

Parenting On Point #1 - Start With Love

- Pastor Mark Driscoll here welcoming you to my first ever parenting series. More than 20 years in the pulpit, never taught an entire parenting series. "Parenting On Point" is a five week series looking at what it means to love God and live in the love of God with all your heart, emotional life, soul, spiritual life, mind, mental life, strength and physical life and help your neighbor do the same, starting with your own family and the kids that are sleeping in the bunk beds down the hall. So thanks for joining me, hope to be of service to you. Wow, happy birthday to the Trinity Church. You guys are one years old today. What a great year. And let me say this, if you're new, you're surrounded with some extraordinarily great people. Some wonderful people that have prayed, that have given, that have served to get this church planted, to get this building purchased, to get it renovated and we're right on the brink of the beginning of the school year. How many of you gotta find some school supplies by tomorrow for your kids? That's what we're working on. We love you, it's good to see you. Want to thank all the teachers and administrators and those who are also serving the students. And I wanna celebrate with you guys this great one year church anniversary. We've got a great church family. It's an honor to be here and if you're new, my name's Mark. And I've been a senior pastor for more than 20 years. And I've actually never done a whole series on parenting because you're never really sure how they're gonna turn out. So you got to wait and see, you know, you think you're doing good, you're watching the television show of cops. There's one of your kids and they're not the cop. You're like, "Okay, didn't go as well as I was hoping." Thankfully, our kids are all walking with Jesus and serving here at the church. My wife, Grace, and I are on the brink of our 25th wedding anniversary coming up in just a few weeks, yes. Yes, she's a superhero and I'm blessed. We also have three boys, two girls, ages 11 to 20, which is amazing. How many of you are parents or grandparents? Can you remember the first time you brought your first child home? You remember the time you held your first child? True or false, you were freaked out, overwhelmed. Jim Gaffigan, the comedian, he said, "Most of the time I feel unqualified to be a parent." He said, "I call these times being awake." If you're a parent don't feel, I can still remember with our first, Ashley, I thought for sure, for sure, for sure, I was gonna have a boy. I was convinced we were gonna, I didn't even have a girl name picked out, wasn't even worried about having a girl, no problem at all. I knew God would give me a boy because the Bible says, "God doesn't give you things you can't handle." So I knew for sure we'd start with a boy and I'd ease my way into parenting. And then I'm there with Grace for the birth, it was a little traumatic and dramatic and out comes the baby and they look at me and say, "It's a girl!" I was like, "No, it's not, check again." They're like, "No, we're professionals. "We double checked, this is a boy." And they hand me my daughter and I'm thinking, "I have no idea what to do." "For sure, I do not know what to do." If they would have handed me a boy, I would have had some things I could have imparted. "When you eat a corn dog, watch out for the stick. "Don't get overly aggressive, it sneaks up on you, "that's dangerous. "I know you're gonna ask, "yes, you can pee in the yard, that's fine. "Until you get a driver's license and you got to stop. "You'll get arrested. "And number three, never ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever "root for the New England Patriots." I would have had stuff. Yeah. I would have had stuff to tell a boy. A girl I'm like, "Oh, oh, oh boy." Then they give

you the kid. They actually give you the kid and they're like, "Good luck." "That's it? "That's it? "I needed to go get a license for a pet, "I needed to take a test to drive a boat, "you're just gonna give me a kid?" "Yep, good luck with that. "Don't do anything wrong. "Otherwise, you'll bring 'em back." "What the heck." So then, what I couldn't believe, they didn't even give me any advice. I've got a person, a human being. When I leave IKEA, at least they give me directions. Step one. And what looks like a tool, it's not really a tool but they're pretending to help. The hospital didn't even pretend to help. Then you get the kid home and you're raising the kid and you're trying to figure out what to do. And I started thinking about it, here we are in Scottsdale, Arizona, and this is the fastest growing city in the United States of America, the fastest growing county in the United States of America, tons of people are moving here, we're right on the brink, the beginning, the cusp of the school year, and there's lots of families and I started thinking about what is the point of parenting? Because how do you even know if you're doing a good job? If you're an athlete, you're playing a sport, you're like, "I know if we're doing a good job "because I look at the scoreboard and we're winning." You're in business, you know if you're doing a good job when you get your P and L statement and they tell you how you're doing financially. Parenting, you have no idea if you're doing a good job or a bad job. You have no clue. I started thinking what is the point of parenting? What's the objective? What's the goal? How do you know if you're meeting the design that God intends for you? And that led me to a portion in the Bible, Mark chapter 12. If you've got a Bible, go there, please and as you're finding your place, lemme ask a few questions. First question is this, who is the most significant person in the history of the world?

- Jesus.

- Jesus. If you're here and you're new, and I ask a question, usually, it's one of three answers, Jesus, duct tape or burrito. Because whatever the problem is, one of those three is probably the solution. So today, the answer is Jesus, the most significant person who has ever lived in the history of the world, more songs sung to him, more books written regarding him, more paintings painted of him than anyone who has lived in the history of the world. Christianity is the biggest movement in the history of the world. Billions of people claim to be followers of Jesus right now on planet Earth. We measure time by the life of this man, not just a good man but the God man, into BC before Christ, AD Anno Domini, the year of our Lord and our big holidays are all about Jesus. So at Christmas we celebrate His birth and Easter we celebrate his resurrection from the dead, most significant person in the history of the world. Second question, what's the most important book in the history of the world? Give you a little secret, go get one. The most significant book read in the history of the world is the Bible. It's been translated into more languages than any other book that has ever been sold. In addition, it is the best selling book in the history of the world. And even if you're not a Christian, we love you and we're glad to have you, the language of this book has entirely shaped Western culture. So if somebody helps somebody, we call them a good Samaritan. And if a kid rebels and wanders away, we call them the prodigal son. This is all language of the Bible. And so, what we find in Mark 12, the most significant person in the history of the world, Jesus Christ, opens up the most significant book in the history of the world, the Bible, and tells us what the most significant section is. I think it's fair

