

Good morning. My name is Tim Basselin. My family has been attending Catalyst for a little over a year. I'm a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary where I teach about theology and art and I also help get students involved in serving people in Dallas.

Do y'all remember the party we had at Texas Skatium at the beginning of November to celebrate our church's first 10 years? That was pretty fantastic, wasn't it? God loves it when we pause and remember and celebrate what God has done. When the Israelites crossed over the Jordan and came into the Holy Land for the first time, God told them to set up stones there as a monument, so that every time they passed that spot for generations to come they could tell their children about how God had freed them from slavery and brought them to this land of milk and honey. Throughout the Old Testament, God calls people to remember and to celebrate. In fact, many of ancient Israel's laws were about how to celebrate well!

We're following that party with three Sundays to both remind us of our calling as a church over the last 10 years and to imagine what that calling should look like for the next 10 years. Just three Sundays. Sometimes when I'm teaching, I make impossible assignments that require students to summarize an entire book in one page or to explain the trinity in a couple of paragraphs. Of course, all that needs to be said can't be said, but the limitation is a good discipline, because the limitation requires focus. To put it all onto one page, the students can only get across what is essential. More importantly, though, I have less to grade.

Just three Sundays to remind us of our calling as a church and to imagine what that calling should look like in the future. So the discussion has been narrowed. [VISION slide] We have a vision statement: **Catalyst creates spaces where everyone can embrace their God-given calling.** And we're seeing how that vision is worked out in relation to three guiding words that have been our past and will guide us into our future. Last week Sue talked to us about Love. Today, we're talking about Serve. And next week we'll hear about Grow.

[Images of the two "orders"] I don't want to make too much of the order of these sermons, but I think their order is worth noting, because where we begin matters. Love → Serve → Grow. Beginning with love might seem a little odd; perhaps you've been in a church before that would begin with Grow, which would be understood as learning more about God. Maybe then they'd move to service, which would begin with volunteering at the church. And then maybe love at the end as something we learn about and then try to practice and then maybe feel. Grow → Serve → Love is actually a pretty good church strategy, because it elevates the role of the church, of the professionals teaching the people what they should know, getting their doctrines straight. This is also known as Job Security for pastors. The first and most important thing is that you need the church to teach you something, to grow you, and once you're mature enough, then you'll start giving back. And finally, you may start feeling love for others.

Here at Catalyst, though, we're not so sure head knowledge can fix everything. We've encountered too many people that believed all the right beliefs but didn't live them out. So, instead of being a knowledge-first church, we are a love-first church. We simply believe that's what God the Father, God

the Son and God the Spirit is all about. There's a reason Jn 3:16 is the most famous verse in the Bible. "For God so loved the world that He (dot dot dot)"

And we are called to be a people who so love the world that we ... (dot dot dot)

Love precedes doing because love is the essence of who we are as humans. We were created to love God and one another. To love is to be what God created us to be: to love is to be human. To love is also to be what God is calling us to be: to love is to participate in the remaking of the world, to enact God's will on earth as it is in heaven.

And when we are fully free to be human, when we are free to love, service is the very natural result. "For God so loved the world that He sent His son..." God's love creates an action, a service to the other person.

You need only recall a first love and your willingness to do anything for that person. Anyone remember this song lyric from the Proclaimers?

"But I would walk 500 miles

And I would walk 500 more

Just to be the man who walked a thousand miles

To fall down at your door

da,da,la,dah. da, da, la, dah."

Love → serve → and finally grow. So out of love comes service to the other, then we'll hear more about Grow next week, but we believe growth occurs when our love gets put into action. Learning accomplishes little if it is only ideas. Where we truly learn and grow is when our love and service are surprisingly and gloriously returned by another person in the real world, or we can also learn, sadly, when our love and service run up against hatred and brick walls.

Love → Serve → Grow. It seems to me to be a very appropriate vision for the future of Catalyst.

[**Scripture Slide**] Today, we will focus on that middle one: serve. And our verse for today is found in Galatians 5:13-14. You can find that on page ??? of the Bibles in the back. If you don't have a Bible, you're welcome to use one of those and to keep it. Trust me, nothing would make us happier than to have to buy more Bibles to give away to people who don't have one. We're like Gideons in that regard. You know those Bibles in the nightstand of every hotel room? Well, people go around restocking those, and they're simply delighted when one is missing. So, please take one of those Bibles, if you'd like one.

Now, hold onto that page for a minute while we get a little background on Galatia.

