

## **The One You Love**

**Series: *Love***

**John 11:1-5**

### **Pastor Groeschel**

Hey, LifeChurch, welcome today to all of our churches – our network churches, as well – those of you in countries all over the world at Church Online. You are in for an amazing treat. Before I introduce to you our guest speaker, I want to tell you, two weeks from now, we are starting the long-anticipated series of the year. Everybody loves *At the Movies*. I want to encourage you to think about who you can bring that normally wouldn't come to church to be in church two weeks from now, as we take popular movies and pull spiritual truths, starting two weeks from now, *At the Movies*.

Today, though, I want to introduce to you one of my very, very close friends – in my opinion, honestly, one of the best Bible teachers and communicators on the entire planet. He has an incredible book called *Jesus Is \_\_\_\_\_*, and I invited him to share a couple of messages from the Bible, based on his book. We're very honored to have my good friend. Would you show love and honor to Pastor Judah Smith?

### **Pastor Smith**

So good to be here, church! I trust all is well. And it is awesome to be here at LifeChurch, to say the very least. And I've got to say this, and I mean absolutely every

word of it. Pastor Craig Groeschel and the whole Groeschel family are heroes to my family. You've got to know that. And I know all the network churches and LifeChurch – Please understand the gift that you have been given, by God, in your pastor. You are so blessed.

The grass doesn't get any greener than LifeChurch, and hey, if you don't – Yeah, there you go. That's good. If you don't take care of your pastor, we will steal him. I'm just saying that. So, you take care of him and don't steal him, like you stole the Sonics. We won't steal him. But it really is a privilege to be here with you, and excited to share a thought with you, from Scripture, about the love of God, and I trust it'll be a real encouragement to you today.

Aren't you glad you go to a church where there's good news? We've got enough bad news today. We need some more good news, and today you're going to hear good news. If you came in discouraged, you're going to leave encouraged. If you came with your head down, you're going to leave with your head up. And we just believe, here at LifeChurch, that the best is yet to come. Your best days are ahead of you. Amen?

All right, turn with me to John chapter 11. If you have your Bible, that's great; if you don't, no worries. I'm going to read it to you. I believe, with all my heart, the Bible is God's Word. It's God's Book to humanity, and I believe that the main point of the whole

Book is God's love for humanity. And we're going to read a brief story here, just five verses, and see if we can apply it to our life today.

John chapter 11, verse 1, says:

**1** Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. **2** It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. **3** So the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, he whom You love is ill." **4** [Now] when Jesus heard it He said, "This illness does not lead to death. [It's] for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

**5** Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

We'll stop our reading there for today.

I want to title this message "The One You Love," "The One You Love." So, turn to the person next to you and say, "You are the one He loves." Even if you're not sure you believe it, just say, just encourage them, "You are the one He loves." Would you pray with me?

God, thank You so much for Your grace. In these moments, Lord, we need far more than information. We need to encounter You, in a real way. I pray You'd make this

matter moment in our everyday life. I pray, Lord, that we would see more and more of Your extraordinary goodness and love right now, in this moment. Thank You for Your grace. Thank You that You made me a Seattle Seahawk, and we are world champions. In Jesus' name, and everybody said ... Amen. I feel good already. Don't you feel good?

Have you ever heard anybody say, in the heat of the moment you end up saying stuff you don't mean? Have you ever heard anybody say that? Just four of you, fantastic. In the heat of the moment, they say, you say things you don't mean. I fundamentally disagree with that. I think, in the heat of the moment, you actually say things you really mean. I think when things intensify, and circumstances get difficult, and stressful, and complicated, I think what you really believe about life, what you really believe about God, what you really believe about yourself, somehow just seems to come to the surface and oftentimes slip through your lips.

Now, I had one of these situations in my life, at the beginning of my marriage. Now, I've been married for 14 years. I know that's shocking, because I look like a teenager, but, you know – You can shut up. But ... I've been married for 14 years, but three months into our marriage, we kind of had a heated situation. Right? It was probably, like, the last time we fought, but ...

But here's the deal: We got married – when I got married, I was 21. Can we all agree, that should be illegal? I mean, honestly, it should be illegal. You're not ready for

marriage. Two things you can never be ready for, you know what they are, right?