to say this is significant, Amen. The most significant person opens the most significant book and tells us the most significant section. And that's where we find ourselves in Mark chapter 12 where we start with love. Here's the account, Mark 12:20-31. "And one of the scribes," this is a religious guy, this is like a Bible College seminary student, this is somebody who is in the position where they feel like they know a lot and everybody has to give an account to them. He's a little bit smarmy, he's a little bit self righteous and he's going to go give Jesus a test. Isn't that funny? You're gonna go to God and see if He knows what He's talking about. Just so you know, when it comes to you and God, you're the student, not the teacher, Amen? You're the student, God's not like, "Tell me." No, no, no, we should be, "Tell me." This guy has a bad posture. He's gonna go test Jesus. "One of the scribes came up "and heard them disputing with one another." So they're having a dialogue and a discussion. "And seeing that, he answered them, "well asked him, he asked Jesus, "which commandment is the most important of all?" "This is a big book, there's a lot of things in there, "just give me the bottom line, give me the cliff notes, "give me the sparks notes, give me the tweet, "give me the social media posts, "just bottom line it, what is the summary?" Just the first five books of the Old Testament alone have 613 commandments, rules, laws. And so he's gonna test Jesus, which one is the most important, the most significant? Jesus answered, "Most important is," and I put the numbers in 'cause I'm old and that's just my way of reminding that those will be the points I'll be covering, "the most important is, hear, O Israel," that's God's people. "The LORD our God, the Lord is one. "You shall love the Lord your God, "with all your heart, soul, mind, strength." This will be our five week series. It's all about relationships and it will apply to parenting but it goes beyond that. This week, we're gonna deal with love. Heart, that's loving God with your emotional life and loving others. Soul, this is loving God with your spiritual life and loving others. Mind, this is loving God with your mental life and loving others. And strength, this is loving God with your physical life and loving others. We want you to be a healthy whole person that is fully engaged in relationship with God in a life-giving and healthy way so that you similarly, can also have loving relationship with others. And Jesus is gonna tell us in just a moment that includes our neighbor. Our neighbor includes the people that live down the street, the people that attend our kid's school, are part of our community at work or people here at the church or whatever the case may be but the nearest neighbor is family. So my wife, Grace and I, she's my nearest neighbor. And then the kids are our nearest neighbor. And so it begins with family. So, "Love the Lord your God "with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. "And the second is this, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Quotes, I think it's Leviticus 19:8, "There is no other commandment greater than these." First thing I wanna talk about is your posture when it comes to learning God's Word or learning from Jesus. Now, I did something in the first service and I almost killed a grandmother. So let me just deploy the airbag here. What I'm going to do is controversial for a reason. There are really two ways to approach the scriptures and I'm talking here about your posture. This person's posture in approaching Jesus is hardy, not humble. Your posture when it comes to God's Word should be humble and not hardy. The hardy position is this, and this is what almost killed the grandmother, it's this position, "I am in authority over the scriptures. "They will give an account to me, "I will determine what is right and wrong, true and false "and if there's anything in this book that I disagree with, "I will edit or omit it." That's a hardy position. We would encourage you, and this man has a hardy position. We would encourage you to have a humble position. This Word is true. If I disagree

with it, it's because I'm wrong. Amen. I first picked up the Bible in college to figure out what was wrong with the Bible. Very quickly, I realized that the Bible was showing me what was wrong with me. There was nothing wrong with the Bible. There was much that was wrong with me. My job was not to change the Bible, the Bible's job was to change me. And so this humble position assumes, "God is an authority, God's Word is true "and I'm coming as student, not teacher. "I'm coming as student, not critic. "I'm coming as student, not editor." And so his posture is not good but Jesus humbly even answers his question. So firstly, I want to address posture. Secondly, priority. What Jesus says is loving relationship with the Lord your God and then loving relationship with neighbor. Again, and I would say that is the person or persons who you live in closest community and relationship with. How many of you have taken a flight and the first time on the flight, you heard the safety announcement? And what they say is, in case of turbulence, the oxygen mask will drop and if you're with a child, who gets the oxygen mask first, you or the child?

- You.

- You. And at first you're like, "Poor kids, they hate kids in this airline." You're like, "Well, good luck kid." What they're teaching is, it's counterintuitive but your health and well being needs to be secured for you to care for a child. So let me say this, for you, your health, your well being, mentally, spiritually, physically, emotionally, relationally, your receiving of God's love, your loving of God, that flow of oxygen between you and God at the soul level, if I could use a metaphor, that makes you healthy, that makes you alive, and then you can love your neighbor, you can relationally care for your child. Otherwise, what happens is we come to the Bible and we say, "That's good. "You need that and they need that "and she needs that and he needs that." And we never put the oxygen mask on our own mouth. We're thinking about all the things that all these people need to learn and do but we're not healthy people. People who are in relationship with God, that is loving, become healthy and they're alive. Then they can have healthy life giving relationships. And if you come here thinking everyone needs to change, you need to change first. That's the big idea. So your posture and your priority and then he tells us five things about God. Here, first thing he tells us is that our God is a God who speaks. And the question is, "Are we listening?" The question is not, "Is God speaking?" The question is, "Are we listening?" God wants us to hear Him. The Bible uses the language that God has like a father and we're like his kids and any parent who loves their kids will communicate with them. The primary way that God communicates to us is through His Word. So if you're here and you're saying, "I wish I heard a word from God," all you need to do is open the Word of God. The best way to receive a Word from God is to open up the Word of God. And so here's what I would encourage you, read the Bible. Read it slow, think it through, stop and talk to God as your heart opens toward things that matter to you. Grab a study Bible, learn to dig a little deeper as you are able. That ultimately God is always speaking but oftentimes we are not listening. Our God wants to meet with you, He wants to speak with you, He wants to instruct you and what he encourages and invites you is just listen. And so firstly, we learn that ours is a God who speaks and secondly, He is the Lord. Back, please. And when it speaks of the Lord, what it's talking about is His authority. So, in a school, there's a principal, on a team, there's a coach, in the business, there's a president, in a

