***Session 7 Loving Others: God’s Primary Plan Is the Local Church***

1. introduction
   1. God loves us with the intensity that God loves God (John 15:9). Abiding in love includes taking the initiative to love others. He *empowers* us to love by receiving His love, and He *commissions* us to express His love to people whom He loves. Our love for others is the measure of our love for Jesus. We do not passively wait, with a spirit of entitlement, for someone to love and befriend us.

9“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love…12This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:9-12)

*John**15:9 is the verse we have been focusing on in this series. It is one of the most remarkable, dramatic statements in the whole of the Bible. In verse 9, Jesus says, and I will paraphrase it, “In the same intensity that the Father loves Me, I love you—in that same intensity.” This statement is dramatic. It is remarkable. It is the ultimate statement of our worth—that Jesus feels about us like the Father feels about Him. Not only is it a statement of our worth, it is also a statement of the worth of every believer in the Body of Christ, even the ones that bother and annoy you. This is how God feels about them, and this changes the way we view them when we see this. Of course we will never see this about another if we do not see it as true about ourselves.*

*Then in verse 12, He connects verse 9 and verse 12 in a very strategic way. He joins these two truths. He says, in effect, “In light of the fact that I love you in this intensity, I command you to be a vessel of this love to other people.” In other words, He is saying, “I have loved you this way, and in the overflow, in the gratitude of receiving it, I want you to be part of My plan to express this kind of intensity to other people.”*

*Verse 12 is a commission from the Lord. Every single believer is commissioned to operate in a pastoral way. That might be a new idea to some people. I am not saying that you quit your job and take the occupation of a fulltime pastor. That is not what I am saying. But the very command to love is a commission to take responsibility for others, outside of our four or five good friends. He wants us to see people differently through this commandment.*

*Now Jesus understands that we receive the love of God in three distinct ways. I believe that is one reason He connected these two verses together. We discover the intensity or we experience the intensity of verse 9 in three distinct ways. Number one is obvious—by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God in a direct way God communicates that He loves us. Of course we want more of that, but we understand the concept—the Spirit stirs our heart, and He inspires us through the Word that God loves us. That is the direct way that we experience and discover this love.*

*The second way is indirect, by receiving it from another member in the Body of Christ. That it is part of God's plan; He would reveal that He loves you the way God loves God through the words, deeds, hands, and kindness of other believers. Now here is the point—you cannot get the* ***full*** *revelation of the love of God for your life by yourself alone, directly by the Word and the Spirit. Part of it has been strategically placed* ***in*** *other people to communicate it to you, and God designed it this way. We can be radically devoted to the Lord in an individual way, but we cannot have all that He wants us to have of the love of God without being vitally connected to others who show and express a facet of that love to us. That is the second way we discover the love of God—through the words and the deeds of others.*

*The third way is also indirect. It is revealed to us when we are being a vessel to communicate God’s love to others. So we are not receiving His love from others, but communicating it* ***to*** *others. I have found over the years that I have received significant things and insights into the love of God by sharing the love of God with other people. There is a certain muscle that we work—a spiritual muscle as an analogy—and we work that muscle when we are communicating the kindness, the goodness, and the love of God to others; it returns back to us. I have gained more understanding by giving love even than by receiving it from other people on some occasions. In the very act of serving others you gain understanding of God's love for you. God designed it this way.*

*So let me say these three again. First, we understand that Jesus loves us like the Father loves Him directly by the Spirit. Second, by receiving it from others. And third, by sowing this love into other people, we discover it ourselves about our own lives. Therefore, in verse 12, when Jesus commands us to love others, He knows that the very act of doing it will change us and make us the recipients of the very love we are communicating to them. Now* ***all*** *three of these dimensions of the love of God, or all three of these ways of discovering and experiencing the love of God, are critical; we cannot live without any one of them.*

*A lot of people focus all of their attention on trying to understand the love of God directly by the Spirit and the Word. It is good to do that—focus a lot of attention on that—but they cannot get the fullness of it in isolation. Not only must they be around other believers, but also they have to be vitally interacting with them on a regular basis for the fuller revelation of the love of God to actually connect with their heart.*

*By this commandment every single one of us has received a pastoral assignment. There is a pastoral anointing, a pastoral grace in every single believer in the Body of Christ by virtue of the command, the commission, to be vessels to share His love with others. Again the reason this matters is it changes the way we view people. Instead of thinking of Christian fellowship as three or four friends who are Christians, who all like the same movies, the same music, the same sports—it is us four and no more, we have a good time together—there is a greater dimension of the love of God to be experienced only when we step out of that circle of the familiar.*

* 1. Our commission to love one another extends beyond loving only the people who enjoy the same things that we enjoy. The spiritually strong believers are to pursue the weaker ones, knowing that the weaker ones cannot enhance their natural resources, influences, or profile, etc.

