

# SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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Stunning Love

PART

9

TITLE

Love Is Relentless

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 13:4-7



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Well, it's good to see you all. There's something about endurance that's inspiring to all of us. When we read the words "love is relentless", what we're really talking about is endurance. And there's something about endurance that captures, well, it just captures our heart. When we see it, it's inspiring, it's motivating. It can be seen in a soldier. It can be seen in an athlete. It can be seen in a parent. It can be seen in a child who's seeking to give care to a parent who is older. It can be seen from a patient who's been diagnosed with cancer and is going through treatment. When we see endurance there's something about it, we know, that's difficult. And so, it's inspiring to us.

And so I've been doing just a little bit of work this week to just look at examples of endurance, and there's one that I want to share with you. So every single spring there's a bunch of athletes, every single year, that gather at Frozen Head State Park, which is in, I believe, Tennessee. And their hope is to win but, ultimately, their hope is to actually add their name to the list of finishers to something called the Barkley Marathon.

Now, since 1986, it's a pretty short list, there's only 15 people who have ever finished this marathon, and it's because of the various hazards that are placed in front of the athletes. And so, what we're told is this, it's a fascinating read, and so if you want to look it up you certainly can, but they have 60 hours to complete the marathon. It consists, you have to make five laps and each lap is somewhere just under a marathon distance. And so, the entire thing is somewhere between, and it changes every year, between 100 and 125 miles.

And what you see here on this picture is why it's so hard, is it's actually run not on a trail or a track but through just rugged mountain terrain with a total elevation gain of 60,000 feet. What that means is for the 15 finishers who've actually completed the race, that 60,000 feet is equivalent to climbing Mount Everest twice in 60 hours, in addition to the 100-and-however-many miles.

There's something about these things that ... I mean, some of us go, "Well, those people, that's not inspirational. That's just crazy." But the fact is endurance to every single one of us is something that's compelling, and the reason is because we all know that we come standard with a built-in desire to stop when things get hard, whatever it is, which is why endurance, ultimately, is as inspiring as it is difficult. And what we find here in Paul's last little description of love is he says that love endures all things.

And as we come to the end of our series the fact is, as I look around this room, and I know that some of you, you're ready to quit. You're ready to quit on someone. You're tired of enduring. You're in the middle of something that is really difficult. It may be a job. It may be a friendship. It may be a marriage. It may be your children. It may be waiting for your child, and maybe is an adult child, to finally repent and come back home and come back to the lord, and you're pleading, and you just ... you're praying, and you just want to stop praying because you're tired of praying, because endurance is so difficult.

And so, I know that endurance is really hard, and I know that, some of us in the room, that we are just about ready to let go of the heavy bucket that is in our hand, and we think, “I just can’t carry this anymore.” And so, what I want to do before we look at what endurance is, when it’s really described in the context of love, I want to pray for us that God would even inspire our hearts to want to listen. So let me pray for us.

Father, I thank you for each person who is in this room. And first I pray for those who do not have a relationship with you. I pray, Father, that you would help them to see in Jesus Christ someone who loves them in such an enduring way that they’ll never find another person who loves them the way that you love them. I pray that you would open up their eyes and help them to see, just, the fascinating endurance of your love in order to rescue us and them. I pray for those who know you. I pray for every single one of us in the room. God, I pray that you would help us to find interest in what we read. I pray for those that are just literally at the brink where they just cannot possibly imagine enduring any longer and seeking to show love to another human being, or to that one particular human being.

I pray, Father, that you would inspire us and that you would help us, Lord, to display your love by giving us endurance to love those who are really hard to love. We thank you, God, for your word and pray that you would speak through weakness and that you would inspire our hearts now with the truth of your word. I pray all of this in Christ’s name, amen.

It is really good to see. It always is. I always love the first time the lights come on, and I get to see your faces, and to sing with you, and to now open up God’s word. It is always thrilling to me. And if you’re a guest, we’re just really grateful that you’ve come. We’ve already sung about things that, maybe, some of which you don’t understand, God’s wrath, and sin, and blood. And so, over the next 30 minutes I hope to give you context to why we would sing about things like this in the context of a passage that’s actually dealing with something that’s really appealing to your heart, and that is love. All of us want to be loved.