Marriage and kids, right?

Anybody who tells you they're ready for marriage, they're not ready. Anybody that tells you they're ready for kids, you're definitely not ready. Now, when you admit you're not ready, you might be ready, right? That's the key. You can't get ready for marriage.

And I love, like, growing up in church – I'm a seventh-generation preacher, as far back as we can tell, which means my family has more issues than your family, okay? We'll go toe-to-toe on dysfunction, all right? But growing up in church, the premise was, this whole premarital counseling thing was going to – like, in six months they could solve all the issues you'll have in 60 years of marriage. It's awesome. But it's not true. So, we did the six-month premarital counseling.

Now, let me back up and tell you our story. Chelsea's mom and my mom were best friends, pregnant together at the exact same time. And they said, "Wouldn't it be fun if we had a boy and a girl, and got them married?" So, I believe in arranged marriages. Holla at your boy. Okay, so ... So, I knew Chelsea my whole life, but we're 20 years old, we knew we were going to get married. She said "yes," and we went into this premarital process. And in the premarital process, we read this book called *The Five Love Languages*.

Have you heard of this book, by Dr. Gary Chapman? A fantastic book, by the way, and if you don't know the book, let me give you a quick overview. Dr. Chapman's premise is, he believes that everybody has a love language. This love language is how you feel love; it's oftentimes how you express love. His book outlines the five love languages, hence the name of the book.

And these are the five love languages. You've got quality time, you've got words of affirmation, gifts, acts of service, and touch. Those are the five love languages.

Now, I know you're wondering, *What are my love languages?* And Dr. Chapman says you have a top two, or sometimes three. My love languages are touch, words of affirmation, and "touch me again." Those are my love languages, okay?

So, the idea was, my wife and I are supposed to connect, and she's supposed to understand how I feel love, and I'm supposed to understand how she feels love. But I didn't have to pay attention to her love language, because I know women! Because I was raised by a strong woman, and a strong older sister. I know women. I know how women tick.

I remember being, like, 16, 17 years old, guys in the neighborhood talking about, "Women are difficult. Women are complicated. Women are like computers." I'm like, "Y'all are amateurs, man! Women are easy!"

My mom's love language, growing up, was acts of service, and my older sister's love language was gifts. So, I remember telling dude – it was like, “Are you serious, man? All you've got to do is mow the lawn and bring home high heels! Women are easy-peasy, for sheesy,” right? Like, this was so easy!

And so, Chelsea – I think in the premarital process, she was sharing her love language, but I already know what women's love languages are, so I didn't really pay attention. And so, sure enough, three months into marriage, I started to try to express my love. And so, I hired a landscaper, and – Don't judge me, okay? So, I hired a landscaper, and I started bringing home trinkets, and toys, and stuff, just to bless her, and she was impervious to my attempts to make her feel loved! And I couldn't understand it.

And one afternoon, everything came to a head. I was playing golf – it was the one day off that I had, at the time, Mondays, and I was playing golf with the boys. And we're coming close to the 18th hole, and it's a nice, sunny day in Seattle, which we get nine of those, right? So, it was awesome.

And so, we're playing golf, and I'm thinking, *Man, I'm going to go home to my brand new wife. She's beautiful. She's probably fixing me dinner – right? Now I know better, but – She's probably fixing me dinner, and I'm going to come home, we're going to have dinner, and then we're going to do a little something-something after dinner.* And so,

I'm like, *I'm proud to be an American!* Right? Like, *I love this country*, right? It's just one of those days ... I was, just, pumped!

So, I come into our house, and I come into the kitchen, and I'm like, "Yo, girl, where you at?" Translation, "Good evening, honey, I'm home!" And I could feel a chill in the air.

Only married men know what I'm talking about right now. It is palatable. It is real. It's real, people. There's a chill. Something was wrong. I didn't understand it. [Singing] "Let the storm rage on, the cold never bothered me anyways." But ... I'll sing Disney tunes for days, okay? But – the cold always bothers me. I hate the chill. I hate conflict. I'm that guy. It's like, "No, let's – everybody just get along."