*Our commission to love extends beyond the familiar comfort zone of a few Christian friends who like what we like. That comfort zone of people we would be friends with, even if we were not in the kingdom of God. We like them even without the Holy Spirit's inspiration. They like what we like, and we like what they like. It does not require the Holy Spirit in order for us to engage. Unbelievers all around the world do that. Jesus is talking about something more than that.*

*He is talking about the spiritually stronger believers investing in an intentional way in the weaker ones with an understanding that they invest in those who cannot enhance them in any way in the natural sense. Meaning, by investing in these weaker ones, they do not get more money, they do not gain more influence, they do not have more fun, they do not gain anything in the natural by investing in them. That is the kind of love of God that Jesus is talking about here.*

*Now it is good that we have three or four friends, and we have fun together; there is nothing wrong with that. I am not putting that down, but what I am saying is that the commission to love goes far beyond the comfort zone of our familiar few friends who like what we like and do what we do. It goes beyond what I call the cool zone of being with the people who would seem like it would be fun to be with. There is nothing wrong with that, but that is not exactly what Jesus is talking about—try to get with as many cool people as you can and spend as much time as you can, and if they are Christians, it is fellowship, and isn’t that awesome? Again, I think that has its place, but it is not what Jesus is talking about here.*

*There is a spiritual dynamic that takes place, and it is very powerful in us when, in sheer gratitude for having received the love of God, we are investing in those who cannot enhance our natural profile in any sense whatsoever. I am talking about those who are weak in many ways, but spiritually is the point I am focused on right now. Maybe in their character they are moody, they are grouchy, they complain when you relate to them, they are negative, they have a huge rejection spirit, they resist everything you say, they do not respond in a good way, and Jesus says, “That is the group I am talking about right there.”*

*Now He knows that when we intentionally go after these folks and love them, dynamic changes are made in us, and we actually discover the love of God ourselves. He knows that outside of that tension, that reach, something inside of us does not mature and something inside of us is not strengthened apart from that lifestyle. But many believers do not think of love in those terms. They say, “That guy bothers me. I do not like him. I do not like the movies he likes, music he likes, or the sports he likes. I do not talk the way he talks. I do not like anything about him. Therefore he is not within my purview of loving.”*

*The Lord says, “No, it is exactly the opposite, for that is the way I loved you. You did not bring anything to enhance My natural profile or My influence when you loved Me. Yet I loved you because I loved you because I am love.” The Father is telling us, “I love that guy as much as I love you, and I love you as much as I love My Son, Jesus, and I want you to be part of My plan to share with that guy how I feel about him, and I do not mean just in a few words—words are important though, not minimizing words—but in action, by relating to them, by giving them a sense of belonging, by including them in the sphere of your life.” Jesus says when you do that, it gives a tremendous signal or a message of what the Father is really like. When we love people who cannot in any way enhance our world in the natural way, it is so God-like, it is so opposite of how people naturally love, especially when those whom we are loving do not respond well and are not very interesting in the natural.*

*People say, “Well, I do not really have any connection to them. I am not really drawn to them.”*

*The Lord says, “But* ***I*** *am drawn to them, and the fact that I am drawn to them should excite your heart because you love Me. So be a vessel, a joint of supply, that I will use to touch them.”*

*Now I am guessing—this is purely a guess number. I cannot prove it, but I am guessing about thirty percent of the Body of Christ, I mean genuine born-again believers who have been in the kingdom for decades—I am just totally pulling a number out of the hat. I am just being honest about it, but I am guessing about thirty percent of the church, nobody ever pursues them, ever. Nobody notices them. I mean, somebody might wave at them at a church service or somebody might pass them in the hallway and in a polite way say hello. I am not talking about that. What I am saying is that nobody pursues them, includes them, goes after them. And the Lord says, “I have a plan to fix that.” The Lord is saying to the stronger ones, “I will actually reveal My love to you* ***while*** *you are revealing My love to them. I will surprise you with revelations of My love and how I feel about you.”*