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ed/Galatia_Map.svg] Christianity was very young when Paul wrote this letter to the people in Galatia. The Christian community at the time was still trying to figure out what it meant to follow Jesus. Jesus was a Jew. He and his family followed the laws of the Old Testament. They participated in all the festivals. They worshiped at the temple in Jerusalem, when

possible. They rested on the Sabbath. And Jesus' disciples were all Jewish. They all participated in the festivals, rested on the Sabbath, worshiped at the temple. This was their religion.

Paul, though, was called to make churches among the Gentiles, those who were not Jewish. When he established the church in Galatia, his message to them was that Christ would free them from their bondage to their previous gods, the Roman gods. A problem occurred, however, once Paul left to go establish more churches. New preachers came to Galatia and started telling the people, "Hey. To really grow and learn to love Jesus, you need to become like Jesus, you need to be Jewish, because Jesus was *obviously* a Jew. So you need to follow the rules. You need to do the festivals, rest on the Sabbath, and you need to be circumcised!" Christians today no longer say we need to become Jewish, but we do have sets of rules we are suppose to follow. We have lists of requirements for being good Christians, don't we? You need to have a certain amount of quiet time, you need to go on a certain amount of missions trips in your life.

When Paul heard about these other preachers, he recognized that their message was not the gospel at all, but was actually the opposite of the freedom that the gospel gave. Paul's argument against these other preachers builds and builds in the letter until it climaxes at the end of chapter 3, where we find this beautiful sentence: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

It's hard for us to even imagine the freedom this sentence spoke into a culture of such great divisions between Jews and Gentiles. Today we might speak of Christ reconciling the divisions between races in our country, truly reconciling - so that we may no longer have a need for a *black lives matter* campaign because everyone would understand that black lives matter. Or we might speak of Christ reconciling the divisions we have between conservatives and liberals, truly reconciling - so that something as miraculous as our congress working together to pass legislation for the common good might happen.

Although Paul's argument up to this point in Galatians has been about Jews and Gentiles, in this sentence he now applies the same argument to larger categories: males and females, slaves and owners. This sentence was a manifesto, a one-line revolution against hierarchies and the norms of society. It's a beautiful vision of equality in a time when hierarchy was unquestioned.

Paul also recognized, though, that the danger of such radical freedom, the danger with loving freely, is that we may just end up loving ourselves and serving our selfish desires. So Paul addressed this problem near the end of his letter, after he established the necessity of freedom. And that's where our verse is. Galatians 5:13-14 reads:

13 You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. 14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

So we're called to be free? yet our freedom should lead us to serve? Anyone else confused by this paradox. Paul says we are free to serve. And the language Paul is using here for serve isn't "can you please serve us some juice with breakfast." It's the language of slavery.

And that's how doing good deeds often feels to us, isn't it, like slavery? We tend to serve the poor or give money out of a sense of duty. God has given us so much, and we have a responsibility to give to others. We call it "giving back." In fact, we're told that Christ gave his life for us and so we should give our lives to others. Do your duty. If you're going to follow Jesus, then you need to do what he did.

Hmmm... sounds a little like the preachers that were telling the Galatians to become more Jewish, doesn't it?

Other times, the emotion we feel that prompts us to serve is guilt, that we're not doing enough to be worthy of God's love for us. So we guiltily try to earn God's favor.

But Paul says "serve one another humbly in love." He does not say serve out of duty, and he does not condemn us with guilt.

Still, how can we understand this paradox? How can we be free only to become slaves? I'd like to suggest that answering that question is the difference between beginning with religion, with all of its "knowing" the right things to do, and beginning with love.

So what does beginning with love look like? How does service flow out of love? Well, let's remember John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that whoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life." You see the flow there is correct. God so loved ... and out of that, he gave his only son.

Ok. but we're not God. So how about something a little more practical. Let's remember again your first love, or any young love. What did you want to do for that person? Anything they wanted, right? You just wanted to serve them, with little concern for what it cost you. Your service to them flowed out of your love.

Ok, but we all know young love is idealistic and not very trustworthy, right? And it led some of us to make some pretty stupid decisions. So let me give you another example.

I have a very distinct memory of the day I had the undeniable thought "Well, I'm a father now." Robin and I lived in a 500 sq ft apartment at the time and our first child, Risa, was about 18 months old. She'd had a fever and wasn't doing well. Risa and I were sitting on the floor outside of the bathroom, and I recognized the sudden facial change that meant she was about to throw up. As her abdomen heaved and her eyes got as big as saucers, I found myself holding out my cupped hands to catch her throwup. Everything changed for me in that moment. I was no longer higher or more important than this tiny person. I was now the bowl she threw up into. I was her servant.