nation, there's a king, over all of those leaders is someone called the Lord. He is the highest authority that all other authorities will ultimately give an account to. And that means that even in the family, the parents aren't the highest authority, that the Lord is the highest authority, And that the parents who are in authority over the child need to be under the authority of the one who's called the Lord. Do you respect God's authority? Do you honor God's authority? Do you see God's authority as a good thing to bless you and to benefit you not to harm you? Because for sure he does not hate you. Listen to God, He speaks. He is the Lord, He has all authority and we give an account to Him, our God. He's personal. He's very personal. There is something, I think it's called pantheism. You'll see it up in "Sedona" or see it on "Star Wars" and it's this concept that what ultimately is supernatural is just part of creation and this invisible force that rules the world. That's not relational. That's not personal. When it says our God, that means that individually, God wants a relationship with you and collectively, God wants a relationship with us. So here's at the Trinity Church this is our God. The God of the Bible is our God and He happens to be the Lord, the one who is in highest authority. The LORD our God, the Lord is one. Jesus here quotes the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, there's Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. That fifth book in your Bible, chapter six, verse four, there's a little section called the Shema. The Hebrew kids would have memorized it. This was like their pledge of allegiance, this was like their national anthem. They memorized it, you knew it since you were a little kid and you would recite it as a prayer daily. So this was just part and parcel of your spiritual life. And it was, "Hear us, Oh the Lord, our God, He is one." So Jesus here, from memory, quotes a section of Deuteronomy that He probably learned as a little child. This is where little children can learn the scriptures and it actually can take up residence in their heart. And as they grow, they take God's Word with them. That's what happened for the Lord Jesus. But this little concept here of God being one, way back in Deuteronomy 6:4, it's an interesting word for one. We'll get into the complexities of it but originally written in Hebrew, it's like a cluster of grapes. How many of you like grapes? Amen? And when you get a cluster of grapes, it's one cluster of many grapes. So it's multiple singular. That's essentially what that word means. And what it is, it's an intimation of something called the doctrine of the Trinity. We're called the Trinity Church. So we believe, as all Bible believing Christians do, in one God, three persons Father, Son and Spirit. That there are three persons, Father, Son and Spirit. They live in loving relationship eternally, as one God, as one God. The same word for one is used back in the first book of the Bible. Genesis, I think, it's chapter two, verse 24. There's a husband and a wife. There's two persons and the Bible says they become

- One.

- one, one. You see, no, that's a man and a woman. Yeah, and they're one as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are one. What He's talking about here, is the fact that there is just one God. The atheist says there is no God, Jesus says there's one God. The polytheist says there are many gods, Jesus says there's one God. The agnostic says there may or may not be a god and Jesus says, "There is a God. "And I'm here, so you know who I am." And so ultimately, what Jesus is doing, He's dealing with most of the big philosophical, theological, historical questions in a very short summary. But here's what I need you to see. God is

relational. God doesn't just do relationship, God is relationship. God didn't make us because God was lonely. The Father, Son and Spirit had relationship. God didn't make us because he needed a relationship. God made us to share in his relationship because when you have a loving relationship, you want others to be invited to also share that loving relationship. That's the heart and nature and character of God. And here's what God invites us to, this God who is one, this God who is relational, this God who is loving, "And you," it's an invitation, "shall love." God invites you to loving relationship. Any of you ever watched those shows where somebody doesn't know their family and then they go on this big adventure to find their family? And then they finally meet their mom and their dad and their brothers and their sisters and everybody cries. That's the longing of the human heart. God is a father who loves us, we're wayward children that have run away from home and the father has come to invite us into relationship with him as the children of God. God invites you into relationship with Him. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Every time you hear the word love, I want you to think of relationship. Love is what allows relationship. Love is what permits relationship. Love is what strengthens relationship. This five week series is ultimately a relationship series and it will apply to parents but it actually applies to everyone. Because we all have relationships with some neighbor. For those of you who are married, spouse is first neighbor. For those of us who are parents, children are first neighbor. But what he's talking about here is love which is really significant. Many religions do not have a concept of God as loving. One of the fastest growing religions in the world has multiple names for God that people get down and pray daily but among those is not love. You need to know that God loves you. That's where we start. We start with the love of God. And what's interesting in the Bible, first two chapters is perfection. It's before sin enters the world and everything is perfect. God makes everything and He says, "It's good. "It's good, it's good, it's good, it's good." Genesis two, God says, "There's one thing that's not good." And this is before sin enters the world, God says it's not good to be

- Alone.

- alone. Question, at that moment, this man that God is communicating to, Adam, does he have a relationship with God? Yes or no? Yes. Does he have a perfect relationship at that moment with God? Yes. Is that enough? No. Some of you you will say, "I don't need people, "I just need the Lord." The Lord says you need people. You need relationship. As God has a relationship, Father, Son and Spirit, in union and communion as peers, so you and I need loving relationship with peers in union and communion. It's interesting. Here's my concept, my thesis. The quality of your relationships determine the quality of your life. The quality of your relationships determine the quality of your life. See, we tend to be a lot about what we have but it's really about who we love. Because sometimes the people who have the most they're in fact the one who were relationally impoverished and oftentimes miserable. Sometimes we get shocked when it is someone who is very famous and very wealthy and very affluent is very depressed or even takes their own life tragically. We ask, "Why is that?" Because the quality of your relationships determines the quality of your life and things can never replace people. I have been to the hospital bed of dying people and I have never heard one of them say, "Please bring me all of my stuff." I have had them say, "Bring me my friends and family." Because ultimately, it's

relationships which define the quality of our life. And what's curious is the Bible says this. And once sin enters the world, this is increasingly more true. And now the social sciences are starting to catch up. I'll share three studies with you. One, it was a number of generations ago but it was particularly true, around the time of the major world wars that many fathers and mothers died and many children were left orphans. And so many nations, especially European, they started creating orphanages, institutions to raise the children Fresh air, natural light, healthy food, clean water, a comfortable bed, toys to play with. The children were sickly, they did not grow and develop and infant mortality rate was pushing toward 100%. The children were dying in the institutions. So what they did, they brought in some psychologists and some pediatricians to do an investigation. And here's what they decided. Children die unless they're loved. That the nurses needed to take the mask off so the children could see their face. Someone needed to hold the child, comfort the child, blow on their belly, kiss them, talk to them, play with them, hold them. And as soon as that happened, the children stopped dying and they started living. How many of you moms knew this? Any of you moms know this? You're like, "I could have saved them a lot of research." They determined that children need a "primary caregiver". Her name is

- Mom.