*Again, there is a spiritual muscle, there is a dynamic that happens in our life when we live in that value system which creates strength in us that actually causes us to stand in greater ways in the future, in ways that we cannot fully calculate. I mean that our muscles get strong spiritually speaking by living in that lifestyle together. I am guessing that thirty percent of the Body of Christ is so trapped in the pain of loneliness; they live in the tyranny of lies about how worthless they are. They feel utterly like a failure in all that they do, and none of it is true; they cannot connect with the truth I am talking about. They love God, but in a practical way they cannot connect with His love. And the Lord says, “I have a plan, and that plan is you. You and two or three of your friends, who understanding your pastoral calling and responsibility, together intentionally go after him and show him how I feel about him. Again, not just by a few casual words, meeting him once and prophesying over him. I am talking about something far more than that. I am talking about walking in love.”*

* 1. Jesus is retuning for a Church filled with glory that is established in every tribe and nation. His glory includes His love, power, and insight, etc., being manifest as believers love one another. He will have a people in every nation who will love others in the way that He loves them.

27…that He might present her to Himself a glorious church… (Eph. 5:27)

*I have good news! Jesus is returning for a Church that is* ***filled*** *with the glory of God, as we read in Ephesians 5:27. Now we know that the gospel has to be preached in every nation before the Lord returns. He said that in Matthew 24:14. But Jesus has more in mind than the gospel preached in every nation so that people get saved and escape hell. That is good—I think escaping hell is awesome—but there is more on God's heart than having the gospel being preached in every nation before He returns and having people in every nation escape hell. He wants more. He wants spiritual families dwelling together, called local churches, which give a witness about the truth of His Fatherhood in every tribe and every tongue before He returns.*

*So it is more than people getting saved. He wants a witness of the Father and the way the Father loves His people. He wants this witnessed through congregations of a hundred, to several hundred, to several thousands, of all different types of people. There are always a small number of stronger ones who are pursuing the weaker ones. Now, it is not normal that the stronger ones pursue the weaker ones. Normally the stronger ones hang out with the stronger ones, but He is going to turn this thing around. Jesus said, “I am not coming back until My Church in every tribe and tongue of the earth is actually walking in the glory of God, witnessing the truth about My Father's love by the way that the stronger ones actually include and pursue those that cannot enhance anything in their life in the natural.” He is going to fill the earth with this witness of the Father.*

* 1. God ordained that each believer be a “joint of supply” that reveals His love to others.

16“… the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body… (Eph. 4:16)

*In Ephesians 4:16, Paul describes the Body of Christ. He said that the whole Body will be joined and knit together—now here is the phrase—by what every joint supplies. God has ordained that every born-again believer be a joint of supply. What a joint of supply means is that we are each a vessel that supplies a demonstration of the love of God to other people. Sometimes a large demonstration, usually a small demonstration, but it is a valid and important demonstration.*

*Every born-again believer is a joint of supply, meaning Christian fellowship is not four or five guys who again would be buddies even if they were not in the kingdom because they all like the same stuff. It is bigger than four or five Christian guys hanging out together playing video games, watching movies, and listening to music. He says, “No, I want you to take on this responsibility I have given you in the geographic area where you live. I want you to express this pastoral anointing and give witness of what the Father is like in whatever part of the earth I have put you in for that season of your life.”*

*When we see ourselves in this pastoral anointing, when we see ourselves as joints of supply, we look at our neighbors differently. The Lord says, “I want to reach them, and not just so they will get saved. I want to include them in a family when they get saved.” Beloved, we have neighbors who are born-again believers, and they are living in isolation. I mean the guy down the road. The Lord says, “I love him, and I want you to be a part of reaching him with the love of the Father. He is already saved, and he is going to heaven, but he does not feel like he is part of the family, and I am a Father, and I want that changed.”*

*“Well, Lord, he goes to another church.”*

*The Lord says, “I only recognize one Church. It is the worldwide, born-again Body of Christ. Go love them!”*

* 1. The Father had a deep desire to have a family who experiences and expresses His love to others. Jesus’ primary revelation of the transcendent God of all power and splendor is that He is a father. He is a relational God. He thinks, feels, and acts like a father. He wants to share the family life of the Trinity with redeemed humans, who are invited and empowered to enjoy His love.

