



DIFFERENCE MAKER • NEW HOPE CHURCH

Love in Action

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Good morning, New Hope. My name is Brett Berzio, and I am the executive administrator here at New Hope, which is really just a fancy term for trying to make sure things run smoothly, or at least run. I am very excited to be with you here this morning. In fact, I really feel like I should be talking with you about grace, as I am afraid I will be asking much of it from you.

When Rusty first asked me to think about giving one of the messages in this Difference Makers series, he really should have had his phone at the ready to take a picture of my face, because I'm quite certain there were funny contortions of all types. I told him I would pray about it. And then as I was looking at some of the message titles in this series, I saw one that said, this is bigger than you. So it's not about you, Berzio. But what it is about is love and action. And I honestly love this message because it truly sums up why God sent his son Jesus into this world. to die for our sins up on the cross. It was truly love in action. You see, Jesus modeled for us a love that requires action.

Let's take a look at our first scripture today. This is John 15, 12 through 17. This is my commandment. Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you slaves because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for using my name. This is my command. Love each other.

You know, it wasn't until recently that I read that last verse and I realized that Jesus is emphasizing that we love one another as the church. As followers of Jesus, we are commanded to love one another. It's an important distinction to understand. Yes, we are also called to love our neighbors as ourselves. But we do that best by honing that love for one another here today, this morning.

One of the hats that I wear here at New Hope is managing some of the volunteer teams who week in and week out exemplify this love and action that Jesus is talking about. I want to give you a few examples of that love.

You know, when we drive in every Sunday morning, we're met by our parking volunteers who guide us to a spot, walk us safely across the street, oftentimes in pouring rain like last Sunday, in the brutal heat and in the chilling cold of winter. That is loving one another.

And then as we come to the front door, we're met by our greeters. with a warm smile, sometimes a hug, wishes of a good morning and maybe a how are you doing today. This is loving one another.

If you're a first-time guest or even a regular attender that has questions about really anything, when you come into our lobby, you'll see our guest services hosts there, ready to answer those questions and connect with our first-time guests and guide them through the service. This is loving one another.

And then as you go into the atrium, you'll find hot water for tea, sodas, coffee, even decaf. And I have to admit that I do not understand the purpose of decaf, but it's there. There are clean tables and countertops. And this is all our hospitality team volunteers loving you and loving one another.

just before you enter the auditorium, you'll be greeted by one of our ushers. We'll have a take-home sheet for you and to look if you have needing any seating issues, looking out for you. This is loving one another.

And as you are listening to me now, enjoying the videos up on the screens here in the atrium, being led by the Spirit with our worship team, enjoying the pictures on our website and social media, you are experiencing the love of our technical team volunteers and our worship team volunteers. These are volunteers who not only volunteer to be here both services on Sunday mornings, but also Wednesday evenings for rehearsals so that our time here in worship is seamless. This is loving one another.

As we gather here every Sunday, our security and medical volunteer teams are with us and our families, keeping us safe behind the scenes with loving vigilance. This is loving one another.

Parents, we have our children in service with us today because of the holiday. But I know that there are times where we come into services on Sunday for some desperately needed me time. And trust me, I know what that means, being a father of five and a grandfather of nine. But what that does mean, however, is that there is an entire army of children's ministry volunteers back there with our children, many of whom are parents themselves, teaching our children about God's unending love for them in this our time of worship and respite. This church is loving one another.

Did you know that on any given Sunday, it takes an average of 107 volunteers for us to run our Sunday services? And that number goes up to an average of 127 volunteers used through any given week for all of our other non-Sunday activities. And if you include all of the unique volunteer teams here at New Hope, including Celebrate Recovery, Unbound, Lay Counseling, Takeover for our students, our prayer team, our leadership team, finance team, small group leaders, journey group leaders, Grief Share, Divorce Care, Holland Connect, Crossbeam, and forgive me because I know I'm probably leaving something out. But if you include all of our teams here at New Hope that volunteer, there are 368 uniquely placed volunteers. It's truly an amazing thing to watch week in and week out as our volunteers give the love and receive the love here at New Hope. This is love in action.

So let me ask you a question that I asked myself a few years ago. Why and how could I possibly volunteer when I feel so, and you all can fill in the blanks here with your own doubts. How can I possibly volunteer when I feel so tired, busy, ashamed, broken, unqualified, shy, introverted? To which the Lord graciously and

patiently answered me by saying, If you're looking for a way to feel physically, mentally, and spiritually better, love one another. And we'll see this in our second scripture verse today in Proverbs 11.25. Proverbs 11.25 says, the generous will prosper. Those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.

