you know?

If a man loves not his brother, he is able now to see that he makes himself a liar when he says that he loves Me. Little children, it's not thoughts or words that prove your love to all. If you're love is not an action, then it isn't love at all.

Love is a decision and love is always a demonstration. And:

Love is always the DIFFERENCE...
That's the third "D".

Now, if you've ever been to a wedding, you've probably heard 1 Corinthians, 13 where it starts, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels but have not love... If I give all my money to the poor but have not love... Even if I become a martyr for the faith but have not love... I'm just a clanging gong or a clashing symbol. My life is just obnoxious noise because genuine love is what always makes the difference." It's a state of heart and mind. It's pure motivation. It's a different way to see the world. It's 3D love and that always makes the difference.

I keep this word from Brennan Manning in the margin of my Bible and it's been stuck in my heart and head for many years now. He says:

"If we want to truly love, we must return again and again to the love of the great Lover."
If we want to truly love, then we must return again and again to the love of the great Lover. I'm just telling you when you know that you are loved, when you know the love of the great Lover, it changes the way you see the world. When you know that you are unconditionally loved, it begins to flow out of you.

That's why Paul prayed this prayer in Ephesians, chapter 3. He says:

"...I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp," to grasp, "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." (NIV)

I did a little word study on the word translated "grasp". It comes from the root that means to rust, decay, or eat all the way through. So he's saying here, "I don't want you to show up to church and intellectually learn some stuff about God's love. I want you to experience it. I want you to grasp it. I want you to let it eat all the way through you."

Let His love be your security. Let His love be your hope. Let His love fill you with gratitude and peace and compassion. When you slip your hand into the nail-scarred hand of Jesus you will finally know what love is like. And when you know the great Lover, then, then, you will be able to let it overflow into other people.

So what are we called to do? What are we called to do? We are called to see what Jesus would see if He were looking through our eyes and respond as He would respond. That's what we are called to do. To see what Jesus would see if He were looking through our eyes and then respond as He would respond.

It's about the heart. A heart that grasps the love of the Father and beats after the same things that His heart beats after. It's about compassion. It's about empathy. It's about seeing Jesus in the least of these and seeing people with a 3D difference making love.

I love this quote from Ian Watson. I have it typed up behind my desk for many years. It says:

We live on a contaminated planet. It is contaminated on every level. It should have been quarantined from heaven. No reasonable God would go near it with a ten-foot pole. But Jesus is no reasonable God. He became a human being and took on your uncleanness and mine. But instead of the world infecting him, he infected the world. With his immaculate infection, it's still spreading.

What do you say we keep the infection spreading? Let's take off the blinders and love. Let's refuse to check out of this broken world. Let's refuse to allow the needs of other people just to stay foggy out there in the distance. Let's refuse to go into isolation. Let's keep taking the risks that love requires, opening up our homes and opening up our hearts and getting up close and seeing the way that Jesus sees.

And now these three remain, these big three: faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love.

Father, thank You. Lord, we are so grateful for Your love. And it is my deepest prayer, the same way that Paul prayed, that we would be able to grasp how wide and how high and how deep and how long Your love is for us. I pray that some here today, some watching online today would finally let that truth just eat all the way through them. That they would know that they are so deeply loved.

Father, I know it's a challenge for us to love but we'll never have a shot if we don't first internalize that we are loved by You. God, I pray that that would happen and that we would overflow on other people the way that Jesus overflowed on other people.

Lord, help us to be aware even before we leave here today in the parking lot, or a restaurant, or in school tomorrow, or at work tomorrow—help us be aware of the needs around us, to be aware of Your presence in our life, to hear Your Holy Spirit speak to us saying, "Come on. Do this." or, "Do that." or, "Go there." or, "Say this."

I pray that love would motivate us first thing as we roll out of bed tomorrow morning to go, "What does love require of me today? What would love have me do today? I want that to be my highest goal today. Out of everything on my to-do list, I want love to be first. And I want to be

known as a person who loves God and loves people.” So, Lord, I just pray that we would be sensitive to Your Holy Spirit who is trying to get us to move through this world with the love of Jesus.

If there is anything in us, God, that needs to be corrected in our vision, we give You permission to do that. Thank You for Your patience with us. Thank You for Your deep, deep love for us. I pray all of this in the name of Jesus, the great Lover. Amen.