*Now before Genesis 1, before the heavens and the earth were created, God the Father dwelt in a dynamic family relationship with the Son and the Holy Spirit. Within the Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—the Father was functioning as the Father to the Son and the Spirit. The Family was always functioning in great joy and love, but there was a time when the Father declared, “We are going to take the family life that we share, and we are going to bring human beings into that family life with us.” I mean, it is the most remarkable reality that we are actually participating in the family dynamics of what the Godhead experiences. We join Their Family as sons and daughters of God. We can be so used to the term “sons of God” that we lose the fact of what this really means—we are in the family that They have shared from eternity past.*

*When Jesus came in His ministry, He revealed to the nation of Israel that the God of Israel was, in fact, a Father. This was His primary emphasis. The nation of Israel was aware of the Old Testament God with transcendent power. What I mean by transcendent power is awesome power and majesty. Israel was familiar with the God of the prophets, the transcendent God. Jesus came and He said, “Let Me tell you. The transcendent God with all power, majesty, and splendor is, in fact, a Father, and He has been a Father from eternity past.” It is not a symbolic title. It is a name that describes how His personality functions. He thinks like a Father, He acts like a Father, He plans like a Father, and His desire is to raise up a family across the earth, all over the earth in every tribe and tongue. It is called the Body of Christ, local churches all over the earth that connect together as spiritual families. Not just the strong with the strong. Not just a few friends who like the same stuff, hanging out together once a week. Far beyond that and actually displaying the nature of the Father by the way we value those who cannot give us back anything in the natural. That is the way the Father loves.*

*Again not only do some of them not give anything back in the natural, but they are moody, they are negative, they repel the love you give them, they criticize you, and they resist you.* ***But*** *they are in the Body of Christ, and the Lord says, “I want them. I love them like I love you, and I love you like I love My Son.” That is what Jesus announced. Jesus taught us to pray “Our Father who art in heaven,” not “Our God who art in heaven.” He is God—there is no question—but He is more than just a God of power—He is a* ***Father*** *God. That was the revelation that Jesus came to bring us.*

* 1. The believers in each area are to participate in a local church. Together they have a corporate assignment to reveal the Father to other believers and to the lost. Jesus continues to proclaim, to make known, the Father’s name. The twofold result is that those who receive the Father’s love directly by the Spirit or indirectly through His people will surely love God and others more.

26“I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:26)

*At the very end of Jesus' earthly ministry, right before the cross, John 17:26 is the very last sentence that is recorded in the upper room before He went to the garden and onward to the cross. We know that He was in the upper room where they had the Last Supper. There are five chapters that represent that time frame that evening—John 13-17. There is much understanding to be gained by understanding His final statement in John 17.*

*He is in prayer to the Father, and we see His plan in this prayer. Jesus' plan is to awaken love in the Body of Christ by revealing the Father's love. In essence, both His plan and His ministry was this—I will reveal what the Father is like, and those who receive it, they will love God, and they will love one another more. When they see what God is like, they will love more. That is the plan, so I will tell them what the Father is like. I will communicate the Father's love. When they hear of the truth, and it touches them, they will love God, and they will love people. Love will be awakened when the Father is revealed—He declares this in John 17:26.*

*He is talking to the Father, and He says, “Father, I have declared to them Your name.” He is talking about the last three-and-a-half-years of ministry, He says, “By My lifestyle of love, by My teaching, by My miracles, I was always letting the people know what You are like.” So when we see Jesus' lifestyle of love, His miracles, and His teaching, if we interpret them rightly, we understand and get a picture of what the Father is like. He said, “I made You known—that is what I was all about. Yes, I helped a lot of people, I lessened the burden of their life, and I did a lot of other things, but primarily I was giving them a picture as to what You are like.”*

*Notice the next statement. The next statement is a future-tense statement, whereas the first statement was a past-tense statement. He says, “And, Father, I am going to continue to make Your name known.” Now He does it in the cross and the resurrection, but more than that—that is glorious, I mean, that He makes the Father known in the cross and the resurrection; that is a massive, glorious subject—but when He rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, sat at the right hand of the Father, poured out the Spirit on the Body of Christ throughout 2,000 years of Church history—He is saying, “Through the Church—I am going to anoint them to declare what God is like, and as they are faithful to make God known, the Father known, people will love God and love people more.” He says, “I am going to stay with the same program.”*