So let's start with the physical and mental benefits of volunteering. I found this while doing some research. This is from the Mayo Clinic in Cleveland. Volunteering reduces stress and increases positive relaxed feelings by releasing dopamine. By spending time in service to others, volunteers report feeling a sense of meaning and appreciation, both given and received, which can have a stress-reducing effect. Reduced stress further decreases the risk of some physical and mental health problems such as heart disease, stroke, depression, anxiety, and general illness. In addition, people who volunteer have lower mortality rates than those who do not, even when controlling for age, gender, and physical health.

Isn't it interesting that volunteering releases dopamine into our systems? And for those who don't know what dopamine is, and this is from an organization called Mental Health America, dopamine is a transmitter released by brain neurons when you do something enjoyable or beneficial. Neurotransmitters send messages through your nervous system, and dopamine's message is, this is great. Let's remember this and do it again sometime. I love that definition.

And I personally have seen this in action. For the past 34 years, I worked at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts as a theater manager. And in that time, I observed legions of volunteers often working into and serving into their 70s, 80s, and 90s. Most of the volunteers I spoke with over that time, and especially those in their 80s and 90s, would tell me that volunteering at the center was the one of the most important health factors in keeping them going every week. They just felt better getting up and out and being part of the good work being done. And I have, in my time here at New Hope, observed exactly the same thing with our volunteers here.

As to feeling spiritually better, I'd like to start with an example Jesus gave us through his miracle at the wedding at Cana. This was the time Jesus went to the wedding and Mary, his mother, came and told him that they had run out of wine. Jesus told the servants to take these large stone pots and fill them with water and then take them to the head waiter to give to the guests. Have you ever thought who actually received the blessings of that miracle? It wasn't really the head waiter. or the guests, or the wedding party, although it was described as being very, very good wine. No, it was the servants who knew what Jesus had done, and it was the servants who received the blessing.

Jesus spoke about another wedding feast in a parable in Luke 14, 8 through 11. He said, when you were invited to a wedding feast, don't sit in the seat of honor. What if someone is more distinguished than you has also been invited? Then you will be embarrassed, and you will have to take whatever seat is left at the foot of the table. Instead, take the lowest place at the foot of the table. Then, when your host sees you, he will come and say, friend, we have a better place for you. Then you will be honored in front of the other guests. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

You see, when we humble ourselves by serving one another, there are blessings. We see this in Jesus' example of washing the apostles' feet. After doing so, he told the apostles in John 13, 14 through 17, 'And

since I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. I tell you the truth. Slaves are not greater than their master, nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.'

And if that wasn't enough, Jesus let us know through the gift of the Holy Spirit in John 14, 27. I am leaving you with a gift, peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is the gift a world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.

And yet, even though we hear these words spoken by Jesus himself, not to be troubled or afraid, it's okay when we are. He understands. He has always understood when we're troubled and afraid. It's okay to have doubts. God will honor them and you and provide a way forward.

Our final verse helps us with that dilemma and is something we can hold on to when it comes to love and action. Psalm 50, 15 says, then call on me when you are in trouble and I will rescue you and you will give me glory.

You know, the Bible is absolutely filled with people who had doubts about what God was calling them to do. Rusty, a few weeks ago, was talking about Gideon and his struggles to feel worthy to do what God was calling. Moses had tremendous doubts about his abilities to lead the nation of Israel out of Egypt. At the burning bush, when God told Moses he was sending him to Pharaoh, this is Moses' response. This is Exodus 3.11. But Moses protested to God, who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people out of Egypt? And then a little later in Exodus 4.1, what if they won't believe me or listen to me? What if they say, the Lord never appeared to you? And then his final desperate plea, and this one I have used personally many, many times myself. In Exodus 4.10, Oh Lord, I'm not very good with words. I never have been and I'm not now. Even though you have spoken to me, I get tongue-tied and my words get tangled. I am so with Moses on this one.

But honestly, my personal favorite doubter is hands down my brother Jonah. God calls Jonah to get up and go to this great city of Nineveh. And in Jonah 1.3 it says, But Jonah got up, now he did get up, and he went in the opposite direction to get away from the Lord. He went down to the port of Joppa, where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket and went on board, hoping to escape from the Lord by sailing to Tarshish.

I'm gonna tell you a few stories about myself. I have been a runner for most of my life, and I am not talking about 5Ks, 10Ks, or marathons. No, my running days started actually just up the way at Belvedere Elementary in kindergarten, just off of Columbia Pike. I found myself one day feeling completely overwhelmed by kindergarten. And yes, you can let that sink in that I was completely overwhelmed by kindergarten. So I asked the teacher if I could go to the bathroom and I went out that door and I ran for the nearest exit. It took me what seemed like an eternity to get home. I was hiding behind cars and bushes and trees. And when I finally got home to the sweet, sweet respite of my house, Do you know what my mother did? She plopped me back in the car, drove me back to school so that I could be educated on all the things

that I had just done wrong. Now isn't that just like what God did with Jonah? And trust me, sitting in Principal Oakes' office with my mother and my teacher did indeed feel like being in three days in the belly of the fish.