So, I came in, I'm like, "Hey, babe," and I noticed she's, like, just – nothing. And I'm like, are you okay? She goes, "I'm fine." I specifically remember spawning something like, "I know you are, girl!" But that didn't go over very well.

Well, I want to talk, but ladies, can we be honest? Can we be honest? At the time, I – remember, I'm 21, which should be illegal to get married at 21 – I actually thought when women said that they're fine, they actually meant that they're fine!

But I know now, ladies – okay? – you have a code language. Yeah, you do. Uh-huh. And I'm convinced that you get little 14-, 15-year-old girls, and you take them on a code language retreat! And you teach them that when the day comes that you marry some knucklehead, and he does so many stupid things, and he wants to come home and talk about, 'Hey, girl, where you at?' you are going to use the word *fine*. And the word *fine* means, "There are so many things that are not fine, I do not know where to start with you!"

Yeah. Silly me. I thought she was fine – "I'm fine." I said, "Okay." And she said, "I don't understand." And I said, "No, no, no, I'm fine; you're fine. Let's eat." Right? "I don't understand." She says this: "Are you going to golf every day?" Now, the first thought that came to me was like, *Is that an option? Because if it is, you are more fine than I ever realized!* But I didn't say that.

But gentlemen – while we're on topic, we're just getting some stuff out in the open here today. Have you noticed – married men, talking to you for a second. Have you noticed that when your wife asks an overtly rhetorical question, you know it's rhetorical by the tone, but then she leaves a space, a pause, as if she wants you to respond? They learn that on the retreat, too. I'm telling you right now ...

So, she asks, like, this – true story. She goes, “Are you going to golf every day?” So, I’m like, *Rhetorical – wait, she’s waiting for a response.* And so, I’m like, “Uh, no – yes – no – what do I say?” It’s a trap, guys. It’s one of their tricks.

So, I know how to answer now, because I have 14 years of – you know, I’m seasoned. And she’ll ask this. She’ll be like, “Are you going to golf every day?” And this is how I answer now: “Are you?” Right? I just turn it on her. Because marriage is about winning! Wait a second ...

Things escalated, I’ll admit. Things intensified. Things got stressful. Laundry was being launched. I was completely shocked at her lack of self-control. And things just started – She’s not yelling, I’m the yeller, so I start defending myself. “Are you serious?”

And then, I said it. I did, I said it. I said, “Really? Out of all the love languages you could have, you have to have quality time! There are four others to choose from!” I promised myself I would never say it, but it only took three months and it just came out.

I remember calling my brother-in-law, Benny – he’s my brother-in-law because he married my sister. And I called him, I said, “Benny” – because my of sister’s gifts ... I said, “But you’ve got it so good, man. You could be gone for, like, three, four months, just send the packages, and you’re good. Wendy’s just happy.”

So ... After I said that comment, we didn't have our first child for five years. You do the math.

Hey, but let's be honest. When life gets difficult, challenging, when things intensify, situations escalate, what ends up happening is, what you really believe – what you swore you would never say, but you think about a lot – ends up coming to the surface, does it not?

If, in fact, that is true, that brings us back to the five short verses we read a moment ago, because Mary and Martha are in the thick of it, are they not? Mary and Martha are in a heated moment, to say the very least. Their little brother, Lazarus, their beloved little brother, is on death's doorstep. He is hours from passing into eternity.

It becomes clear to me, in our portion of Scripture, they have attempted all other avenues to save their little brother. Now they have concluded there is only one answer, and it's a miracle, and there's only one Miracle Worker, and that's God. They need Jesus to come heal Lazarus. They need Jesus to come save Lazarus' life.

They get a very logical plan: They're going to write a note. They're going to put it in a runner's hand – Jesus is several miles down the road. They're going to have the runner run down those several miles, hand the note to Jesus. Upon reading this note, this note

and its contents will compel God to come down the road several miles and save their little brother's life.

Now, we are about to discover what Mary and Martha believe about God. When push comes to shove, when it's a matter of life and death, the heat is on, what Mary and Martha really believe about Jesus is about to come to the surface.

Now, keep in mind, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus are the closest natural family to Jesus on the planet, other than His literal family. The second-to-last week of His life is spent exclusively with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. They are close friends with Jesus. Lazarus is one of Jesus' dudes. This is His guy. This is one of His sidekicks.