*He goes on in the rest of passage, “The divine love that You have for Me will operate in them when they see what You are like. When they encounter Your love, the very love of God will be awakened in them, and they will love God more, they will love people more.” He says, “That has been My plan in My ministry on the earth for three-and-a-half years, and that is My plan through the Body of Christ, to give a witness of what the Father is like.”*

*God wants us to make Him known in south Kansas City, along with hundreds of other churches. We all have the same mandate, and we are to do it together in gracious cooperation. Our mandate is not just to get people out of hell, but it is also to reveal the Father and have people function in a family under the Father's leadership, magnifying what He is like. That is what is on His mind to do in every tribe and every tongue of the earth.*

* 1. The Father wants to express His heart as a father in every geographical place through spiritual families that give each believer care, love, and a sense of belonging. He is the Father of His family, not just the leader of His army. He wants each believer to play their part in expressing His heart in the specific geographic area where He puts them in each season of their life.
  2. He wants unbelievers in every nation to see love consistently expressed in local churches to their weaker members and the lost. They will conclude that God is a Father who inspires such love.

35By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:35)

*There is a well-known promise in John 13:35. He says, “By this everybody will know that you are My disciples, that you are My representatives. They will know you represent Me* ***when*** *you love this way.” Again it is not just four or five friends having fun and entertainment together, and they all happen to be Christians. Fellowship is so much more than that. Though it sounds like I am down on that, I am not. But I do not want to limit love and fellowship to four or five buddies hanging out together, and they all happen to be born-again, but they do not really move forward in God, and together they do not bring other people forward.*

*Beloved, if you have three or four friends you hang out with a lot, you need to take seriously that you have a mandate. If He put you in south Kansas City for three months or three years or whatever, you are here to help make the Father known in this city, and that means loving people that you would not naturally hang out with, if you were not inspired by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “When you love this way, not only will it work a certain spiritual dynamic in you that will change you and make you strong, but when you love this way, you will discover more about Me. I will surprise you by revealing how I love you when you set your heart to love this way.”*

*He says in verse 35 that unbelievers will conclude that the God of Jesus is actually a Father. Unbelievers will take a step back, and they will witness the way the stronger ones intentionally and consistently honor the weaker ones who cannot help them. They will say, “Well, you know, I can understand a one-time outreach where you have one nice afternoon, and it’s great—good for you.” I am not talking about a one time, three-hour act of kindness, and that is it. I am talking about a people who dwell together where everyone in their midst is pursued and honored because the stronger ones see the glory and the value of this as giving testimony to the Father in our city and in our neighborhoods.*

*The unbelievers will look at it and they will go, “Wow, that is not natural to live and to love this way. They are not very fun to be with, those people you are reaching out to. How can they help you? They are not entertaining. They are not fun. They do not bring you money. They do not bring you influence. They do not open doors for you. They do not do anything. Why are you doing this so consistently?”*

*“Because the Father has inspired me,” He said. Jesus said that when people see this, they will conclude that God is a Father. That God is real, but He is more than real—He is actually a Father—is what He is saying. They will know you are My representatives, that you represent what I stand for, and that is to make the Father known. They will say there is only one answer. The unbelievers will conclude, “There must be a supernatural being with a Father's heart inspiring them because they would never stay steady for so many years doing this.”*

*Now there is nothing notable about friends being nice to friends. Jesus said in Matthew 5:46, “Even the sinners are nice to sinners when they like the same stuff and they hang out together” (paraphrased). He says, in effect, “That is not bad, but there is no message in that.”*

*Nobody stops when four guys who all like the same sports, music, hobbies, whatever, whatever, whatever—they all like the same thing—hang out together. If they were not in the kingdom, they would still be hanging out together. There is no message in that. Nobody looks at that and says, “Wow, that is awesome.”*

*Jesus said that the tax gathers do that. He said that what has a message in it is when they are not those to whom you are naturally attracted without the Spirit, and though they do not respond rightly, you keep reaching out to them together. Twos and threes of you keep going after them.*

*I believe one of the most neglected “mission fields” in the kingdom of God is the Body of Christ. Now again I am operating off this hypothetical number of thirty percent that I believe nobody pursues ever, for decades. These believers, though they started off zealous, you know, after five years, ten years, twenty years, they have lost so much ground in the Spirit that they feel filled with pain, they feel hopeless, they are in despair, they see no reason to even go forward. The Lord says, “I want to recover them.” Now there are a number of neglected mission fields out there, but I want to just to draw attention today, not as the only mission field but as the mission field of the neglected members of the Body of Christ.*