Now you may change a baby's diaper out of duty or guilt, but you don't catch another person's throw up out of duty or out of guilt. You have to have been shaped by your love. I so loved my daughter that I ... (dot dot dot) caught her throwup. My response was not one I had time to reason my way into. It was not one I COULD have reasoned my way into. My response was not reasonable. And that's how I knew something had changed. I was a father now; and there was no going back. No matter what this little girl threw my way for the rest of her life ... I was going to be there to catch it.

Imagine how I'd feel if I had been taught my whole life to catch throw up and to be glad about it. What if I just went around catching people's throw up out of duty and doing it with a smile? How miserable would I be on the inside? How tired and weary?

BUT to serve out of love...? wow! that's completely different. There's a freedom in serving my daughter. It's the very natural result of truly loving her. The funny thing is that both of these ways of serving can look the same from the outside, but we know the difference on the inside, and we all know which one lasts and which one creates burnout.

As we imagine what Catalyst will look like in the next 10 years, we're not asking what we should be doing. We're not wondering what our duty is to our neighborhood. We're going to be asking what our loves are. "For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Each one of us is unique, and we're not all suppose to serve the same people or in the same way. God has made you how you are because there are things only you can do. If I try to do the stuff you're supposed to do, I'll just do it out of duty. And I'll hate it. And I'll get burnt out.

So the question is, what do you love? What's unique about how God made you? Do you just love talking with **elderly** people? Who's your neighbor then? Perhaps you should be visiting a nursing home every Saturday morning.

Or do you just love **canoeing**? Who's your neighbor then? People who like to camp? or maybe the raccoons. Or maybe you're supposed to care for the fish in a particular river.

Or maybe you're all about **gaming** and your neighbors are online. Are you loving them well?

Or maybe **Nascar**? How do you love cars that go round and round? I don't know. I don't get it. And that's the point. I don't even know how to change the oil in my minivan! I can't love those people the way you can.

So what do you love doing? Who has God made you to be? Now look around where you live and ask who your neighbor is. God is interested in pairing someone's needs with your loves.

Remember our new Vision Statement? **Catalyst creates spaces where everyone can embrace their God-given calling.** Your God-given calling has to do with your particular loves. Creating spaces for others to embrace their calling has to do with being hospitable. These are spaces not just in our church building, but they are spaces in nursing homes and they are spaces online, and spaces only canoes can get to, and *even* spaces around a racetrack. These hospitable spaces will be particularly important as Rowlett welcomes a large influx of new and different kinds of people to the city. We can all remember what it feels like to move to a new city or a new school. And we remember what it felt like when we found the hospitable space that Catalyst invited us into. Let's make sure we create the spaces that extend the same hospitality to our current and our future neighbors.

What will serving look like for Catalyst 10 years from now? We don't know yet. First, we have to name our loves. For some of us, our loves are so buried under duties that we'll have to discover our loves. Then as we find our loves, we'll look around Rowlett and ask where people's needs are that match what our loves are. And as we are listening to who God has made us to be, God will match us with people that need exactly what we have to offer. And through us, God will extend hospitable spaces to those people where He can love them just as He created them to be.

So that means we get to be his hands and his feet. Isn't that exciting? We get to walk 500 miles and walk 500 more! We get to be the cupped hands that catch the world's throw up!! Ok, so maybe those are not the best examples anymore. But all of us serving in different ways according to the loves God has placed in us and that ultimately find fulfillment in Him ... that is what it means to be the Body of Christ, to be one body, brought together to love and care for one another and to extend that love and care to the whole world. The world that God so loves that He... [dot, dot, dot] gives us!

I'd like to challenge you this week to spend some time considering your loves and what those loves make you want to do. To whom is God giving you with all your special talents and particular interests? Have a conversation this week with your C-Group or with someone you trust about what your loves are and how you might follow those loves into serving your neighbors.

We are going to end our service today by taking communion together. Communion is a celebration, a remembering of God's love for us in the act of giving his son for us. It is a hospitable table where we can rest in being who God has created us to be. If that sounds good to you, you are welcome to partake with us. This table is a monument we walk by regularly and remind one another of what God has done for us and is doing with us.

Jesus used this remembrance language at the Last Supper. As Paul reminds the Corinthians about how to take communion, he repeats Christ's words to them: (1 Cor 11:23) *"The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."*

It is because of God's love for us that he sent his son. And it is because of his son's death that we are free to love as we have been loved and to serve as we have been served. Remember his gift of love for you and allow that love to set you free today to serve others in love.

[Prayer of Consecration]

BENEDICTION, with this quote on the screen:

Catalyst: "Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in Love in a quite absolute, final way.

What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.

It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.

Fall in Love, stay in love, and it will decide everything."