And so I want to ask all of us, if you can, to look with me in 1 Corinthians chapter 13. If you have one with you, turn there. If you don’t have, there’s lots of bibles in the chairs near you. That’s the word of God and if you don’t have one at home, take that home as a gift. We would love for you to have your own copy.

In 1 Corinthians 13, though, Paul is seeking to describe love, to help us to understand what love is. He hangs it on the wall like a mirror. And in James chapter one this is what we’re told, it says that the man ... I’m sorry. It’s not on the screen. I say that and every goes ... looks up and I’m still right here. I’m still right here. It’s not on the screen. But in James one it actually says this, is that the person who’s not a wise person but who hears the word of God and doesn’t do it is like a person that stands in front of the law of God, in front of this mirror and they see in the mirror all of the deformities, all of the problems, we see our bedhead, we see the lines in the face and we look and see, and for the first time we can actually see what we’re looking like to other people, and yet if we don’t actually put it into practice it says that we’re like the person that just walks away.

Everyone else can continue to see because they have a lens of us but we have a blind spot. We cannot see our own face unless there's a mirror.

He says, "But the person who looks into this perfect law of liberty, which is the law of love, and perseveres, and endures, and not only listens to it, and hears it but also puts it into practice," which means that when we see something in the mirror and we think, "Man, I don't want to look like that," God says, "I shouldn't want to look like that. I want to confess my sin. I want to repent. God, I'm relying on you. Would you change my heart?" It says that this is the person who's wise who actually walks away, and it says, "Then he puts it into practice."

And so, what Paul's doing here is he's putting up a mirror in front of every single one of us, every believer who's ever lived who looks at 1 Corinthians 13, you're supposed to ask the question, "Do I look like this?" He holds it up as a mirror and the fact is the church in Corinth, the very first recipients of this, they didn't look like this at all. We read throughout the whole book as they're suing each other. They are divorcing each other. They're hating each other. They're stealing from each other. They're sleeping with each other. There's all kinds of things that are taking place that Paul wants to call them out on to say, "You're acting in selfish interest. You're impure. You're greedy. You're motivated by pride." It's just an absolute mess. In fact, the fact is someone once said that the church in Corinth was much like Noah's ark, and that is that if not for the flood outside very few people would choose the stench on the inside.

You see, they lacked love. And Paul knew what Jesus wanted because he stood on this earth and he says, "Listen to me, by this all people know that you're my disciples, if you have love for one another." And Paul saw this enormous risk, and that is he saw this enormous city called Corinth where there were people that were created in the image of God who had no relationship with God, and they no availability to the gospel. They had no knowledge that Jesus had come in order to die on a cross and rise from the dead to forgive them of their sin, and yet there's a lighthouse in the city called the church who's supposed to be the salt and the light of the city to say, "This is the hope." But here's the deal, because of their lack of love they boarded up all the glass of the lighthouse. That light was still there, but it had a hard time penetrating all of the lack of love. And so, people were looking at the church and they're saying, "Man, if that's what it's like to following Jesus Christ, then why would I want that?"

And so, he's so burdened in his heart that he feels compelled in the midst of a letter, that largely is a rebuke, to say, "Guys, this is what he wants." This is the apologetic of the gospel. This is the one thing, not our scholarship, not our theology, not our buildings, love. This is what makes Christianity Christianity.

And he says ... What he says, he goes, "If I speak in the tongues of men of angels but have not love, I'm a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." You see what he says there? He goes, "If I can talk angel talk but I don't have love, I'm irritating to people." And he says, "And if I have powers of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains but have not love, I am nothing." In other words, if I have absolutely exceptional gifts that motivate people, that move people, that teach people, that encourage people and he goes, "But I don't have love," he goes, "I don't gain anything in the process of using those gifts."