- mom. We've had five kids, I know who the primary caregiver is. I do give care, she's the primary caregiver. She loves, her instincts are maternal, they're God given. People die unless they're loved. People don't mature unless they're loved. People don't develop unless they're loved. And two things I want to note out of this, number one, institutions cannot replace relationships when it comes to the development of a human being. We are a church, my kids go to a school, my athletic kids play on sports teams but none of those can replace a relationship with God, with me and their mom and their siblings. Many Americans still have not learned this lesson. Parents are looking for the best institutions to put their children in and then neglecting the relationship with those children. You could put your kid in a great school but you need a relationship. You can dump your kid off in a great ministry but you need a relationship. You can find the best team with the best coach and pay hundreds of dollars a month, I know, from my own experience but you still need a relationship with the child. And sometimes people are trying to hand off their responsibilities for the raising of their own children to institutions and the research consistently has proven for 100 years that institutions do not have the capacity to replace relationship. Secondly, what we learn from that example, is that non-relational parenting is dysfunctional parenting. Some of you grew up in homes that were non-relational. Your parents were not very invested or involved. They only spoke to you when they had something for you to do or you did something wrong but there wasn't the building of a relationship. Non-relational parenting is dysfunctional parenting. Technological parenting is dysfunctional parenting. Some parents literally buy technology so that they don't have a relationship with their kid. My kids have got phones and I think phone is the Greek word for demons. So we're always saying, "Put the phone down and enter into the relationship." And I'm not saying that technology is evil and I'm not saying that institutions are evil but I'm saying that if anything gets in the primary relationship, then it is a problem for the relationship. This makes sense? That being said, there was a second

study that was done. And I actually found it last night, I was preparing for the sermon, just snuggling with Grace on the couch, looking At the news. Someone took all of the sociological data, ran it and asked the question, "Today, what is the number one issue "causing mortality in America taking our lives prematurely?" It used to be obesity. The new research suggests it's loneliness. Isolation, loneliness and living alone is causing people to die. It's not good to be alone. God's Word is true. And eventually the social sciences catch up with the scriptures. They said that if people will have a few meaningful relationships, their odds of dying will go down by 50%. Because a loving relationship makes the good days twice as great and the bad days half as bad. The third study I got texted to my phone last night were part of a research group and a friend of mine, he is running, they call it metadata in how people make life decisions and change. And it used to be, some of you been in church for a while you've heard this, information plus application equals transformation. That's what people have generally thought for generations. Information plus application equals transformation. The new sociological data suggests otherwise. It's information, so let's say Bible teaching, plus application in relationship, leads to transformation. You can have a lot of information but if you don't have a lot of relationships, you won't have a lot of transformation. That's why it is God's Word and God's people that lead to us becoming more like this loving God. So at the Trinity Church, we say, "We open our Bibles to learn, we open our lives to love "so that lives and legacies are transformed." The Word of God says it and the research proves it. You just listening to a podcast, you just reading a book, you just listening to a sermon, that is good thing but it's not a sufficient thing apart from a relationship where you're talking with someone and praying with someone and working it out. And that's why the people who we live in relationship with, they affect us, they change us. My relationship with Grace, we've been together now, gosh, almost 30 years, have been married for almost 25. That loving relationship has changed, is changing and will changed me in a way that just reading a book about relationships would not have the same impact apart from a real relationship with a human being. That's why God didn't just drop a book out of the sky. He came down to be in a relationship. And He says we need relationship with Him and with one another. And what makes a relationship healthy is love. So, we're gonna spend a little time talking about love. It's the most misunderstood and misused word, I would argue, in the English language. "I love pizza, four wheel drives." That might not be the, "and my wife" probably not all in the same category, Amen? If two teenagers are dating and the boy wants to break commandments, he tells the girl he loves her, right? It's a misunderstood and misused word. So what is love? Where does love come from? What does love do? Firstly, the big idea is your love to love. So where does love come from? What is love? God is love. 1 John 4:8, "God is love." This is the guy who is Jesus' best friend while He walks on the earth. He's called the one whom Jesus loved. His name is John. And he says God is love. This is incredibly important because we live in a world that we don't know what love is and when we think of love, we have to go back to God the Father, God the Son God, the Spirit and then when Jesus comes into human history, if you wanna know what love looks like, look at our God, His name is Jesus. 1 Corinthians 13 gives us this great definition of love, "Love is patient, love is kind, "love is not self-seeking, love is not boastful." Ultimately, all of that points to Jesus. Jesus is love walking around on the earth. It's in the app, but I put together a little quiz for you out of 1 Corinthians 13 whether or not you're a loving person, something for you to do and consider, have your kids or