*What you must* ***not*** *do is to hear this with a sense of entitlement like, “Well, praise God, finally somebody is going to start loving me.” I am not telling you that finally somebody is going to start loving you. I am telling* ***you*** *to start loving people. You think, “Well, I am one of the weak ones.” Well, you will get stronger by starting the process.*

*The strong will get stronger by doing this,* ***and******the weak*** *will get stronger by doing this. So I am not wanting to give anyone a sense of entitlement. Are you going to sit back on row eight and wait until somebody finally makes you feel important? No, you commit that you are going to start on that pastoral function to people in the Body of Christ and outside as well. We will get to the subject of outside, really soon—I mean witnessing to unbelievers. There is a tremendous recovery that must happen on the inside of the Church as well.*

* 1. One of Jesus’ greatest prophecies is that He will build the Church as spiritual families that are committed to the first and second commandments. Jesus’ top priority is to build His Church. The Church is God’s idea, not man’s. He is returning for a deeply connected Church filled with glory.

18“I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:18-19)

*In Matthew 16, Jesus gives one of the only prophecies in the whole Bible directly about the Church. He says, “I am building a Church.” Then He says, “And I am going to build a Church that is going to prevail over the authority of Satan.” That is what He is saying here in verse 16. The “gates of Hades” means “the gates of hell,” which means “the authority of Satan.” He says, in effect, “I am in a building program. I am going to build spiritual families—a couple hundred here, or a couple thousand over there—and among them everybody will be pursued and honored, and the strong ones will feel the responsibility to bring the weak ones into a sense of belonging and importance. It will be so staggering that unbelievers will be struck by it, but it will also be the place of safety and power for the people of God in that dynamic.” Jesus said, “I am building a Church.”*

*Now in the last probably twenty years—I have been pastoring for thirty-five plus years, and the first ten or fifteen years the Church was pretty popular, in the 1970's and 80's, but in about the last twenty years in the Western world the Church has not been popular any longer. It went out of style. It is not cool to be deeply committed to a local church, but I have good news for you—Jesus is building a Church, and He has a tremendous recovery program that is going to succeed fully.*

*He is coming back for a Church deeply connected, with everybody pursued in value, and the strong ones taking the initiative. They are taking their four or five good friends and, instead of hanging out together “us four and no more,” they are taking responsibility and going out together saying, “We are going to get those others to bring them into the realization of the Father's heart.”*

*And, we are going to do it with unbelievers too. Again that is a big subject, a very important subject.*

* + 1. Jesus promised to release His authority to *bind* the works of the enemy and to *loose*,or release, the works of God.
    2. The phrase *gates of Hades* speaks of Satan’s authority. Jesus promised that the power or authority of hell would not prevail against His people when they function as kingdom communities, or spiritual families (local churches). Imagine a people in whom the enemy has no inroads and where each believer is walking free of demonic influence in their life and in their family.
    3. The condition for the fullness of this promise is that His people function as spiritual families. God has ordained the local church as a place of the greatest power, blessing, protection, and safety. He is changing the understanding and expression of the Church across the nations. The promise of a victorious Church operating in power is in the context of God building the local church, in which the strongest ones pursue the weakest.

*Jesus said in Matthew 16:19, “I will give you the keys, or the authority, to bind the works of the devil and to release the works of God” (paraphrased). So verse 19 is a very popular and famous verse because God gives the authority, or the keys, to stop the bad things—to bind them—and release the good things—to loose them.*

*Many people focus on verse 19 because it is glorious: it is the power of God, it is the favor of God, it is the blessing of God. But here is that part we must not neglect. Jesus promised the power in verse 19* ***in context to*** *the building of the local church in verse right before, in verse 18, “I will build My Church.”*

*We cannot separate the power—the promise of power—in verse 19 from the context of people being committed to one another and, again, not just the strong to the strong, not just the cool ones with the cool ones. It is the strong ones reaching those who have no other way to make it. He says that is where His power will be manifest—in that context.*

*Some people, when they are training for ministry, have a dream of a big ministry and great power. But let me tell you, the dream in Jesus' heart was not merely to have a big ministry and great power. It was to build a family under the Father. The Holy Spirit wants us to use the power and the ministry to build a family, not to separate it.*

