

CHURCH OF THE HIGHLANDS

WHAT IS LOVE? - LOVEOLOGY - MARK PETTUS

Full Transcript

Church of the Highlands
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Welcome and Church Announcements

- 0:41 I am so thankful to be in God's house today. Anybody else grateful? Oh, come on. You're grateful to be in God's house today? Welcome to church. Welcome to week one of a new series called Loveology. We're going to study love and relationships. I would dance right now. I feel like it needs that, but your boy can't dance. I'm not going to do that. But the great opener there is we just set up what's going to be an amazing month. But for that, though, I do want to welcome, officially welcome all of our locations, every Highlands campus. We love you with all of our heart, Alabama and Georgia. Anyone joining us online or on demand, just really in my heart today was praying for those who'd be joining us online for the very first time.
- 1:15 We're so grateful you're with us. And of course, the men and women of the Alabama Correctional Facilities, come on every location, put your hands together for your church family. We love you. And before we get into the message today, I do just want to share a couple of things, really just still reflecting on what God did last weekend as we celebrated 25 years as a church. God is moving at Highlands in a powerful way. You've heard that we're launching. Small groups. I love Jacob and Abby's story. I know they had a roll tide flag on the wall, but come on, we can all celebrate that. That was a lot of branding there, but it was an amazing story.
- 1:48 I love seeing people gather, and I love seeing what God is doing to young people at Highlands right now. Can we celebrate? God is truly moving. College students, high school students, I'm telling you, revival's here, and that's just one picture of that. But we all need that community. I'm grateful that God is moving in GrowthTrack. Last Sunday night, we had over 1,100 people. Step one, great job. One of the largest we've ever had. And so if that was you, continue that journey. I know the Super Bowl's tonight, but you can watch it when you get home. What a great opportunity to continue to grow that GrowthTrack for life. I did. We talked about it last week.
- 2:22 I can't wait to unpack that more in the future. One last thing I want to just reflect on. I mentioned it last weekend, but you actually see it today, and that's in front of you. There's the Highlands icon on the back of your seat, or it'll be on your seat back if you're on the front row. This is what I was referencing last week when I talked about pastoral. As a church, I need you to hear this. Even if you weren't here last week, you need to know we are never going to stop doing whatever we can to serve you, to come alongside you, to walk through life with you. And what's in front of you represents a new way to do that faster.
- 2:51 Your campus pastors will talk more about it later on, but you're going to be able to tap your phone, fill out things like connection cards. It allows us to respond faster. In fact, today, if you're here with us for the first time, or if you give your heart to Jesus later on this service, we're going to immediately be able to reach out to you, which is a really important thing for us. Getting prayer requests. prayer requests prayed over faster. Again, we'll walk you through what it exactly looks like later on in the service, but the heart behind it, I need you to hear from me. It is to serve you better, and we are so excited about really launching it today, and then the journey of what that's going to look like as we move forward.

Why Relationships Matter Most

- 3:22 And so, so many great things happening, and now getting into the series we're in. You know, we are in the month of love. This is February, everybody. It was, you know, January was an amazing month, but as we step into the year, this really is, in so many ways, the month of love. It's a great time. It's a great time to talk about relationships, and relationships are by far, like, there literally is no close second. I mean, it's such a huge gap between, you know, topic people saying, hey, can you preach on relationships? It is by far the number one requested topic. Areas like dating or conflict, parenting, which I'm excited to announce later on this year.
- 3:59 We're going to have an incredible parenting event in September that I can't wait to tell you more about because it's such an important season of life for many people. I know raising kids, I know for Jill and I, so important. We want to do it God's way. Can I get an amen? So we're going to serve you in that way. And of course, also marriage, and I want to highlight this one because we do have our marriage conference coming up in just a couple weeks, February 20th and 21st. Get registered. Of course, we have scholarships, whatever we can do to get you there. It's our honor to get you there. And here's my word for this marriage conference.