those who are in relationship with and to give you a talking and beginning point. But in 1 Corinthians 13:13, that great section on love that was quoted at many of your weddings, it says that the most important thing in the whole world is love. Because everything begins with love. Everything starts with love. Everything is made healthy with love. Relationships are possible where there is love. And where does love come from? Love comes from God because God is love. God is love. A couple of things I'll say about God's love, number one, love is received from God, not achieved by you. Some of you need to take this to heart and think about this because you have had relationships that are performance-based. Meaning, if you do a good job, I love you, you do a bad job, I withhold my love from you. If you please me, I love you, if you displease me, I withhold my love from you. These are performance-based relationships. That's why some of you eat into your family of origins. You are always producing and performing to get the approval of your parent because they never really said they loved you or showed they loved you until you produced and performed and it can cause you to have a performance-based view of love. God's love is not like that. God's love is not predicated on your performance but it is predicated upon His person. It's not because of what you do or don't do, it's because of who He is. I have really good news for you, God can't love you any more and no matter what you do, God won't love you any less. And it starts with love and it continues in love and this is how our parenting should be. We love our kids no matter what they do. Say they disappoint me, I love them while they're disappointing me. They frustrate me and they will. Some of you who don't have children here, they're like, "No, that's," no, it's coming, I'm just telling you what's gonna happen. They're gonna frustrate you. Frustration will come and go, disappointment will come and go but love should be constant because that's what secures the relationship. And relationship is more important than issues because we can't deal with any issue unless we have a loving relationship and that's how God works with us. Number two, God's love is jealous. There is such a thing as a bad jealous love. Some of you have dated that guy, congratulations on breaking up. Bad jealous love is where you're just not emotionally healthy or stable. And so you smother, you overwhelm, you control someone. But there is a healthy form of jealousy. The Bible says, not only is God loving but one of the aspects of God's love is that God is a jealous God. What jealousy is it's not approving of someone in my place. So Grace and I, we love each other and together, we have dinner at our family dinner table. We got this big old table built and we sit at it to have dinner as a family. And our guests come and sign underneath it with a sharpie, that's our version of a guest book. And my place, there's a chair, that's my chair, that's my place. And Grace and the kids sit with me at dinner. If I come home tonight and there's another guy sitting my chair, eating my, what do we have in tonight? Pork carnitas? Okay, I gotta hurry up and get this sermon over with. I'm gonna be thinking about nothing but pork carnitas and green chili sauce. Oh man, if the rapture comes, I'm grabbing the Crock-Pot taking it with me. That's one of my favorites. So, if when I get home tonight, there's a guy sitting in my chair, eating my pork carnitas, holding my wife's hand, visiting with my children, I will be

- Jealous.

- jealous. Amen. And I'll even quote versus defending that feeling, okay? Because that's my place. God gets jealous when someone or something is in his place and that's loving. Some of

you, your job is more important than God. Some of you, your kids are more important than God, your spouse is more important than God, your wealth is more important than God, your appearance is more important than God, your success is more important than God. Your house is more important than God, your lifestyle is more important than God. And God would say those are not bad things but I'm jealous for our relationship. How come we don't talk? How come we don't spend time together? How come we don't have a relationship where my love for you is primary and first? And let me say this about God, God wants that loving relationship with Him to be in first place, first position, because He wants good for your whole life. And He knows if you'll start in relationship with Him, His love will make you healthy, His love will make you holy, His love will make you well. And then you can live the rest of your life with everyone and everything in its appropriate place. Otherwise, what happens if we don't have that loving relationship with God in first position, in first place, we want someone or something else to be in that position and place and we crush the relationship. Some of you want your spouse to be God, you want your parents to be God, you want your kids to be God, you want your friends to be God and you crush them with the weight of expectation because you're putting them in a position they were not created to be and that's the place that God should be. How's your time with God? How's your relationship with God? Thirdly, God's love tolerates then transforms. Some of you are young, you bought a cultural lie and it's very prevalent and that is that love and tolerance are synonymous. So if you love me, you'll just accept whatever I do. How many of you were parents and would never look at your child and say, "Here's my credit card, whatever you want, "I just support you." If you hate your child do that. They'll be three years old drinking Red Bull, lighting off fireworks in the house at two o'clock in the morning. And it's not for their good, Amen? Some of the toon are like, "We can't?" No, you can't. That's why your parents brought you here, just to hear that point right there. A loving parent will look at a child and say, "I love you but I reject that behavior." There's a difference between accepting the person and accepting the behavior. God is a father who has the right to say no. When He says no to our behavior, He's not saying no to our relationship, He's saying that the behavior is actually hindering the relationship. So the relationship needs to go away so that the relationship can become stronger. Here's how the God of the Bible works. He tolerates you because He loves you and then his love transforms you so that your behavior changes. So if you're here and you're not a Christian, let me bottom line it for you. God welcomes you as you are but He's going to change who you are if you enter into relationship with Him. God wants you to come with everything that you are and believe and do and much of that is going to change through a loving relationship with Him. God's love tolerates you, come as you are. God's love transforms you, changes who you are. Number four on God's love, God's love connects before it corrects. God builds the relationship to then deal with issues in our life. It says in Romans that the kindness of God leads us to repentance. It's that loving relationship that leads to change behavior. When our kids were little, I would literally try my best and I did fail, we all do. Every parent, Satan is always gonna tell you all the things you did wrong and it's God's grace that makes up the difference. But for me, I always wanted to connect before I'd correct. So my kids would tell you, we had this little, now they're tall, so now if I wanna correct them, I gotta look up 'cause I'm the front row of my own Christmas photo, I'm the shortest one in the family. I have giant sons. So I'm like, "Alright, let's talk about, this is weird." If you got our Christmas card this year, I'll just publicly confess this and