Now, have you ever read the Bible, and anticipate what you know it's going to say? Do you ever do that? I do it all the time. And I've read the Bible a few times, and so I remember, a couple of years ago, I'm reading this passage. And I'm reading it, and I'm like, *Oh, yeah, the note, and they send it ...* And I knew that the note read something like, "Lord, the one that loves you is ill." And I read it, and it was the opposite, and I didn't remember that. Listen to the contents of their note.

First of all, the length of the note is shocking, in and of itself. How short is this note? If you had one note to save your loved one's life, first of all, it ain't going to be short! If I'm trying to save – If you had one note to save your mother-in-law's life, what would it

read? “God, I know You’re busy, all the best.” No, I’m just kidding! I’m teasing.  
Mom, I love you, wherever you are.

But if you had one note to save your loved one’s life, one note to save my sister’s life, I would instantly go into her resume! I would start listing her spiritual statistics, her average time in prayer daily! “Hello! This is life and death! God, this is Wendy, my sister! She’s one of the good guys, but she’s a girl! You know, Wendy! Wendy, it’s Wendy! You love Wendy! Come on, Wendy loves You! Wendy is all about You!”

But listen to what they write: “Lord, the one You love is sick.” The end. I remember reading that, and I’m going, *What –?*

This is what Mary and Martha believe. They believe that what will move God most is His love for Lazarus, not Lazarus’ love for Him.

Now, this shocked me personally, personally. This is not a sermon, as much as it was a personal journey that I went on, because I started to investigate the focus of my relationship with God, and it started to kind of alarm me, to be frank. I started to think, *Is the focus of the Gospel – what is the focus of the Gospel*, which is the Good News of what God has done for us through Jesus. *What’s the focus? Is it man loving God, or God loving man?* And I had to come to the obvious, biblical conclusion that the essence of the Gospel is overwhelmingly God loving man.

Now, here's a thought that could actually change your entire outlook on God and life. Guess what moves God most? God. God moves God most. It dawned on me – you know, John 3:16, the Scripture Tim Tebow wrote – It dawned on me that – we're grateful – that I had been living my Christian life as if John 3:16 read like this: "For the world so loved God that He gave His only begotten Son." That's not what it reads.

I had been living a life with God as if the Gospel Story went something like, God is in heaven, pacing His gold-laden streets, and on this dusty, small, little planet known as "Earth," there is a remnant of people who were imploring God because of their passion, and their desire, and their love, and their intrigue – They were so enraptured with God, they were saying, "God, come to us! We love You! Please!" And God paced, and He considered their offer, and He wondered, *Should I? Should I not? I have much to do up here, but boy, they're convincing. They sure do want Me there. Okay, here I come.*

That's not the Gospel. "For God so loved the world ..." Look at that word, *so*, in front of love. He didn't just love, He so loved.

So, let's just insert the word *obsession*. That's fair. "God was obsessed with the world." Excuse me? This is John 3:16. Have you ever considered how ridiculous and illogical our most famous verse is? "For God so loved the world ..." The word *world* means "bad system, bad people." So, John 3:16 reads like this: "God was so obsessed

with bad people that He put on skin and bone, and came to the earth, and died” – listen, it gets worse – “for whosoever, whoever.”

I’m sorry, excuse me? You’re going to give Your life with a “whoever”? I mean, if I give you a car, don’t be selling that car. You’d better be driving that car when I see you! Because I’m giving it with an expectation you appreciate it! Right? This is how our world works. “What did I give you? Are you wearing it? Oh, you didn’t like it? It wasn’t nice enough, huh? Oh, my bad.” Right?

God is so obsessed with bad people, He gives His Son on the premise of a “whoever.” Maybe we can get a few more guarantees, God, before You give Yourself! Whoever, whenever, however, wherever ... What kind of love is this? Because I’m not familiar with this, in my earthly context.

God is obsessed with bad people. This is not good for God. Can we be honest? This is not good for God. You’ve heard the term “groupie,” come on! What’s the problem with a groupie? You’re obsessed with someone who will never reciprocate, and it gets really weird, especially when you’re in your twenties.