Real Prayer Requests from the Congregation

- 4:26 It's going to be great, practical. I mean, getting into how do we actually, you know, live out marriage, of course, but also we are going to press into the power of the Holy Spirit. We need God. And so it's a great opportunity. We need to strengthen your marriage. Or if you're in a situation right now that feels, you know, like you don't even see how there could be a roadmap forward, this is a great opportunity for you to be a part of that. And so all those requests come in, but it doesn't really stop with content. And really what's behind that is the fact that for a lot of us, we're walking through situations relationally that are painful.
- 4:58 And what I'm about to share with you is just four or five prayer requests. But this represents what come in every week. We pray over these. They're across every stage, every Saturday in prayer. This is, you know, again, through that tap. In front of you, you're able to send in prayer requests. We get prayer requests every week. And there are just, again, literally thousands. It's the number one prayer request. It's the number one topic. It's the number one prayer request. And the heart behind this series really is stepping into these situations with you and seeing God do amazing things. This is, these are real prayer requests from Highlands. Pray for a radical change in my dad's heart.
- 5:28 I pray he feels the Lord knocking and accepts Jesus. I'm asking for prayer over my single season. I'm fully trusting God's timing, but I'm struggling to wait in this moment. I'm estranged from my daughters after a divorce eight years ago. Pray for me for reconciliation and that their hearts are open to me as their dad. I continue to pray for God to heal my family. I also want to thank God because I can see him working. And this last one, I know this situation is all across Highlands. My marriage is falling apart

right now. I need the power of God. Just a few examples of what we see every single week. And I'm believing with all of my heart.

The Foundation: Healthy Relationships Start Within

6:03

Matthew 19:26

But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Theology Matters: Heart Transformation, Not Behavior Modification

6:34 I think we recognize normal is not working. We need a different way. Marriage, co-worker relationships, friendships with our sibling. Every relationship, we need a different way. And thank God we have his word today. And we're going to open our hearts up to his word. Let me pray for us. God, we love you. Thank you today for this opportunity to step into this moment and receive truth and power. God, I pray for every single person in every situation. I know there are pain. There's confusion. There's just question marks in every one of our hearts, probably in a certain area of relationship. So we're looking to you today. We open our hearts. And ask you to move in Jesus' name.

7:09 And everybody said? Amen. Amen. All right, if you have your app, open it up. We're going to take notes today. This will be the thesis for the whole series and also really for the marriage conference as well this year. And that is this. Healthy relationships start in us. Everybody say in. In. Not even just with us, but first and foremost in us. Now, I want to acknowledge something. I'm going to say this once, this series, and we're going to move past it. I want to acknowledge something we all know today. Y'all ready for this? Clearly, they are the problem.

7:37 Okay. Can we just get out? Let's get this off our chest. In fact, a few things. Maybe this is just me getting this off my chest, this first one. It's just as easy for her to put the toilet seat down as it is for me to put it up. It just is. This next one, ladies, where you at? The thermostat setting is a moral issue. And he is on the wrong side of history. I love this one. The issue is that they load the dishwasher incorrectly. There is a system.

Love Is Not a Feeling (Misconception #1)

7:58 That's getting real in the Pettis household because Jill says forks go up in the dishwasher, which I'm sure they do because it probably cleans them better. But it's easier to put them down because I'm just in a hurry. And it happens every week. And I'm like, okay. Here's the next one. Clearly, I've already apologized. I love this. For the way they felt.

8:14 And this last one sums them all up. It is obvious that if they change, I could finally be the loving person God has called me to be. Okay. So, obviously, the problem is them. But if you'll play along with me, I'm going first in this myself. Over the next few weeks, we're going to focus on us. I got a quote for us. It's going to sting a little bit. Y'all ready for this? This is Dr. Les Parrott. If you try to build intimacy with another person before you've gotten a hole on your own, all your relationships become an attempt to complete yourself. Yeah, that one stings a little bit. All right? Because it's true.