we put it online. I was standing on the step so that I actually could look as tall as my sons. Okay, I'll just publicly admit that. So anyways, when the kids were little though, I would get down on their level 'cause I wanted to connect before I would correct. I'd look at them and say, "Okay." I'd ask the questions, "Okay, who am I?" They would say, "You're my dad." And if they're feeling a little saucy, they'd say, "You're Pastor Mark." Okay. How do I feel about you? The kids would say, and I didn't make them look me in the eye, "Dad, you love me." "I do love you." "I love you" One of my daughters was really product, she would say, "You love me as big as the sky "and as deep as the ocean." It was hard to discipline that one. I said, "Okay, I love you. "My love for you is constant. "I also would like to enjoy you. "And you have something to do with that. "My love for you, that's regardless of your behavior. "My enjoyment of you has a lot to do with your behavior. "I wanna enjoy you." I'm the making memories, scheduling fun, always got the next trip plan, good time dad. I like to have fun with my kids. My kids will tell you I do. This week our power went out 'cause the storm hit. We took a paddleboard down to the park 'cause it filled up with water. And we were the crazy people paddle boarding in what is not really alike and then our power went out, so we found a hotel with a lazy river and my kids put on bathrobes and ate ice cream that cost \$600. I'm totally fine having a good time. And if you want to be adopted and wear a robe and eat ice cream, see me after the service. But anyways, I like having fun and making memories with my kids, I just do. We have a lot of fun as a family. But there are times that their behavior makes it hard to enjoy them. And what I tell them is, "I love you. "Our relationship is not based on your performance. "But I would like to enjoy you, make memories, have fun. "So could we correct your behavior "so that we could enjoy our relationship?" God is a God who wants a relationship with you. God is a God who wants to make memories with you. God is a God who has a father's heart. God is a God who wants to have good times with you. God is not a non-relational parent. He's a relational parent and He's very loving. And His love for you is unconditional but His enjoyment of you is predicated upon your behavior. Which is why He'll connect with you, establish the loving relationship and then correct you to get some of the behavior out of the way so that the relationship could be enjoyable again. God is love. God is love. God's love is said and shown. Some of you grew up in households, we're gonna deal a little bit with your family of origins. The love of your parents was either said or shown. How many of you grew up, you don't have to raise your hand especially if you're here with your mom, they said they loved you but they didn't show they love you. "I love you, I love you, I love you." Is like, "Why are you always gone? "How come you don't come home for dinner? "How come I don't get a hug? "How come on my birthday, you keep forgetting? "Why on Christmas, are you at the casino? "You text me you love me, but I don't see it." Others of you grew up in homes where it was shown but it was not said. And I was watching television with the kids recently. It's one of those competitive shows where they give the backstory of the contestants, sort of emotionally engage and connect you and one guy's doing it for his dad who's dying. And he said, "My dad never told me he loved me "But he shows me." And then they interview his dad, "Yeah, in our house," he says, "we don't say I love you." I thought, "Well, that's wrong." Because the God of the Bible tells us He loves us. The Bible speaks of God's love, I've looked it up, about 800 times. That's a lot. So maybe we're not even biblical parents until we've told our kids that we love them 800 times. Jesus says don't make a vow. What he's talking about as an inner vow. An inner vow is where you make it rule to rule your life and that takes away the rule of the Lord. Some

families have this vow, "We don't say, I love you." That's demonic, it's a curse, it's a generational curse and it needs to be broken. Tell your kids you love them. I talked to my dad this week. He's like, "Marky, I love you." I know, I'm 46, I'm still Marky and my dad loves me, I appreciate that. My mom will tell me the same thing, I tell them I love them. I know my parents love me 'cause they say it and my kids know I love them 'cause I say it. Some of you are just broken because your parents never told you they loved you. God's our father He loves you. Lemme hear you just receive that. God says, "I love you. "I love you." Receive that. It'll start to heal you up. God says He loves you, we need to say, "I love you." And God shows He loves us. He shows He loves us. Some families say, "We don't hug." Why, give me the verse. Why? Where's "Thou shall not hug," I read the whole book, I can't find that verse. It's okay to say you love each other. "Well, we're not affectionate, we'll repent to that." God's affectionate. I bet you when you see Jesus in the kingdom, if He says, "I wanna hug you." You're not gonna be like, "Well, we don't do that. "We made a vow." You're like, "I'm in, that's great." We want you to be a healthy person, to have healthy relationship with God that allows you to have healthy relationship with neighbor. God's love is shown. One translation of the Bible, Romans 5:8, "God demonstrates His love for us in this, "while we're still sinners Christ died for us." How do we know God loves us? He didn't just say He loved us He showed us He loved us at the cross of Jesus. That this God who is relational made us for a relationship and we literally turned our back. We rebelled, we sinned, we walked away, we said, "God I want no relationship with you." And God says, "But I want a relationship with you." So He comes as the Lord Jesus. God becomes a person to reconcile the relationship between people and God. That's amazing, it's unbelievable. It's more incredible than any superhero story that's ever been told. It's the Godman. God becomes a person to restore relationships between people and God. And Jesus comes in perfect love and we hate Him because we don't understand love. And we kill Him who is love. And on the cross, He deals with our sin problem and heals our relationship problem with God. And he cries out on the cross as he's dying in our place for our sins, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" That relationship between God the Father and God the Son, that was constant, was severed momentarily as He took upon Himself the separation and the sin and He brought, in our place, reconciliation and forgiveness. The key to all relationships is forgiveness. There is no relationship where there is not forgiveness. So we need Jesus to forgive our sins so that we can have our relationship reconciled to God. Jesus reconciles our relationship to God. He takes away our sin problem. He dies, He rises, He's alive and well today and Jesus is still pursuing people for relationship, Amen. Some of you didn't know that. You're here and you're like, "I got a lot of problems in my life." Let's deal with the biggest problem first, you don't have a relationship with God. And Jesus is the one who makes that possible and this needs to be the day that you cross that line and you make that decision that you're going to be friends with Jesus through the forgiveness of sin. And it's shown through Jesus and it's shown through the Holy Spirit. Says this in Romans 5:5, "God's love has been poured out into our hearts "through the Holy Spirit." We'll deal with the heart next week. It's the emotional seat sermon center of who you are. It appears 900 times in the Bible. Your life flows out of your heart, that's what the Bible says. Your words flow out of your heart, your decisions flow out of your heart, your relationships flow out of your heart. So what you really need is love in your heart. And God's love has been poured, if you belong to Jesus, God the Father loves God the Son, God the Son brings the love of God,