*So I talk to young people, and I say, “You need to add to your dream to operate in power, a dream to help build spiritual families in whatever city God puts you.” Again I am not just talking about a small, little cluster of four or five people who like the same things, who hang out together and just have fun—which is not bad at all; that is a cool thing to do. I like the people that I like. I mean, that is really fun; it is not negative at all—but beloved, our mandate is far beyond that. Again, there are spiritual dynamics that happen in us when we reach out beyond our comfort level. Jesus’ top priority is the building of the Church.*

*Could you imagine a couple thousand people living like this? I mean, it is going to happen all over the earth. Groups of a couple hundred people—whatever, it does not matter what the number is, but it is more than five or ten—who are operating as a spiritual family, and they are dwelling together and the gates of Hades, the oppression of Satan, have no inroads in any of their lives. Could you imagine a couple thousand people where nobody in the midst of them is oppressed by devil? Well, that is what Matthew 16:19 promises, but it is in context to the verse 18, the family of God.*

*The local church is the God-ordained place for the greatest power, the greatest blessing, and the greatest protection in the Body of Christ. The greatest place of power and protection is where we dwell together intentionally, building a family that loves in this way. It is loving in the mundane, the routine. It is bigger than just hanging out and having fun; I am talking about something far more powerful than that.*

* 1. The fullness of God’s purpose and power can only be experienced as the Body of Christ functions together. Walking in our full destiny, individually and corporately, is connected to our pursuing weak people in love.

18…to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height…  
19to know [experience and express] the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:18–19)

*Here is the point of this: Ephesians 3:18-19. Paul is telling us that the fullness of God—the full purpose of God—can only be experienced when all the saints dwell together (verse 18). We cannot experience the fullness if the saints are separated from one another. So he says in verse 18 that when all the saints are operating together—that is talking about all the saints in different local congregations, not all the saints in the whole earth, but all those that He has put you together with—when they are dwelling together in love, that is where the love is manifest (verse 19).*

* 1. The ***width*** of love speaks of embracing each type of person and personality in every nationality.   
     The ***length*** of love speaks of reaching far beyond our failure in this life and continuing forever. The ***depth*** of love points to how far Jesus descended and what it cost Him to save us (Phil. 2:8). The ***height*** of love speaks of the measure of exaltation that we receive in His grace (Rev. 3:21).
  2. One aspect of God’s love is only revealed to us as we give to others; another aspect is only revealed to us when we receive from others. Much is lost in our spiritual life (and in the life of our children) if we forsake assembling together and instead embrace a “churchless Christianity.”

25…not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb. 10:25)

*Hebrews 10:25 exhorts us not to forsake assembling together. Again, in the last twenty years, it has become somewhat popular in the Western world to forsake gathering together where the Church functions as a family together. I want to urge our IHOPU students and our interns—these twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two-year-olds, not married, no children—I want them to get a dream that is according to what Jesus said, where they are going to raise their families in context of the local church and have their children grow up with the value of the local church because it is God's plan; it is not man's plan. We have messed it up, but Jesus is going to recover it.*

*Beloved, it is critical. I am talking to the students now. You are not even married. You do not have children, but one day many of you will. When your children are four or five, everything will be fine. But when those children are eighteen and nineteen, they have to be in a dynamic relationship where they are giving in a costly way to other people besides a few of their friends, or they will not be spiritually strong and stable. They have to be receiving from people besides their three or four friends, or they will not have the love of God in the full way God wants. Then a few years will go by, and they will be twenty-five, they will be thirty-five, they will be forty-five, and they will not be equipped to stand if they do not grasp what the Church is. So I want to send our young folks back home with a revelation of the beauty of Jesus and the glory of His spiritual family.*

*Amen and amen, let's stand. I want to encourage you to do two things. First, to say “Yes, Lord” to this pastoral calling on every single person's life by virtue of the command to love one another—that is a pastoral calling. You say, “Okay, it is more than us four and no more and a few of our friends—I am actually going to take responsibility for some people in my neighborhood, on my campus. Okay, I have got a mind to do that.” I want all of you to say yes to the Lord to that in just a moment, if you want to; it is biblical.*

*Second, the young people—I encourage you to determine, “I am going to raise my family and build my family in the context of the Church.” I know it is not popular now, but it is going to have a comeback in a fierce way, and it is going to come back soon. You are saying in your heart, “I am going to do what Jesus said.” Okay, I am going to lead you in prayer.*