Love Is Not Approval (Misconception #2)

8:46 And so, let's open our hearts up to this. So, the first thing we're going to do today is get our theology right. And we're going to go into the rest of the series. And honestly, most series, we're going to start like this together because it's important to know what we believe. Don't let theology be intimidating. It's just this. The word just means what God has to say about something. It's who God is and how he moves in different areas. It's what we believe about God. And here's why I want to start this. Because when we know what we believe, we're going to know how to live. When we know what we believe, then we know how to live.

9:14 Christianity, look at me. Christianity is not behavior modification. It is heart transformation. I'm going to say that one more time. This is not self-help behavior modification. We're asking God to make us new creations. Can I get a better amen at church today? We have something better than a self-help book. This is a heart transformation book. And we allow that to change who we are. Now, we get to behavior change out of who we are. And again, the next. In a few weeks, that's where we're going to go. But we've got to start with what we believe today. And really, we're going to wrestle with a question you saw in that opener. And that is, what is love?

9:44 If we don't get this right, then we have no hope of going forward. We're going to answer the question today. What really is love according to God? Now, I was thinking about it. Kind of a funny way to think about it. But love can be a very confusing topic. I think we're aware of that. And I was thinking about, you know, if you were a space alien, and you visited Earth for the very first time, and you have a notepad, and you're walking around trying to figure out what love is, it would be confusing. And so, imagine yourself right now as your favorite space alien, all right? This is kind of generational. Where are my ET people at?

10:14 You're an ET person. Spock. Any Spock people out there? Y'all remember Marvin the Martian? That's a good alien. I mean, come on. Stitch? Great alien. But I'm going to show you my favorite alien of all time. This guy right here.

10:29 And does anybody know what he loves to eat? Cats. I didn't say it. You said it.

Love Is Not Conditional (Misconception #3)

10:36 So, if this alien was walking around taking notes, they would say, it's kind of confusing with love because they love God, and they love Chick -fil -A. They love football, and they love their kids. And man, in the South, they really love Milo's sweet tea. I'm really confused. And the alien would probably write down some misconceptions, and I want to hit these directly today. Kind of, you know, this misconception number one, you know, is love just a feeling? Like, is that really what love is all about? And this is kind of the Hollywood, you know, version of love, or, you know, kind of primarily you see this in love songs. This is what's articulated about love.

11:08 And I love all about the feeling of love. This is important. Love has feelings. I think sometimes in the church, we can act like it doesn't have feelings, but love is not all about feelings. Here's the way I want to say it today. Love has feelings, but love is not just a feeling. Because if love was just a feeling, y'all, it would be cruel. And some of us have experienced this kind of love because it's here one moment and then gone the next. And love has to be more than that. We're going to unpack this later on today. It has to be more than that. It can't just be a feeling because feelings come and go.

11:40 I remember, you know, Jill and I's first kiss, that was a moment full of lots of feelings. I've told that story before. But if love was just a feeling, here we are now over 20 years later, and when I put that fork the wrong way in the dishwasher, and she didn't feel that love anymore, then we would be in trouble. So love has to be more than a feeling. Here's the second misconception. This one is massive in our world today, and that is love means approval.

God Is Love: The Divine Definition

12:02 And this is definitely culturally the demonic really attack on love right now, is that love means approval, you know, and if that's true, approval love means this, and I wrote these down just to kind of frame it. You know, this is what we see in the world today. Approval love means I agree with you with how you see yourself. I'm just going to agree with whatever you see yourself as. So I, therefore I support your choices. I never challenge your truth. And I'm in all that's kind of really based off. I'm just going to prioritize your feelings. Hey, everybody, look at me today. That is not real love. That is indifference with better branding.

12:35 I'm going to say that one more time. That is indifference with better branding. And I will praise God for three claps over here on the left side of Grants Mill. So I have four boys. You guys know this. And if you have boys in your house, especially if you have the critical mass of sons in your house, any activity is, it ends up being dangerous by design. They want to get as close to death as possible. So this is probably 10 or 10 years ago or so now, and, or probably eight years ago. Now I look out the front window. We kind of live on a little hill and I look out the front window and all four of them.