Now, bear with me, bear with me. Have you ever wanted to have a talk with God, based on what you’re reading in His Book? “God, I’m starting to get the sinking sensation here that You’ve – we’ve got this term down here, and it’s called ‘groupie,’ and

You are toeing the line. I recently read that while we sleep, like ... You watch us! And based on what I can tell here, You're obsessed with bad people. Now, God, do You understand that some of these people, um, are always going to be bad? Do You know that? And I don't want You to get hurt, because You're, like, following these people, and You're watching them while they sleep! And they're never even going to acknowledge You. You know, You've got this thing called 'foreknowledge.' Maybe You could utilize that a little bit more, and just kind of, you know, pick and choose. You're God!" God loves the world, *so* loves the world.

Someone came up to me recently and said, "God doesn't make sense." And I was like, "Oh, welcome to the party! I'm sorry, was God supposed to make sense? God's not a vending machine, and a mathematical equation – you push His buttons and get what you want! If that's the case, who's God?"

God is a mystery. That's what makes Him God. If you understand God, that's not God. God's ways are higher than our ways. His love is higher than our love. God loves bad people. God is obsessed with bad people. Even bad people who stay bad, God stays in love with them.

You know God loves people in hell? He still loves the people in hell. God didn't create hell for man – for demons and devils.

But what is love without choice? Without choice we have lost the definition of love. In our culture and society, forced love is how you go to jail. That's called "abuse." God is not abusive. He gives choice. You can either acknowledge this obsession towards you, or you can ignore. It is your choice, but the obsession remains. God loves.

First John 4:10 says, "This is love ..." "This is love ..." And before it tells you what love is, it tells you what it's not: "This is love" – not that you loved God, because you didn't, but that God loved us. God's first. God's the Initiator. The Book's about God.

You know how the Book starts? "In the beginning God ..." "Could we get a little more background?" Nope. "In the beginning God ..." "Where did the beginning come from, and God, what's Your background? Tell us a little bit of Your story." Nope. In the beginning God just started making stuff, which means God began the beginning, and He was before the beginning. Oh, that makes a lot of sense.

This is about God. I realized, *Man, I've been so busy obsessing over my love, and I got this thing out of order.* I wondered, *Have I missed the whole focus of it all with my obsession with my performance, and my deeds, and my efforts?*

And I end with this, and this is my conclusion. Sixty-five percent of your audience reengages upon the use of the word *conclusion*, and so, I shall conclude with this. Once again, this is where I will conclude.

Mary and Martha, we've made it abundantly clear they used the word *love* in their note: "Lord, the one You love is ill." The word *love* that they used, there, is the word that we most often refer to when we use the word *love*. It's what our songs are sung about. It's *phileo*. Those of you who are familiar with the original language, *phileo* is the word used here by Mary and Martha. *Phileo* is earthly love. *Phileo* is how people get married, by the way. *Phileo* is how people have best friends. *Phileo* is love that is based upon reciprocation.

I've never done a wedding – and I've done lots of weddings – where some bride's coming down the aisle, and her dad's dragging her, and, "I hate this guy!" And the guy's up front, "She's the one for me!" That doesn't happen, right? You text your friends. If you don't get a response in a minute and 30 seconds, you're like, "Oh, my gosh, you're never there for me." Right? It's called *phileo*. This is how the world works – *phileo*.

Mary and Martha write the note to Jesus, and they go, "The one that You love, and loves you back, is sick." Oh, Mary and Martha, you think this is *phileo*? You think God *phileos* you? I'm here to tell you this morning, God does not *phileo* you. He doesn't. Never has. Never will!

God has a love that is exclusively His. It flows from His being. The essence of who He is, and it is not *phileo*. It is otherworldly love – from another realm, from another

dimension, from the essence and core of His being. God does not feel love, God does not merely express love, God is love, and God always acts in consistency with the contents of His character! God cannot deny Himself.

God is love. But God is not *phileo*. God is *agape*. What is *agape*? *Agape* is love that absolutely does not need any reciprocation, whatsoever. It is unconditional, it is relentless, it is persistent, and it is aggressive. And it will not take “no” for an answer. It will remain. This is God. This is how God functions. He has *agape* for every human being that has ever lived! God does not *phileo* humanity; God *agapes* humanity.