Then he talks about sacrifice. He goes, "If I give everything that I have away, and even deliver up my own body to be burned," you see what he's saying? He says, "If I am so convinced of the truth that I'm willing to die for the truth," he goes, "But I have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy for boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

And over the last two months we've been looking at each of these different characteristics of love and we come to the very last one, and that is that love endures all things. So what I want to do here in our time as we wrap this series up is to seek to describe what enduring love actually is, and then wrap up the whole series with just a few applications of what I'm praying that the Lord would do and has done in our lives.

So what is enduring love? Well, this is what love is. Number one is this, is that love stands under unthinkable levels of resistance. Love stands under unthinkable levels of resistance. Some of you [inaudible 00:13:08]. It's weird to stand under something. What is that? Well, the word endure is actually a compound Greek word that's made up of two words, and that is to stand under, or to remain under. The idea is, is that there's this enormous weight, there's this enormous resistance that is falling down upon us, and instead of crushing us love has the staying power to stand under it, to remain under it. It was a military term that was actually used frequently for holding a vital position to the war at all cost.

We see this throughout so many different wars in the world but in 1944 Hitler, he made one last [inaudible 00:13:55], one last offensive goal and that was that he wanted to split the Allied forces in order to cut off the supply chain of ammo, and food, and water, and resources from one to the other. And so, he assembled much of his army in one section and he sought to cut them in half. And the people, the Allied forces, many of which, 700,000 American forces over 40 days, they sought to hold back so that they wouldn't be cut off. However, they did make an enormous imprint. And so, what happened was that line that at one time was straight, it had a bulge and we call it the what, the Battle of the Bulge.

And this is what it looked like. 700,000 ... I'm sorry, 700,000 American soldiers and many other Allied forces, they all hunkered down in the dead of winter and over 40 days 98,000 American forces were killed. And yet, these individuals recognized that holding this position was absolutely vital to victory, and so they said, "I'm going to stand my ground." This is endurance. And endurance then is, ultimately, distinguished by resistance.

You need to understand this. This is so important.

Enduring behavior, we characterize behavior has, “Hey, that’s endurance,” and we do so when we see resistance. For example, if I go home today and I nap for three hours, very people are going to go, “Wow, that’s some kind of endurance. He turned twice on his pillow and, I mean, he got a blanket and he pulled back over and about halfway through, I mean, just such a ...” No one says that because there’s no resistance. There’s no difficulty, even though it may be the same amount of time.

However, if go running for three hours this afternoon some of you may say, “Well, that’s a lot of endurance.” However, if I running today for three hours and every five yards someone tackles me to the ground, now all of a sudden you say, “Now, that’s stunning endurance.” We see that and we think, “How does he keep getting up? How does he keep getting up and running a little bit more only to get tackled again, only to get up and be tackled again.” Why, because endurance is characterized by resistance. When we see a tremendous amount of resistance, it causes us to feel inspired and motivated and in awe, to say, “Wow, can you believe what they are enduring in this moment.” And yet, don’t forget, Paul is not trying to inspire us with endurance. He’s trying to describe love.

In other words, what he’s saying is this, is love is distinguished by resistance. You see, you look at this picture and when a kid draws her mother a picture, and there’s smiles, and there’s kindness, and there’s warmth, and there’s laughter, if Mom gets up, walks to the other side of couch and hugs and says, “I just love you so much,” nobody who’s in the kitchen looks back and go, “Wow, what enduring love. I can’t believe you actually want to hug her right now.” That’s the logical thing to do. It’s the fitting thing to do. It’s the easy thing to do. And so we don’t go, “Wow, that’s characterized by endurance. What love.” No, but when we are mistreated, when we’re disrespected, when we’re deceived and yet we continue to love. People think, “Wow, what enduring love. I can’t believe he’s still there. Can’t believe she’s not left. I cannot believe that she or he is still praying. How in the world can they continue to do what they’re doing?”

