

September 6, 2026
Paul Purdue preaching

In 1948, my mom, Joann Sims graduated from high school. She had walked across the same neighbors' farm fields for 12 years to the only school she knew. On Sundays she rode a mule to Rockbridge Baptist Church, sometimes she and her sister Margarette shared one saddle. Her church could not afford a full-time pastor so every three years a few deacons rode to Louisville to recruit a new seminary student from the Southern Baptist Seminary. Despite having no running water, her family often fed the preacher Sunday dinner: fried chicken in the summer and chicken and dumplings in the winter. Lunch was full of slow deliberate conversation. When the preacher had children my grandfather saddled a pony and led the children around the pasture.

Her father, Ark, never finished third grade, but he and Clackie saved enough to send their two girls to college for a year. Mom earned a teaching certification, then her bachelors and finally a Masters. Despite never traveling more than an hour from home, mom decided to be a Student Summer Missionary, teaching Bible School and helping plant a church in Bonner Springs Kansas.

Mom never encouraged me to do summer missions, I did not know she had even done them until I spent a summer in Minnesota and Wisconsin moving from spare guestroom to the dreaded fold-out couch, teaching Bible school, knocking on doors and trying to win Lutherans to Jesus. Yikes!

I am embarrassed to admit that my mom carefully packed the huge trunk that I lived out of all summer. Mom neatly folded and arranged everything in that trunk. Almost immediately I realized mom had tucked 77 little notes into the folds of my clothes. One note deep in my luggage contained a crisp 100 bill and a note *"Paul I sure hope you are not throwing these notes away! Love Mom!"* Another note stuck with me *"Paul I'm praying that you might be a vessel, a pipe, a tube allowing Jesus to flow through you into the world."* I laughed at my mom's clumsy wording *"Be a tube for Jesus!"* but her prayer stuck with me.

Be a tube for Jesus: allow the love of God to fill you and move through you to nourish the world. Mom's tube image is pretty Wesleyan: the early Methodist loved to quote Romans 5, *"The love of God has been spread abroad in our hearts"* Be a tube of "living water" bubbling up to eternal life (John 7) .

If we think of God as a judge or a tyrant, we will never open our souls enough to be filled with love. *"We love because God loved us".* (1 John 4) If we picture God as mad at us or angry at the world, we lose our connection to the source of Love.

Hear the Good News: God is Love, God's character is Love. 1 John 4 declares *"So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them."* Romans 8 tells us that *"nothing in all of creation can separate us from the Love of God given to us in Christ Jesus"* Moses declares *"The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin"* (Exodus 34) The Psalms sings of the Lord's steadfast love over 120 times. Jesus describes God as merciful and compassionate even to the ungrateful and wicked. (Luke 6) When our prayers, worship, communion and theology are rooted and grounded in an understanding of God's love, then we are liberated from fear and able to love ourselves and our neighbors more fully.

(1 John 4)

Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 invites us into God's boundless love . *"I pray that the God of all glory may strengthen and empower you through the Holy Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."* Imagine a Love beyond your imagination.

Be open to Love. Let God's Love heal you, renew, root and ground you.

If my mom had said, be a nalgene bottle for Jesus, she would have capped the flow of God's love. A bottle can only hold so much, but a tube always has room for more love to pass through it. When we let the Love of God pass through us, we make more room for God's love. When we bottle up or try to soak up love, in time it grows stagnant. Moving water, living water, does not grow stagnant. Love is always renewing us, as it moves through our souls.

"Don't be in debt to anyone, except for the obligation to love each other. Whoever loves another person has fulfilled the Law. The commandments, Don't commit adultery, don't murder, don't steal, don't desire what others have, and any other commandments, are all summed up in one word: You must love your neighbor as yourself. Love doesn't do any harm to a neighbor; therefore, love is what fulfills the Law." (Romans 13)

Most of us do not like an obligation. Progressives seek freedom from legalism. Some evangelicals treat grace as if God does not care how we live if we say the right things. Paul says we have an obligation to love: Love is to be our way of life. God created us to love others. Love is part of our manufacturer's design specifications and maybe part of our warranty. Love is to be our way of life. This obligation, this lifestyle, this way of being, somehow renews us,

When we pass the peace of Christ, we feel the Peace of Christ within us.
 When we are kind, kindness blossoms in us
 When we are merciful, mercy heals our souls
 When we offer compassion, God weaves deeper compassion in us.
 When we feed hungry people, we enter a holy feast.
 When we clothe others, we better understand better what matters in life.
 When we visit the imprisoned, we find Christ is there with us .
 When we deeply listen, we often hear from God.
 When we give without expectation of reward, we find liberation from things.
 When we welcome strangers, we find we are not alone.
 When we are present with others, we find others are present with us.
 When we offer healing words, healing takes root in us.
 When we forgive, we make room for forgiveness, even forgiving ourselves.
 When we love without expecting rewards, greater love grows within us.

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 We are vessels, conduits, tubes. Do not bottle or store up God's love, give it away. God designed us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Be a tube allowing the Love of God to flow through you into weary neighbors. Let Love be your way of life
 Amen.