I am for dolphins, and I am for whales, and I am for dogs – I am not for cats – but I am for hills, and I am for mountains, and I am for lakes, and I am for oceans, but there is only one being created in the image of God, in all of creation, and that being is the human being, and that being is the object of God’s relentless obsession! He will not stop loving you. He can’t.

In this instance, biblically, we have come to understand, God cannot help Himself. Can you believe it? How ridiculous is this love? How extensive, how extraordinary, is this love?

We've got to get the message out, that if you're bad, God's obsessed with you! He can't help Himself! You can't shake Him. You can run, but you can't hide! His love remains.

And I pray today, as we go from where we are today, and we get in our cars, and we go about our week, I pray that the preoccupation of your mind and your thoughts would not be your love, and your performance, and your successes – or your weaknesses – but you would be preoccupied with God's extraordinary, extensive, and expansive love for you. His love never fails. It never quits. For as long as God exists, His love for you remains. What extraordinary love. Would you pray with me?

Jesus, we are overwhelmed. We do not have the words to express our gratitude and appreciation for Your love. Your love changes everything. And I pray today that You would transform and change lives by Your love. I pray today that You would help us to respond, accept, and acknowledge, and revel, in Your love towards us. I thank You for that, Lord, in Jesus' name.

### **Pastor Groeschel**

At all of our churches, let's continue in an attitude of prayer.

Father, thank You so much for this powerful and personal, life-changing message of Your love, and Your grace. God, help us to internalize the truth of who You are.

At all of our churches, as you take time just to reflect on this, I want to talk to a specific group of you. Those of you who are followers of Jesus, you've been transformed by the grace of God, and yet, you realize in your own life that you're still often trying to perform for the love of God ... Maybe intellectually you might try to believe that God loves you, but you often feel unworthy of His love; you do something wrong, and you feel guilt or shame for it. You feel like you have to do more good things, and fewer bad things, and you're overwhelmed with a sense of unworthiness in the presence of God.

And as you've heard this message, it's touched your heart, and you want to internalize the truth, a deep understanding and knowledge, and embrace the goodness that love is not just something that God does, but love is who He is. There's nothing you can do to get Him to love you more, or nothing you can do to cause Him to love you less. You want to learn, in your heart, to embrace His unconditional love.

If that's you today, all of our churches, would you just lift up a hand right now and say, "Yes, this is speaking to me, and I need to internalize this eternal truth."

God, I thank You that at all of our churches, there are those whose hearts are being ministered to by the power of Your Holy Spirit. God, I pray that we would embrace the good news that Your grace and Your love is not about our performance, but about Your character, and Your nature, that it is who You are. God, I pray that we would be set free

from trying to win Your love, and simply surrender to it, and embrace it as Your greatest gift to us, that God, You love us because that's who You are, and all You can do.

Transform our hearts, God, as we internalize the grace, the power, the truth, of Your unconditional and eternal love for us.

As you keep praying today, at all of our different churches, there are those of you that the message you just heard is piercing your heart in a very special way. You may be a little bit like I was growing up, where I had this great and deep fear, *Have I done too many things wrong that God couldn't love me? Could I ever perform good enough to get Him to love me, and to accept me?*

And I just want to tell you, the message Pastor Judah preached is absolutely and completely true. There is nothing that we can do to earn His love. God simply loves us. God is obsessed with really, really bad people. He loves you, exactly as you are, no matter what you've done.

At all of our churches, there may be many of you, you recognize, *Yeah, I have messed up. I've done so many things wrong.* And that's what makes the love of God such good news, that He sent His Son, Jesus, who was without sin, to become sin for us on the cross. He died, and three days later He rose again, so that whosoever – and that includes you – who calls on His name will be saved, forgiven, transformed, and made new.

And quite honestly, this is exactly why many of you are here today, and you know it. What is your reasonable response? It's simply, "God, I know You love me, and my only reasonable response is to give my life back to You. I surrender to Your love. I trust Your grace. By faith I give my life to You, through Jesus."

At all of our different churches, those of you who would say, "That's my prayer. Count me in. I surrender and give my life to You," lift up your hands high right now.