I want to begin this morning by telling you something that fifty percent of you don’t believe, and fifty percent of you do and that is this: all of you, no matter who you are, I want you to know you are worthy of love and belonging. You are worthy of love and belonging. You are worthy of love and belonging. In spite of what you’ve done, in spite of what you have, in spite of all your flaws, warts and all, you are worthy of love and belonging. In spite of your regrets, in spite of your failures, in spite of your sin, you are worthy of love and belonging.

If you hear anything I say today, I’ll say it for a seventh time: you are worthy of love and belonging. And this is the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ that you are not what you do, you’re not what you have, you’re not what people say about you. You are a beloved child of God and you are loved by the most amazing person in the world. He loves you. And if he loves you, trust me, you’re worth it. You are.

Our world wants you to earn love and earn respect, and that’s never going to go away, and earning is a good thing, but there comes a point where the most important thing in our lives, love, we need it from the moment we are born, we need love. That to feel as though... that that thing is so fragile, so easily lost, that we become the kind of people who put up masks and perform and act certain ways in order that we don’t have to be outside or abandoned. And many of us, and many of you who
are watching today, you don’t understand how loved you are by me, by this church and especially by God. That many of us on the road of life, we have family members, and we have friends, and we have people in our life that matter, but there are things about ourselves that we feel as though... well we can’t share it with them because well what if we lost them, or what if they got angry, or what if X, Y and Z.

And so very often what happens is in the rhythms of life, we may be married, we may have children or grandchildren or best friends, but in the midst of it all we can still feel lonely. Maybe you feel lonely now and today I have an answer for that. And I’m going to tell you about it so don’t change the channel and don’t leave your seat.

Many of us often feel that we’re in a crowd and yet we’re all alone. Many of us can feel like our whole lives are filled with people, and with things to do, and yet we remain unfulfilled. We have means but no meaning. And many of us live every day pretending that this abyss isn’t there. And what you have in your heart, this emptiness, this loneliness, is a deep desire that all of us have, which is to be loved by someone in spite of all your flaws. To be accepted, to belong, to be valued, to be a part of a true family and you are. You’re part of my family, the family of God. And you belong and you will never lose it.

Let me tell you, as a spokesman for this family, you are loved and you belong, and you are worth it, and that is a tremendously good thing. That is good, good news. The cure for whatever it is that ails you, for
whatever abyss that you feel, whatever loneliness is in your heart, the
cure for that is to be intimately connected to the heart of God and to
other people. And that’s not an either and or - you need both, and today
I’m going to talk about the latter. What it means to be deeply connected
in your relationships. In your love life, not only in that, but with friends,
and with your colleagues, and with the people that you do life with to
have a deep abiding loyalty, friendship and connectivity and intimacy
with the people you do life with. It is so important. It’s the greatest need
you have. That’s why we talk about dignity all the time is because shame
is the thing that gets in-between that. But when you have dignity that’s
found in the kingdom of God, you’re given an incredible courage to just
take a risk and just go deep with people, and that’s a good thing.

So Brene Brown, who’s one of my fav’s, very popular right now, she
gave a Ted Talk and it went viral. It’s the biggest Ted Talk that’s ever
been, I think. And the reason is because she touched a nerve for
everybody. And she did this research, she was originally a psychologist,
and she’s a research analyst, meaning that she says if you can’t measure
it, it doesn’t exist. And as a psychologist, she said well all psychologists,
I’m not a psychologist, I’m a pastor. She said all psychologists sort of
agree on one thing – that the deepest human need is to connect deeply
with other people. And she said I want to find out scientifically why some
people can connect deeply with others, and others cannot.
So she began this long process, it was supposed to be a year or two. It went 16 years long where she had thousands of interviews, tons of statistics, data, research, and what she found was this: that every single person essentially falls into one of two categories, and this makes all the difference on whether or not you can connect deeply with your friends and with your family, and it was just this one thing. Some people believed that they were worthy of love and belonging, and others did not. And at the core of it, if you believe that you are worthy of love and belonging, then you will do a much better job of connecting deeply with others than you would if you think you got to earn it. If you think you’re not good enough. If you think you’re not smart enough.