You see, when we see it people say, “How can it be,” and isn’t that exactly what we sing about Jesus Christ? Amazing love, how can it be that you my king would die for me? You see, Jesus Christ is the embodiment, he’s the perfected form of enduring love. Jesus lives on the earth. He comes to the earth that he created. He’s totally ignored. People don’t even recognize him as creator and yet his love endured. Eventually he is betrayed and his love endures. He denied by Peter and his love endures. He’s accused and his love endures. He’s bound, he’s whipped, he’s humiliated, he’s crowned, he’s crucified and his love endured. And do you know why? Because Psalm 136 tells us something about him, and that is that his steadfast love endures forever.

You see, when you see somebody standing under unthinkable levels of resistance in a relationship and yet they ... and yet their life is characterized by patience, and kindness, and believing, and hoping, and bearing, and not seeking my own way, and all the other descriptions that we’ve looked at, what do we say? We say, “What love,” what love.

And so, love stands under unthinkable levels of resistance. Second thing is that love stands under an undisclosed amount of time. And this becomes really difficult. You see, you and I can typically overcome overwhelming resistance and pressure, so long as we know when relief is coming, not if relief is coming. That's one incentive, but when we know when relief is coming all of a sudden we find so much energy to be enduring. When we see the finish line. So if you're in swim practice and your coach says, "Four more laps," you can say, "Okay, this is how much energy it takes. This is how much. This is ... I can make it there. I can ..." There's something that when we know when the finish line is in front of us and we know exactly where it's at, and it's not moving, suddenly we find energy to finish the task.

If you have some extended family staying with you, and they may be a little difficult, they're wearing your robe around the house and you're like, "It's three more days. It's three more days. I can do this. I can do this." You got someone over at your house and they're a little bit rude and you're like, "15 more minutes. I can hold my tongue 15 more minutes." When we know the time that we have to endure, it incentivizes that we can endure.

Years ago, nine years ago when I was 36 years old I ran in the Charlotte marathon. I thought, "You know what ..." So all growing up I used to run a whole lot, and I always had that on my list of one day I want to do that and I got to 36 and I said, "I better go ahead and do this if I'm going to do this." And so I trained for a while, entered the Charlotte marathon, we start and the first mile I look over and there's a guy and he's wearing a Carolina Panthers football jersey and he's a runner. You know how thick those things can be. And I'm thinking, "Man, what is this guy doing out here?" All of a sudden there's a sign on his back. I can see it flapping in the wind. So I run over to him just a little bit and I look at it and it says, "82nd marathon." He's counting them. He's done 81.

I've not done any, so I start talking to him and I said, "Sir," I said, "can I ask you a question?" He goes, "Well, of course." And I said, "82nd marathon, is that ..." He goes, "Yeah, this is." And I said, "Well, this is my very first one. Can you give me some advice?" He goes, "I can." He says, "When it happens," and I had stopped him and I said, "What do you mean by it? What is it?" He said, "You'll know. It's different for everybody but when it happens you'll know what it is for you." I said, "Okay." He said, "You have to remember two things." I said, "All right, what is it?" He said, "There's a finish line that's exactly 26.2 miles away from where you started and they're not going to move it. And if you'll keep taking another step, you'll get there."

There's something about knowing, but what if you don't know when relief is coming? See, that's where some of you are at in your hopelessness and whatever relationship you have that you say, "I don't know if relief is ever going to come." You've heard of the Navy SEALs. Maybe some of you are a Navy SEAL. Maybe you've gone through the training. Maybe you've made it all the way through. I've been told that about 25% of those who try to do it actually make it through the training. And what they do, it's actually a remarkable thing. You should look it up. I did and I just read all of what they at least have online of what they have them do. I'm sure it's worse than that but it really is a remarkable thing.

They deprive them of food. They deprive them of sleep. They deprive them, sometimes, of water and they just put them through just psychological, emotional, mental strain to see if they can take it. It's a remarkable thing. And then they have them do all kinds of physical feats, and all kinds of endurance sorts of thing. Let me just show you two of them.