13:06 We're riding like a scooter or some kind of device down the driveway. And our youngest Knox is like three years old. He's going to do whatever the brothers do. I mean, there's a little bump. They're trying to catch air and everything turns into a competition. All right. In the, in the world's view of love right now, I would say, you know what? Look at those boys. They must identify as scooter riders.

13:25 It would be unloving for me for the me to step in and actually say, if y'all don't stop riding that you're driving out into the street, you could get hit by a car. This is dangerous. Love steps in and says, I cannot let you do. What you're doing, because it is leading to a dangerous situation. This is not good. Hey, I love you enough to say that's got to change. Come on, somebody that is love where God's truth gets to final work. Do we empathize? Yes. Do we step in and love people in the middle of their pain? Yes. But we love them enough to tell them the truth. We change. God doesn't change.

The Action of Love: God's Sacrifice

13:58 Here's the third misconception that is love is conditional. This is one that probably hits all of us. I sent some texts out a while back. This. This is from people here at Highlands, just with how you struggle to love. This was overwhelmingly me. The response I got was around this area of conditional love. You know, I struggle to feel like I deserve to be loved by God or by others, or even myself. I grew up in a home where love was based on performance. I struggle with that. I can feel unworthy of love because of my past. I find it hard to fully accept love, but unless I'm doing enough to earn it, and I think at some level today, all of us struggle with this, this misconception, usually it's from our hurt or pain, which we all have, or even here in the Bible belt, it

14:35

1 John 4:7-8

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Agape Love: The Divine Pattern for Human Love

15:03 1 John chapter 4. We're going to start in verse 7, and the Bible is going to clear up these misconceptions. And again, we got to know what we believe so we know how to live. Today is the foundation for this entire month. Here's what John says. He says, Verse 8 establishes the ultimate truth around love. God is love.

15:35 God is love. Love is not God. Love does not define God. God defines love. Now, for me, I can struggle with this because a lot of, honestly, when you study even, a lot of definitions around love can be really vague and ethereal and touchy -feely. I don't know. Maybe I'm just a dude. I don't know. I'm like, okay, what do you really, I hear you. It sounds great, but like, what does that actually mean? And years ago, God just gave me a revelation. I've taught this before in my own life that really just cleared up and let me get handles around. What does it mean when the Bible says God? God is love. What does that actually look like?

16:06

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

16:39 Love never fails. Can I get an amen for the word of God today? It's such a powerful scripture. Let me flip one word that will help me. This revelation continues to impact my life. Because as good as all that sounds, I'm still trying to get my handle around, okay, God is love, and just change the word love to God here. And this is a revelation for somebody out there today. God is patient. God is kind. God does not envy. He does not boast. God is not proud. When we say God is love, this is what we mean. He does not dishonor others. He is not self-seeking. God is not easily angered. God keeps no record of wrongs.

Receiving Love: The Gateway to Giving Love

17:14 God does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. God always protects, always trusts, always hopes. God always perseveres. Our God never fails. That is who God is. God is love. And that is what we mean. And I would just encourage anybody out there, write it down that way in your journal. I did this years ago. And get it in your heart. God is love. We need a fresh revelation of that. Back to 1 John. Now we're into verse nine. Continues. God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love. I told you, the Bible is not unclear.

17:51

1 John 4:9-10

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Jesus Washes Feet: Love in Action

18:34

Romans 5:8

but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

19:01 No, we are not worthy of his love. We are. We are worth, you are, let me say it strongly today. You are worth his love. You are worth his patience. Hold high, let's get this in your heart today. You're worth his kindness. You are worth his grace. You're worth his mercy. And so later on today, we're gonna just, in Jesus' name, pray to break off shame and guilt of whatever we have done and even what's been done to us so that we can recognize fresh and new today. You're worth his love. He proved it on the cross. Verse 11 of 1 John 4 concludes this section. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love one another.