And so what I want to say to you is that is the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That the shame you feel, the greatest barrier between you being vulnerable and connecting deeply with others, that the hope of the gospel is this – that in spite of all that I have done, it died on the cross with Christ and that I am loved as I am; that in my baptism I received an adoption that can never be lost. That even now I belong to a family that will never abandon me, and you do. You belong! You belong to the family of God and you are loved! And that will never be lost! You are worthy of love and belonging. Believe it. Believe it. It is true. Yes. That is the gospel and that is the great news.

So often we think of heaven like oh that’s the place I get to breathe under water and fly and eat cake all day and not get fat. Heaven is the
ultimate result of belonging to God. Heaven is the source of all life in the universe. And heaven is the hope that when I die, I'll be more alive than I am now. That I will inherit fully my place with God and in his family. You see isn't that great news? You’re loved, and if you trust in God, you’ll live forever with him and that is such good, good news.

Well today we’re in the seventh commandment in the Ten Commandments, and you may wonder why I’m talking about all this. And it’s because today; who knows the seventh commandment? You want to guess? “You shall not commit adultery.” So you don’t see it in the bible, but Mel Brooks told us this that when Moses.. when Moses came down from the mountain, the people asked him to go back and renegotiate, so he did. He went back up and talked to God about it. And he came back down from the mountain and he said to the people, ‘all right, I got good news and bad news. The good news is I got him down to ten. The bad news is adultery stays.’ So today.. no? Too much, it’s church. It’s too much. You’re right.

So today we’re talking about you shall not commit adultery. And in all truth, there’s a reason why in the greatest moral code ever written, that adultery was included. One is that, I think, that family is the greatest source of justice and goodness in any society. Having worked with homeless and having worked with gangs, I know that those are family problems at their heart and the way that you’re treated by your parents is going to have a big impact on the way that you live your life
and on the decisions you make. And at the core of a family is your parents being married and that relationship that they have. So obviously adultery breaks that.

But even deeper at the heart, I wonder if there could be a bigger emotional wound than somebody cheating on you, than your wife or your husband cheating on you. As a pastor, I've seen it often, I know that there are two sides to that story, and I know that it is still incredibly painful, incredibly messy, and I also know, by the way, that you can get through it if you really want to. That you can regain the hope that you had when you got married before all of that happened.

And what I really want to say is that anyone who gets married, and not all of us are married, but anyone who gets married; Weddings, I love doing weddings. I love them. And one of the reasons I love them is everybody is so joyful, and hopeful, and everybody’s rooting for this couple, and in our world that can’t seem to be focused on anything or make a decision, there’s two people that love each other so much that they say I’m going to spend the rest of my life loving you only.

So when adultery happens, and all the hope and all the expectations that were in what’s the most important relationship in your life are broken, of course you feel terrible, of course you’re hurting, and of course you’re broken. And at the heart of adultery is actually the need that we have, in general, to be loved and to love.
And so what I want to talk about today is not just how to have a good marriage, but I want to talk about how to be good in your relationships in general, including the platonic ones. That with your friends, with your colleagues, how can we be the kind of people that not only have friends and have good friendships, but actually grow deeply and connect deeply with others? That’s what I want to talk about today.

So first I want to say this is the most important thing in your life. Can we just say that? Sometimes movies say this, but overall, the message we get from the world is the most important thing in your life is to leave a legacy, or to be famous, or to change the world. That is not the most important thing in your life. The most important thing in your life, and believe me, if you don’t believe it today, you’ll believe it someday, is your relationships; your marriage, your parents, your siblings, your kids, and your friends. These are the things that matter most in your life.

And those of us who are hungering and thirsting for something, in the end, you will find it in a relationship with God, or in a relationship with your friends. And I don’t mean having friends I mean being deeply connected with them. Having just such an amazing friendship and loyalty that through thick and thin you know this person knows me and I know them and we stick together. I want to tell you, you can have that in your life.

The number one reason people don’t have this in their life is the need to succeed. And let me tell you, there is a need to succeed and I
hope you succeed, and I hope you do well in business or in ministry, or in whatever it is that you do, in your hobbies, or in sports, or in school, whatever it is that you’re doing, I want you to succeed. But let me tell you succeeding alone is worse than failing with friends. One of the greatest, most fulfilling things you can do is succeed with people, with the people you love. That when you cross that finish line, you get there with your friends or with your family, and you hug each other and you know we did this together because we hung through thick and thin. You succeeded as a team. That is the best way to win at anything. And being a pastor, I have seen enough people dying alone with lots of money. I do not want that for you.