the Holy Spirit then takes their love and pours it out into the center of who we are. This heals us, this transforms us so that we can love God and love neighbor. I was thinking about this concept of pouring when we moved to the valley. We were a little shocked this time of year 'cause we were told, "It never rains in Arizona." It does, it just rains all at once, that's what happens in Arizona. I was like, "Holy Noah, look at that." It's monsoon season hits, right? It was crazy. Recently my pool filled up and my whole yard became my pool. Like, that's amazing. I could swim in my barbecue, that's amazing. When the monsoons hit, water pours down from above in abundance. And what I find interesting, it cools that which is hot, it cleans that which is dirty and it brings life where there was bareness. What I find fascinating after living in the desert for two years, is after the monsoon rains hit, wild flowers bloom, things become green and life erupts. Your life on this earth is one in a barren desert that does not have love. People use one another, they do not love one another. God's love is poured out like a monsoon rain. That's why we're in the Word of God, to receive God's love. That's why we're in prayer, to receive God's love. That's why we come together as God's people in God's presence to worship that God's love would pour down on us. Next time it rains, remember God's love poured out into your heart through the Holy Spirit whom He has given Him. God's love is said, God's love is shown and then lastly, God's love flows to you and through you so that God loves others through you. Here's how one translation of the Bible says it. 1 John 3:18, "Let's not merely say that we love each other." Do you know what? Saying you love someone costs you nothing, loving them actually cost you everything. It's very easy to say I love you but to actually love someone, that is very rare in our world. Says, "Let's not just merely say that we love each other, "let us show the truth by our actions." So let me say this, love is sometimes a feeling but it's always an action. It's sometimes what you feel but it's always what you do. What that means is that your emotions need to be driven by your will. And even if you're not feeling loving you'll be doing that which is loving, trusting God to change your heart through your obedience in your relationship. There's no mother at 3:30 in the morning, here's the child screaming and knows that they just filled their diaper and threw up and is thinking, "That's what I want to do now." But love is what she does when she gets out of bed, love is what she does when she picks up the child. love is what she does when she brings herself into proximity for a relationship to serve. Love is what you do, love is what you do, love is what you do. What he says is, "Let's not just say we love each other. "Though it is fine, let us show that we love each other." And this is why Jesus can make this absolutely unbelievable claim. Love your

- Neighbor.

- neighbor. He also says somewhere else love your enemies. Now I get, "Love those who love you." That seems fair. Love those you don't know yet. Well, maybe you will love me. Love those who hate me? What? See, we were enemies of God and God loved us and made us family. It was that relationship with God that turned us from enemy to family. Here's how I know that you and I are not the source of love, to love our enemy means we need a source of love that is not ourselves. I know that you don't wake up morning go like, "I have so much love from my enemies. "I can't wait to pour it out today." I'm not that guy. I'm reading the Old Testament, watching Clint Eastwood films and I moved to Arizona it's open and carry. That's just my heart,

okay? So when the Bible says when Jesus commands that you can even love your enemies, then there must be a source of love that is not from me but flows through me as a gift to them, ultimately from God. Lemme close with this, I'll tell you a story. I'll show you my grandpa, George. Growing up, one of the people that I loved the most and I knew he loved me the most was my grandpa, George. He was a diesel mechanic. For a while he was a red potato farmer. He wore overalls his whole life. So when I was a little boy, I wore overalls a lot. That's when grandpa, George. That was my mom's dad, he died when I was 10. I loved going to his house. I've told you stories about him but we would watch wrestling, we would eat caramel apples and we would make things in the shop with wood and tools and we'd wear overalls. So pretty much, my whole bucket list at Grandpa George's house, those were all my priorities. This was when he was a young man, George's Overall Laundry in Grand Forks, Minnesota. That's where I was born, Grand Forks, Minnesota, North Dakota, just right on the dividing line between the two. Actually, looking at that truck, I wish I still had that. That would be pretty cool to have. But there's my grandpa George in his overalls. When he was an older man, that's a photo of him when he was a younger man, he was very loving and very fun and fun to hang out with. I remember having a lot of good times with my grandpa George. And I remember the deal was if I'm at grandpa George's house and I hear the ice cream man, the rule was, "Marky, if you could run out "and stop the ice cream man, you can get your ice cream "and then I'll come out pay for it." Oh, grandpa George wasn't gonna run to the ice cream man. So, I would run and he would get there eventually. That's what grandpa's do. And so when I was at grandpa George's house, I always got one ear just listening for the ice cream man. Is he living on a cul de sac? And if I hear the ice cream man, I would bolt out, woo-hoo, I'd get my ice cream and grandpa George will come out, pay for the ice cream. There's one time the ice cream man stops, I go out, must have been summer 'cause all the kids, I remember it was warm and sunny out, the whole neighborhood of kids swarmed the ice cream truck. And grandpa George looks at the kids, he says, "Hey, kids, everybody pick whatever ice cream you want. "Marky's gonna pay for it." And I'm like eight or something, I'm thinking, "I'm going ice cream jail. "I got no money. "I'm eight year old broke, I got nothing." My grandpa was kind of a jokester. And he looked at me and he winked and I thought, "Okay, grandpa's got a plan." So all the kids turn around, they're like, "Really, like yeah, Marky's gonna buy all the ice cream." So all the kids immediately start yelling their order at the ice cream man. And my grandpa quietly takes his wallet out, he grabs some cash and he hands it to me. So then I order last. I go up, I say, "Okay, I'll take up," whatever it was. I got my ice cream and all the kids were like, "Thank you, Mark, thank you, Mark. "Thank you, Mark, thank you, Mark." I turn around, I said, "Thank you, grandpa." God's love is like grandpa's ice cream. There's some for you and there's enough for all the neighbors. God wants you to give it to the neighbors so that you can share His joy. Amen?

- Amen.

- This is what I'm gonna do, I'm gonna call up my best friend, our primary caregiver, my wife Grace, and we're gonna answer a couple questions for you 'cause we wanna make this super practical. Grab a few stools, baby. That's one. I did it, all right. There you go, baby. And thank you for being a good mom and raising five kids. You want to do it like that? I'll be honest, I don't

know what to do with a skirt and a stool. I don't have a lot of experience. Okay, thanks baby. I'll read the question. Our four and a half year old asked Jesus to be her Savior. That's awesome, congratulations, we can applaud that. We've gone through tough questions asking why, et cetera. So these parents gave the quiz. Jesus dying for our sins, forgiveness, resurrection, that's good. She shares with just about everyone and is such a witness for Christ, we're thrilled. However, now she is asking for baptism and communion. What is your advice for such a young one accepting Christ and partaking in baptism and communion? Ask Todd and Rachel. How would you answer? You grew up in the church, I didn't get saved till I was 19. You have more experience than I do for sure.