19:40

1 John 4:11

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

20:18 I have to make sure we lean in here because John, in 1 John 4, chooses the word intentionally to use both about God, but also about us when we love others, and it's the word agape. Unconditional. Sacrificial love. This is the word that John uses. So basically, he's saying this, and this is gonna sound kind of funny, but this catch the heart of this. Since God agape'd me,

20:47 Surely, of course, how could I even have another version of this? Because I've been agape loved unconditionally, surely I'm gonna love others the same way that I have been loved. And agape is so powerful because it's not a love that is limited by feelings. It is ultimate love where we say, I'm committed to another's true good no matter what the cost. This is the way the Bible says I have been loved. Therefore, this is the way God has called me to love others. I wrote some things down in my notes this week. Of course, there's so many things going on in the world. I think it's important for us to recognize and remember what God says about love.

21:25 This is agape love. These are practical handles around what it means to have that kind of commitment for the true good of others. When we tell the truth in love, even when it's uncomfortable, we forgive and refuse to keep score. We speak well of others. We value every person as a child of God. We choose kindness. We pursue reconciliation instead of resentment. When we say, as a Christian, as a follower of God, and we read it in his word, and when we say, as a follower of Jesus, I love you, this is what we mean, church. I've been agape loved. Therefore, I love my spouse this way. I love my siblings this way. I love my parents this way.

Invitation to Receive and Worship

22:03 I love my neighbors this way. Even I love my enemies this way. I told y'all, it's different. Normal's not working. The prayer request shows we need a different way. And this is where I want us to finish out today as keys go in and come out. Because I was praying so hard for this moment today and this topic all week long. And I recognize as I'm trying my hardest to make this kind of where we can grab it, but I recognize because there really, there really is so much spiritual attack around this, that when we talk about love in any form, and especially agape love, it can feel almost unreachable. It can almost in itself be discouraging because we can feel like, well, I can never love like that.

22:43

1 John 4:19

We love because he first loved us.

23:02 And here's the thought. This is really what the Holy Spirit spoke to me. We can't create agape love. We can't manufacture it and then deliver it in our marriage. We can only give agape love when we've received agape love. And this is gonna be the series verse in the thesis of everything we're gonna do this month. This is back into 1 John. This is later on in verse 19. We can only love because he first loved us. Our ability, our ability to give love to others, church depends on our ability to receive love ourselves.

23:39 And on Tuesday when I was studying and we're into year two together of me on this platform leading and just such an honor to be standing here. I wanna make sure something is clear. I will not say this unless it's the God's honest truth. I had a Holy Spirit visitation on Tuesday. And the Holy Spirit spoke to me that for us as a culture, we don't really have, we don't really have a God. We don't really have a loving problem. We have a receiving problem.

24:06 The real issue isn't loving others. That's downline from the real issue, which is us receiving love ourselves. And God spoke to me and I don't know who this is for. Honestly, I think it's probably, it was for me. I'll start there. Whoever else it is today, have an open heart in these next few moments to receive.

24:27 This is gonna be a theological shocker. The guy who wrote 1 John is named John.

24:36 It's the same John who was a disciple of Jesus, who wrote the book of John. Early on, John was known by Jesus as a son of thunder. This sounds like a really fun person to hang out with. Later on, he was known differently as John the beloved or the disciple that Jesus loved. Now, I don't know, we don't know much about his whole story. I don't know his struggle, but I know this, receiving love was part of his testimony. He went by that name.

25:08 In 1 John, he writes about love. It's important for John. We can see the passion he has. We just read through it. We just studied it. He writes about love in 1 John, but this is what I had never realized as I was studying for this week. The many theologians believe when he's writing in 1 John, he's actually, he's not just writing a theory a little about it. He's not just writing a concept. He's actually remembering back to a moment where he was with Jesus. He's writing about something that he saw, that he saw firsthand. And in the book of John, we're gonna look at John 13. The book of John, often John is different than the other gospel writers.