In the end, all your trophies and all your money and all the stuff that you have, those things matter but they don’t matter as much as having friends, loved ones or family by your side through thick and thin, and a legacy of the next generation that you know, you loved, you empowered, you supported, you launched. That’s what matters, in the end, I believe with all my heart. And in order to do that, you’ve got to connect deeply with others; with the people that matter to you, and there may only be four or five, or two or one of them, but to connect deeply with the people in your life.

I think there are four ways that you can do this. Oh, so I don’t do this a lot, but I skipped a quote and it’s just so good. You want to hear it? It’s this: if you want to travel fast, go alone. If you want to travel far,
go with friends. It’s an African Proverb. Live by that and you’ll do well in life.

So you don’t have to be lonely. Congratulations. If you feel lonely, maybe you’ve got lots of friends, maybe you’ve got no friends, for whatever reason, you don’t have to feel lonely all the time. You don’t. Because you are worthy of love and belonging, and today I’m going to give you four tools that you’ll need to succeed in your relationships. These are things that I have seen, as a pastor, and in my own experience with my friends and my family, there are many tools that you can get, but these are the four things that I think most people need.

And the first is the most important, and it is this: if you want to connect deeply with people, which is your greatest need. You need that more than anything. If you want to connect deeply with people, you have to be vulnerable. To be vulnerable means to allow yourself to be seen deeply. Deeply. That you allow people to see all the stuff in your life that you’ve been hiding, all your shame, all your fears, all your dreams, all your goals, all your desires, all your wants, all your needs, that you allow the people who are closest in your life to just see you as you are, no masks, no pretending.

When you do that, you always think I’m going to push people away, and sometimes you do, but most of the time when you do that, people don’t feel farther from you, they feel closer to you. They feel safer around you. They feel like well maybe I can tell them my stuff. And when
vulnerability happens, there is a sharing of the soul that happens between friends or lovers or family members. There’s this amazing experience that happens between people. It’s one reason why small groups are so important because this is a place where a group of friends decide to intentionally, for one hour, just be vulnerable. So if you want to connect deeply, I’m telling you, the only way to do it, the only way, is to be vulnerable. If that’s missing, the other three things I’m going to say are just not going to work. But the things that come in the way of vulnerability and connecting deeply with others are these: pride and fear. Pride and fear are the two biggest things that get in the way of you connecting deeply with others. So that’s what you want to ask. Am I being proud or am I afraid? Don’t be afraid and humble yourself and share your life with others.

If you want to connect deeply with others, number one, you’ve got to be vulnerable, and you are learning. You are brave. You are learning to know that your true identity is rooted in God’s love, and that you have nothing to prove to anyone, and you are learning to be vulnerable to the important people in your life. So number one: be vulnerable.

Number two: make deposits into people. I learned this from Dr. Harley, and this is so true, and this is also true in leadership. Every single person you meet has, and I know this is so cheesy. This is a cheesy term but it works. Everyone has a love bank. All right? You’ve got a love bank in your mind or in your heart, and as people do things for
you that are meaningful to you, they essentially make deposits there. And the things that you do in the lives of other people, you’re making deposits and withdrawals. And if you have a relationship that’s on the rocks, it’s probably that you’re.. that love bank is empty or you’re even in debt. And they might even tell you that. You own me. Look, one of the most important things you can do as a leader, or if you’re a manager in your business, or in your family is to think in terms of have I deposited more than I’ve withdrawn. And trust me, you’re going to make mistakes. It’s going to be good to have a little savings account for that rainy day. You’re going to need it.

One of the things that people think about is like well I made all sorts of deposits. Well no, you might have made deposits that have been like you deposits, you know what I mean by that? Everybody receives deposits in different ways. Everybody receives love in different ways. In a marriage relationship, the two most common things that men want are sex, surprise, surprise, I know everyone’s so shocked. Good sex, by the way. And the second is actually recreational companionship. Guys want you to do fun stuff like go golfing, go to the movies, go to dinner, go to a sports event. Statistically, these are the two greatest needs that men typically have in their marriage.

For women, the two greatest needs that women have are one: conversation. Just talk, especially about important things, or about the future. And number two: affection. Holding hands, putting your arm
around me, saying I’m pretty. And I remember John Ortberg told a bunch of pastors, he said “always give your wife four non-sexual hugs a day.” Got it.