There's one of them where they literally just head to the ocean and they put their feet down, so that their feet are over their heads, and then they just let waves crash into them, and it's cold. And here's the deal, if they told them, "60 waves, you got to endure 60 waves," they'd all be sitting there going, "One." Another one, "two," and you could do it. But here's the thing, they don't tell you how many. Sometimes they have them go all night long. And it's never the same amount because there's other people who have gone through it and they may tell them.

And then what they do, and there's lots of these, but then what they do is they tie their hands and feet and they throw them in the pool. And their responsibility is to stay alive, swim, find a way to get air. And that would be something if it was 60 seconds, and you knew it was 60 seconds and you could just count, "One, two," but what if you have no idea how long? And they just leave them in there.

See, perhaps the harshest enemy of all of endurance is the undisclosed amount of time that we have to stand under the pain. Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick." You know what that means, is that when we see the finish line and we run to it and we conserve just enough energy to get there, and then all of a sudden somebody moves the finish line, "How could you move the finish line? I only have enough energy to get to there." But you have to remember that Paul is not simply describing endurance. He's describing love. In other words, what makes love so hard is the undisclosed amount of time that we are to give it before people or the relationship changes.

So we ask questions like, how long, as a parent, must I not be irritable before my kids are pleasant? How often must I forgive before my friend changes? How long must I love my wife before she warms up? Some people come and they go ...

You know what, there's this called a love dare. It's 40 days. First day it says, "Do one thing really kind, really loving, [inaudible 00:25:05], just one thing." First day, I'm going to take her on a date. Second day, I'm going to bring home flowers. Third day, I'm going to give her a card. Still cold and it's like, "How long can I endure this?"

Now, here's the deal, God nor the bible does not minimize how hard it is to love. And the reality is the bible, as we looked at last week, it does provide and affirm protective limits, so that we don't continue to expose ourselves to harmful, abusive circumstances. However, part of what makes Christian love so stunning is its ability to love into overtime.

When you have conserved enough energy to make it four-quarters and suddenly you're still tied and you have to play longer, this is when Christian love distinguishes itself from all other loves. It has staying power to continue to love when there is an undisclosed amount of time that it must love.

You notice within the word endurance is the word durable. In other words, love does not lose its tread even when the destination seems to move further and further ahead into the future. And so, we see here that love stands under this unthinkable level of resistance and in an undisclosed amount of time.

But then there's a third. There's a third thing it stands under and that is unclear future. Love stands under an unclear future. I mean, you do know the fuel that pushes us passed unthinkable resistance, and passed an undisclosed amount of time. It's vision. It's the ability to see with our heart what one day we hope to see with our eyes. It's the ability to see one day what may be. And so, it motivates us to plant seeds into the ground now hoping that one day I'm going to be able to see a harvest. This is the one thing that provides fuel. This is what keeps the Navy SEAL from going and ringing the bell, is they see the day, one day, when they graduate, when they actually finish everything, when they stay in the pool long enough, when they stay in the ocean long enough, when they do enough pushups. It's vision and saying, "One day I see it." This is the enduring quality of a parent who's child or adult child has run away from them and the lord and they continue to pray, and yet they're hoping so much to see their face once again. It's vision.

You see, in Acts chapter 14 we see a picture of this. Paul, he goes to Lystra. They've never heard the gospel. He preaches the gospel and they stone him. Now, if you're new here to Christianity and you don't know what Lystra or stoning ... this is not drug and that's not ... that's a city. People literally, they picked up rocks, they're so angry, and they started throwing rocks at him to where eventually he falls down and now he's a target that's not even moving anymore, and they continue to pepper him with rocks until they're convinced that he's dead. Someone stands up and says, "Okay, everyone save your arm. I think he's done."

They all go back into the city that they've drug him out from and he regains consciousness. He's not dead. And do you know what Paul does? He picks himself up and he says, "I had one more point in that sermon," and he walks right back into Lystra and he begins preaching again. What in the world would cause anybody to have that kind of enduring love for those people who just did him that much harm? Let me tell you, it's because Paul was able to see a church in Lystra before there was a church in Lystra. He was able to see with his eyes people from Lystra standing at the throne of God in Heaven worshiping him from Lystra before there was any of those people who were actually doing that. They had to hear the gospel, and so he marches right back in and he preaches the gospel.