25:42 He doesn't write parables. Like he doesn't record as many of Jesus's parables. He actually records stories that he lived with Jesus and almost writes them like a parable. And we're about to read one in John 13. John 4, 1 John 4 is pointing to John 13, just before Passover. Jesus knows the cross is hours away. Jesus knows where he came from. He knows where he's going.

26:03 Jesus knows who will be with him. Who will betray him. Who will leave him. Jesus knows every mistake that his disciples are about to make. Check this out church today. He knows every mistake I'm ever gonna make and you're ever gonna make. And knowing all of that, not in spite of it, but because of it, what does Jesus do? He loves. John 13, 1. It was just before the Passover festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and to go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them till the end.

26:38

John 13:1

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

27:13

John 13:2-5

During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

27:49 And I just know here at Highlands today, some of us feel like Judas. You've walked in today and you're full of shame because of mistakes or compromises. Maybe even your heart today, you feel broken. There's a fence that has grown. There's so much going on. There's so much going on on the inside right now. Recently, I was in the commons praying, or I walked out in the commons after a service, got a chance to pray with someone. And with tears in his eyes, he began to tell me how a few weeks earlier, he had messed his marriage up in Las Vegas. He was broken. How can God ever love me? And of course, there's a journey to walk out that started with us having honesty in this relationship.

28:23 But I was able to look him in the eye in the middle of that pain, the way I wish I could look one -on -one to everyone here. It doesn't matter what you've done. In the middle of it, Jesus loves you. He loves us too much to leave us where we are. He loves us. And knowing what Judas was about to do, what does Jesus do? This is love. He kneels in front of him and washes his feet. And you just need to know, I don't care what the enemy is telling you today, you are not disqualified from his love. Jesus loves you. Then he comes to Simon Peter. There's always Judas and Simon Peter.

28:56

John 13:6-9

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"

29:15 He feels uncomfortable. Peter refuses to be vulnerable. He will not receive unless he earns. And Jesus draws a hard line, a hard line. He's not angry. He's not rejecting him. He speaks truth and love. Unless you let me wash you, unless you let me love you, you have no part in me. And if you study that word part, what it means, it's like a pie. Like, go to your Edgar's Baker and get a pie. There's a piece of God's love that is for you and you alone. He's trying to deliver it to you. But if you won't let him, he's paid for it. It's yours. He's just saying, take what I have for you. And somebody needs to hear that today.

29:51 Let him love you today. Let him love you. We can't give what we don't have. Verse nine, then Lord, Simon Peter, says, not just my feet. Man, this is, let this be the prayer of Highlands today. Not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well. If you have it for me, God, I want it. As you would at every location, stand to your feet. We're gonna end differently today. I sense the power of God right now. You have my word, we're gonna end on time.

30:23 But our team's gonna lead us into a moment of worship with one goal in mind, with open hearts we receive today. From our heads to our hearts, that immerse, just like Peter said, if you have it for me, come on Highlands, if you have it for me, God, I want it.

30:40 God loves you today. We can't give what we don't have. Today, I'm praying that as we worship together, and I promise we'll end on time. In fact, when we start worshiping, you won't see me again. Our campus pastors are gonna come. We're gonna pray today, and the power of the Holy Spirit's gonna go to work. This is why we have come to church to encounter God. Normal isn't working. There is a better way. God is here today, and he first and foremost, wants us to receive what he has for us. I'm gonna pray, and when I say amen, just worship and receive today. God, we thank you for who you are. Come on, pray with me today.

Welcome and Church Announcements

31:09 God, we open our hearts to you, to receive what you have for us. You're a good God today. We say that we love you. God, thank you for first loving us. God, right now, I pray in the name of Jesus for shame to be broken off, for condemnation to be broken off, for a spirit of striving or earning to be broken off, and for us today to receive what you have. You're an amazing God, and we worship you today. Come on, Highlands. Let's worship.