So it is important that you think in terms of am I really depositing in this person’s life. And that is what Jesus teaches us. The wisdom of Jesus Christ is that you serve your friends. That the purpose you’re in relationship with others is to serve others. If everybody serves everybody, things are going to go a lot better, and that’s usually what happens at the beginning of a marriage, and the beginning of a fantastic relationship. There’s love notes, and there’s hugging, and there’s kissing, and there’s gifts, and there’s time, and everybody’s just serving everybody. And that’s what’s so important is you’ve got to make more deposits, good deposits, than you do withdrawals with the people that matter in your life. All right?

So number one: be vulnerable. Number two: make deposits into people. More deposits than you withdraw. And you are doing that. You’re learning to serve others and I’m proud of you. Number three: do not resent the responsibility that always comes in every relationship. When you have a new friend, you get new responsibilities. When you get married, you have new responsibilities. When you have kids, you have new responsibilities. When you take on a job, you have new responsibilities. When you get a dog or a cat, look, I’m telling you, the more love you have in your life, the less freedom you have. It’s like a
formula. Freedom is the currency of love. The more love you have, the less freedom you have. And if you want love in your life, if you want to have a relationship, you want to have good, deep friends; look love is spelled T-I-M-E. It takes time. You can't be friends with everybody. You can only be friends with some people. And if you want to have deep abiding relationships, you have to devote yourself to people, and you have to understand that there is a responsibility; responsibility, and that certain people get more time than others.

So like Hannah was my first serious girlfriend. I learned very quickly that there was some responsibility there. When I got married, there’s responsibility. I can’t just go out whenever I feel like it. I’ve got to talk to my wife about it. When I have kids, oh my gosh, just responsibility through the roof. No time, no freedom, it’s out the window.

So this is what I’m telling you. I’m telling you now you can either be free, or you can have love. You can’t have both. So choose. In other words, if you have love in your life, you have what everybody wants. You have it. Don’t resent the fact that it means you have to be responsible. They have to be responsible to you, too. It’s a give and take. That responsibility, in a way, is a joy. In the end, as an old person, you’ll look back and recognize that that responsibility made you a better person, it made you a deeper person, it made you a more joyful person, and that’s a good thing.
So number one: be vulnerable. Number two: make deposits more than withdrawals. Number three: having love means responsibility. You’re not going to have freedom. And number four: be the first. Be the first. Be the first to make that phone call. Be the first to say you’re sorry. Be the first to make a change in the relationship. Be the first to clean the house. Look, everybody’s got to clean the house, not just the girls, okay? Dudes, come on. Clean the house. Take turns. Clean the house. Be the first. And that is a big part of making deposits. Be the first.

I think so many times what happens is when there’s a conflict, or when there’s a change that needs to happen, or something needs to happen, pride and fear get in the way and nobody does it. They say I’ll do it, but he has to go first, or she has to go first. And then what happens, it usually gets buried and it just starts doing all sorts of things to your heart, and your mind, and even your body. And that stuff builds up, and now you begin to resent each other and all these walls are going up and you’re wondering what happened to us. Don’t let it happen, just be the first. Just suck it up and say you’re sorry. I know the other person did something wrong, too, and they’ll apologize after you apologize. That’s usually how it happens. Maybe not, but be the first to do those things.

So number one: be vulnerable. Number two: make deposits. More deposits than withdrawals. Number three: love requires responsibility and devotion. And number four: be the first. And if you do these things, you’re going to do a lot better in your friendships, you’re going to do
better leading, and you’re going to be a better husband, you’re going to
be a better wife, you’re going to be a better parent, you’re going to be a
better kid to your parents. You do these things and you’ll grow
immensely and you’ll find a deep connection that you need with people
and it takes time, it takes forgiving; it never goes perfectly. There are
always bumps in the road, but stay firm to these four things, to this
wisdom, and your life will be a lot better.

Lord, thank you that you’ve called us to this place. And I pray for
everybody who’s here in this church and everyone who’s watching on TV
that feels lonely. That feels like they’re unworthy of love and belonging or
has had just a rough patch in marriage, maybe somebody’s going
through a divorce right now and they feel alone or they feel shame. Lord,
I just pray that you’d speak life over them. I speak life over you in Jesus’
name. So Lord, thank you, that you’ve done this for us. It’s only by grace
that we’re saved and by grace we come, and we thank you, in Jesus’
name we pray, amen.