You see, and ultimately, this is our heritage. Hebrews 12:2 says, “Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross.” Jesus looked at the cross, and he didn’t just look at a cross, he looked what was going to take place because he went to the cross. It was vision that allowed him to endure such an unthinkable level of resistance over an enormous amount of time and pain. Vision inspires endurance.

But here’s the thing, this is where we’re different than Jesus, Jesus was sovereign and we’re not. You know what that means? That means our vision is always like looking through this foggy window. We can sort or see faint images. We can sort of see people. We can sort of see a church in Lystra, but not quite. And yet, Paul, Paul was able because of vision to see that faint shape of a church in Lystra which inspired a quality of love called patience.

A parent sees the faint shape of a runaway son standing at the front door, and therefore is inspired to offer more love, maybe in the quality of bearing with that son, believing in that son and hoping in God in that son.

A friend sees the faint shape of a friendship that’s been reconciled, which then motivates love to forgive, to not be irritable, to not be resentful. You see, friends, part of what makes Christian love so stunning is its ability to love towards a future when that future is faintly seen. When maybe all you can see is one step in front, love motivates you to take that step.

And so, love stands under three things. It stands under this unthinkable level of resistance in an undisclosed amount of time, and an unclear future. And ultimately, you have to understand that what Paul longs for is ultimately what ... Why he wrote this down is that the church in Corinth would repent of a lack of love, and not only would they repent of a lack of love but he sums it up and it says, “But then they would be marked by an enduring quality of love.” It would be the greatest, clearest apologetic in Corinth of the trustworthiness of the gospel, that Jesus Christ can change people and that he does change people, and he takes impatient people and he makes them patient people, that he takes people that want to quit on love and yet they don’t quit on love. This is what makes christian love, christian love.

So what do we do with this? A few things. First is, let’s examine our heart. If indeed 1 Corinthians 13 and the rest of the bible is a mirror that we’re supposed to stand in front of, then let’s stand in of it and ask a very important question. And here’s the question, what does the mirror say about me? What does it say about my heart? What does it say about my love? What does it say about what’s happening inside of me? I beg you, do not walk away from this sermon or this series unexamined. A year ago when God said, “This is where you’re going in a year,” I had been praying for a year, just like I do for most of these series, there’s always an end in mind. There’s always something that I’m praying, “God, over those nine weeks as we labor in this, I pray that this would be the effect in our life.” And ultimately, is that you and I, is that we would examine within and that wherever, wherever we find a lack of love is that we would quickly confess it and repent of it.

And let me tell you something. It doesn't take very long at all to fall short. In fact, over the last two months it's remarkable how I started this series and I thought that there were certain qualities of love that were characterized in my life, and every single week I've noticed that I have fallen drastically short.

Think about this for a second, yesterday I finished this sermon at 10:45 in the morning. Go into the kitchen and I'm having a little conversation with my wife, Tabatha, and we start just talking about somebody else, somebody else who's hurting, who's a little uptight with me, a little uptight with us as a church family, and what was amazing was this, it took 15 minutes. I mean, I finished, "All right, that's a great sermon." I walk out. We start talking and the impulse in my heart is, "If that's where they're at, let them go." So I go all afternoon and as I do most Saturdays, eventually I was on a walk, a walk through the neighborhood. This is what I do every time, [inaudible 00:34:26], "All right, God, this is ... is there anything that I've missed, and then is there anything in my own life that I need to address?"

And all of a sudden the Lord just says, "Well, you're about to preach a sermon on enduring love and you just said to wife about another human, 'Let them go'. What are you going to do with that?" You see, it's stunning how fast we can fall short, and yet this is the mercy of God. This is why we do sit under the word of God, because the bible can expose those things. It can help us to change course, so that instead of acting on those selfish impulses we can say, "You know what, love teaches me there's a better way, so let me take a different path." This is what is available to every single one of us, and so I beg you to examine your heart.