I wish I could tell you that I learned from that experience, but my running days were not over. In high school and in college, I ran in the opposite direction from the Lord and made all kinds of bad decisions. But the Lord kept scooping me back up out of all of those doubts that made me run, teaching me patiently, waiting to get things through my sick Berzio skull.

Last time I ran away from the Lord was when my daughter Pauline went to be with him at age 13. I ran away from my family, and yet, he still scooped me back up. And while I have never really deserved the love, the grace, and the blessings that he has showered on me through all of my doubts and fears, Church, I can only tell you from my experience that God has always honored my doubts and me. He has rescued me time after time and placed me on magnificent paths forward.

A few years ago, I started to attend Rusty's small group at 6 a.m. in the morning, Wednesdays. And trust me, I had doubts about that start time. because back then I was still working at the center. I was coming home frequently at midnight, sometimes later. But I started volunteering to come in and make the coffee and help with the setup. And God has since blessed me with the deepest connection of godly, amazing men that I have ever known.

After that, I started volunteering here as a greeter, sometimes as a host and hospitality most Sundays, which led me again to developing the most beautiful relationships with volunteers here at New Hope. I have a beautiful family. I have a beautiful job. But it wasn't until I started putting love into action that I found all of the blessings that God had waiting for me.

On your take-home sheet, there are three takeaways that I would like to go over real quick. These are things that I have intentionally done in my own life recently, and I am recommending to you.

First, start every day by asking God how you might honor him by actively loving others. Church, when you look through life with this lens, it just immediately puts you on a straight path forward. It focuses you first and foremost on him. How can I honor you, Lord, in my speech towards others, in my actions toward others, in my thoughts toward others? When other people are in need, how can I honor you? When the person in front of me is just flat out being mean and nasty, how can I honor you in my response? How can I love my brothers and sisters in Christ here. How can I love my neighbors and honor you in that? Because you see, when we honor him, we are loving him. What did Jesus say to the Pharisee lawyer who asked him which is the greatest commandment? He said, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your soul. This is the greatest commandment. And the second is just like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. We love God first. And then we love others in the same way that he loves us.

The second takeaway is explore the health benefits of volunteering and be refreshed. God works in amazing and mysterious ways, folks. Yes, I understand that I am asking you to think about getting out there and doing some things that are taking you out of some very comfortable comfort zones. But do you know what we're going to be doing When Christ returns, we are going to be volunteering. One of my absolutely favorite

verses in the Bible as a manager of volunteers is Psalm 110.3. And this is the New American Standard Version. It says, thy people will volunteer freely in the day of thy power. In holy array from the womb of the dawn, thy youth are to thee as the dew. Do you know that when Jesus comes again in the day of his power, we are all literally going to be lined up freely with endless excitement to volunteer with whatever he asks us to do? I mean, as a manager of volunteers, goosebumps.

And the third takeaway is this. Don't buy into the lie that because you are broken, you can't serve. I think this is the most important takeaway. And honestly, if you don't remember anything else I say this morning, please remember this. And don't buy into Satan's lies that you can't serve because of who you are or where you are, how broken, useless, and weak you feel. It is a flat-out lie. The Apostle Paul knew this all too well. This is what God told him in 2 Corinthians 12, 9. My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness. And then Paul continues, so now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, I am strong. Amen.

Church, he does his best work for us when we are at our weakest because it is when we are at our most humble. It pains me to say that I spent decades of my Christian walk listening to those lies that I couldn't possibly do things because I felt so broken and weak and not useful. And yet, as I began to step out in faith, little by little, loving action by loving action, I stand before you doing something this morning that I still can't believe I'm doing right now. Because he's using my weakness for his glory. So I'm gonna say it again, don't buy into the lie that you can't serve because you're broken. you can serve, and you will find such beauty and love and peace in it.

As you walk out of service today, you'll see our Difference Makers table set up in front of the fireplace. Please stop by and see what the needs are, because they are many. Pray about it and seek how you might honor him by loving one another. Because again, there is such tremendous joy and peace and love waiting for those who are willing to step out in faith to be a person who puts their love into action.

Let's pray. Father God, we just thank you for your presence here this morning. We thank you for your patience with us. We thank you for knowing all of our doubts and our troubles. We thank you for always gently guiding us back. Father, there are those here today with us who are struggling with those doubts and those fears. Lord, I just ask that you would just shower them with your presence and your love. Father, open their eyes and their hearts and their ears. to your gentle voice, showing them a path forward, showing them how they can love you and love others. Father, we just praise you for the word that you've given to us. We thank you for providing others for us to love in the way that you've loved us. In Jesus' name, amen.