- Really.

- She forgot it on. There we go.

- Well, with our kids, it was all at different ages. I became a Christian at three but didn't get baptized till I was 13. Just because I didn't truly understand, well, I was afraid to stand up in front of people and give my testimony as well. But I think it's really, you're seeing her heart already. I guess it's her, it doesn't say it's a girl.

- Yeah, because it's a girl, I think she.

- Okay. And so it's exciting, you wanna continue to encourage her relationship with Jesus and it's a matter of explaining and we have different sections on the website too, explaining baptism and communion and making sure that they really understand it before they participate in it. But there's no designated age that's good or bad to do it. It really is their understanding. And one of our kids got baptized very young, like four.

- Yeah, one of our sons. I came down one morning, he's got his Little Kids Picture Bible. He's about this age, it was before he could read so he's just looking at the pictures. And he's eating cereal and he said, "John the Baptist." So he said, "I gotta get baptized, dad." I said, "Well, why is that?" He said, "Well, Jesus died for me and he rose "and baptism is about Jesus dying for me and rising. So I need to get baptized, now that I'm a Christian." I was like, "Really little boys." He was very serious about it. I thought, "Well, we'll give it a little time. "See if this sticks." Sometimes kids are like, "I wanna be a pumpkin or an astronaut." I'm like, "Well, okay, we'll just, we'll see tomorrow." And he said, "Dad, no." And so he kept bringing it up. And he started, he's like, "Hey, Hey, Hey, "I gotta get baptized." I was like, "Why?" He's like, "I love Jesus, I wanna get baptized, "that's what you do when you become a Christian." Showed the death or resurrection of Jesus. So I started asking him all the theological questions, he was fine. I said, "Okay, well, go meet with the pastor." So, I scheduled a time, just not as dad but he met with a leader in the church and answered all the questions. Came out and they're like, "He answered all the questions man. "Like if he was 40, we'd make him a deacon, "he knows who he's talking about." I was like, "Okay, well, he loves Jesus." So we baptized him at about this age and he has walked with the Lord everyday since. He's probably serving in kids ministry, teaching little

kids about Jesus right now. So, you can have a child that has the Holy Spirit and the presence of God from a young age. Sometimes as the parent you say, "I'm not sure if they're just wanting this." So, let me tell you the baptist grandma story, okay. No, Baptist grandmas are great but this one, so, there was a baptist grandma I know. She told the grandkids, "If you'll get baptized I'll take you to Toys "R" Us "and buy whatever you want." Which probably isn't the best motivation to get baptized. And so sometimes in some traditions, there's so much pressure toward baptism or sometimes you're wondering "Are they gonna go to heaven if they die "and they're not baptized?" And you get sort of confused that you can push a child toward baptism, not saying to do that. At the same time, if they really have a strong desire for baptism or communion and they know the Lord, as a parent, you're trying to evaluate their heart and their sincerity and what I would say is if it's sincere, you don't wanna discourage them, you wanna encourage them. And then just make a commitment to continue to walk with them. And so for communion as well. So, the way we do it here at the Trinity Church, your kids can be in children's ministry and right now they got water slides and squirt guns and they'll be like, . But they're welcome to go to the service as well, not with the squirt guns, but they're welcome to come to the service. And some of the kids sit in the service because they would rather be in here with their parents. By about sixth grade, all the children are transitioning into the service 'cause we want you to walk together, we want you to worship together and then we want you to be able to discuss things as a family with your child but our theology is that the parents are in the best decision to really know the heart of the child and we really lean on the parents, if they're Christians, to make this decision in relationship with the child. But I would not look at someone who is little and forbid them from communion or baptism if they had a profession of faith and some evidence that they really did love Jesus. And so I would say to this family, congratulations, it's amazing. I mean, your little girl loves Jesus and she's telling other people about Jesus. And she's enthusiastic to make a public profession of faith toward Jesus. And we rejoice in that. So even for us, when we take communion here, we've got juice and wine. Part of that is for conscience, part of that is for little people. We try to not force anybody but invite everybody to walk with Jesus, whatever their age might be.

- And when I was young, I was kind of afraid of baptism and communion. And so it's good to have just an open conversation and a continued conversation if they haven't done those things yet but not hound them with it but just to act like it's very normal part of being a Christian because it is. I was afraid to go up and do the communion thing for some reason. I don't know why I had that fear but sometimes kids just get afraid of things that we don't understand. So until I really understood, "Oh, I need to sit and actually ask the Lord "to forgive me for my sins "and think about the message that I just heard "and then I can have relationship with Him. "And I'll be reminded through communion." I mean, it's a big concept for kids but even at a young age, they can understand them in simple ways. So I just encourage you, if this is your situation, really encourage your child not to have fears of those things and participate as they're able.

- And I know this is shocking, I've gone too long so we probably should just do one question. And this is a good transition. We're gonna take communion now. And communion is where we remember that God loves us and that we're forgiven and that no matter what we've done, He

wants a relationship with us that's parental like a dad who's gonna help his kids. And so, when you're ready and you can think about anything you need to talk to the Lord about or any sin that's inhibiting or prohibiting the relationship, to confess that to Him, to ask for forgiveness, to get time to search your heart and then to come forward to partake of communion, remembering Jesus' broken body and shed blood in our place for our sins. And as you see people taking communion, I want you to have joy and say, "Look at all the people that God loves. "Look at all the people that God loves "and has a relationship with." And then we're gonna sing and that's our way of loving God. Jesus says, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And as we sing, that's one way that we express our love toward God, it's our way of praying collectively and corporately. So if you're a Christian or become one today, we welcome you to partake of communion and I'll invite the band up at this time. And why don't you transition our time in prayer, baby, and we'll transition there.

- Lord, thank you for your word. Thank you for a relationship with you. I pray that if there's anybody that doesn't have that relationship, that they would be drawn to you today. Lord, I pray that we would each grow in our relationship with you and that we would truly experience your love so that we can share that with others in Jesus' name.

- Amen, thank you.