I LOVE MY CHURCH . . . WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

 Last week we talked about loving our church--how we can’t love our church properly until we love THE church correctly and how Jesus’ love is intentional. Since we know that to be true, our love must be intentional as well. But what does that look like? We are called by God to be *functioning* members in a local body. However, we can belong to every church in the community, but what makes the difference is being a blood-bought soul whose name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. We are members of Christ’s church by a new and living way described in [Hebrews 10:19-25](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+10%3A19-25&version=NKJV). It tells us that human connection is important but the salvation of and connection to Christ is necessary to be a part of the church. [Ephesians 5:25-27](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+5%3A25-27&version=NKJV) tells us something of extraordinary importance. The first part of the passage regarding husbands is a wonderful passage for review another day. For now, it is the second part—“Just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, **26**that He might [[a](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+5%3A25-27&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-29331a)] sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word”—that makes clear His love is intentional and, therefore, so must ours be.

 In [Matthew 4:19](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+4%3A19&version=NKJV), we see the disciples being called fishers of men. We get to be a part of this calling—to a place of family, friendships, personal development, accountability, sense of community, support, encouragement, and an opportunity to make a difference. As believers and part of the church, we are called by intentional love and called to intentional love. Serving and reaching out to others for Christ is the responsibility of every believer. Since Christ gave himself for her—The Church, we can certainly give ourselves to her.

 Intentional love is an investment, serving in love and sacrifice. Look back with me at our Gospel reading today: [Mark 1:14-22](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+1%3A14-22&version=NKJV). I love fishing; you all know that. But fishing for people is a way of life. It’s a serious business. It’s investing, sharing. Christian love is the most effective apologetic. My very first Christian mentor, Mark Chase, told me early on to “always have a Paul in my life and always have a Timothy.” Intentional love reaches across generational and socio-economic lines. Demographics of this church reveal that its membership is predominantly older. Oh, yes, we have a wonderful youth pastor, and he leads a worthy program for our youth. But the make-up of our church membership makes clear that we have an opportunity—actually, an obligation to reach out. It is the responsibility of the believer to reach,

to invest, to share, to love intentionally. And we must remember that intentional love isn’t afraid to get its hands dirty! We have so many dedicated, faithful, loving people who serve in love and sacrifice: As [Colossians 3:23-24](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+3%3A23-24&version=NKJV) confirms, “It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.” And we have real worth in His Kingdom, as [Ephesians 2:10](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+2%3A10&version=NKJV) reminds us. We are, indeed, His workmanship, and we are, as Paul writes there, “created in Christ for good works.” What this means for us is a wondrous blessing: When we effectively love our church, we engage in ministry. As we grow spiritually, so does our participation in God’s church. When we invest in the ministries of the church, we experience God. We learn to look for, to seek opportunities to make a difference in a new and loving way. For our church family here at Shepherd, this individual believer’s change in attitude means developing a heart to serve. Here we need greeters to welcome folks when they arrive at the parking lot. We need volunteers in all the new children’s and teen’s classes we have. We need volunteers for VBS. We need to see ourselves reaching across generations to invest in our children. We need actively to welcome families. We need more participants in the prayer team, in the small groups, in the nursery. The opportunities to serve Christ here are endless. But the service must come from intentional love.

 Let me share something God showed me this week as a wonderful reminder: [1 Chronicles 29:10-16](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Chronicles+29%3A10-16&version=NKJV). In this passage, King David prays about the Temple of God, giving God glory and honor. Look at the last part of verse 16. There we receive a reminder that all we do, our worship, our time, our serving, our investing in others, our giving of our talents, resources, and gifts—ALL we have is from HIS hand. All is His.

If each of us share an in intentional love, reaching and serving, imagine the impact in our community, the Kingdom. Intentional love gets its hands dirty. Intentional love encourages believers with love and good deeds.

**When we commit with intentional love to serve The Church, this is not works-based faith but faith-based works.**