The second thing is, let's relentlessly look towards Jesus. See, Providence, if we do not look at Jesus, surely we will not look like him. We have to see him. We have to behold his glory. And so, I want to encourage you to consider the durability of Jesus' love for you and for me. You see, after he rose from the dead, think about this, after he rose from the dead we doubted him, and yet his love endured. After he revealed himself to us, we continue to sin against him, and yet his love endures.

Roman chapter eight says this, "For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present or things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

See, his love is a stunning love because it's an enduring love. And the fact is, is that when we believe in him the bible says that he takes his spirit and his spirit begins to live within our hearts, so that now we are enabled and motivated to love in similarly stunning ways. This is what he has for us, is for us to look like Jesus to other people. But before we can do that we have to know Christ, and so I come to you again. And if you are here today and you have never trusted Christ as your savior and lord, you look at this, I want you to know something, I'm talking about somebody in Jesus who will love you in an enduring way like no one else on this earth ever can or will. You trust in Jesus Christ as your savior and there is absolutely nothing you have ever done, nothing you are doing and nothing you will ever do that will separate you from his enduring love.

And the bible tells us exactly how we go about trusting him. He says the first thing we have to do is something that, you and I, we just know instinctively, at least we should, and that is we have problem. We have a problem in our life. Things aren't working out the way that we thought that they would and we're not our savior. We have to admit we cannot save ourself. We have to admit there's nothing we can do to earn God's forgiveness in our life.

And the second thing we have to do is to believe in Jesus Christ, God's provision to us to bring us back into a relationship with him where we say, "God, I believe. I believe you sent your son and I believe he died on a cross, and I believe he rose from the dead. I'm trusting in his accomplishments and not mine in order to enjoy a relationship with you."

Then the third thing the bible says what this trusting in Christ looks like is where we confess him as lord of our life, where we say, "God, I'm not going to do it perfectly but I give you my life. I rely upon you. And would you change my heart? Would you change the inclinations and the desires of my heart? Would you help me to endure in love? Would you help me to be patient? Would you help me to be kind?"

You see, this is what's available and I'm asking, would you trust Jesus today? Would you trust Jesus today? You know how you do that? You pray. You pray to him, not to me or to anyone else. You can do it right now. You can just say, "God," in your heart your heart you say, "God, I believe. I believe this news. It seems like really good news. I've tried so long to make sense out of my life and I can't, and so I admit to you that I cannot save myself and I believe in your provision in Jesus Christ and what he's accomplished, and I confess him as lord of my life," and the bible says that he will save you. He will forgive you and he'll fill you.

And for those of us that know Christ as savior and lord, one of the most important things you do every single day that's connected to every act of obedience in your life is always first precipitated by you looking and beholding at Jesus. You have to see him. He is the point. The point of bible is not that we become more loving. The point of the bible is that in becoming more loving Jesus Christ is glorified. It's all about Jesus, all of it.

Third thing is, let's not give up on people. Jesus has never looked at you and he's said, "I'm so done with you." Isn't that good news? And yet, Jesus stood on this earth and in John 13:34 he says, "Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." In other words, any time we ever look at another human being and say, "I am so done with you," we are not loving like Jesus has loved us.

And as we've said, and particularly last week, is that we as a staff, as a church family, we want to be able to help you to discern a healthy way forward in some of those sticky, difficult relationships. But no matter how extreme it is, and sometimes there are extremities in relationships to where that relationship once was, it can't ever be that way again. We get that but what we do know is this, is the pathway forward with every human being on the earth, it includes love. It may look different for every person but it includes love, so let's not give up on people.

And last is, let's not forget our mission. Providence, we cannot forget our mission. Every one of us in this room can imagine the benefits of enduring love to our relationships but our relationships are ultimately not Paul's first aim. He looks at Corinth and he sees a city filled with people that are going to Hell because they do not know the good news that Jesus has died to forgive them, and that lighthouse is all boarded up.

And so, what Paul does is he makes an appeal to love. And the reason he does so is because he knows that love is the greatest apologetic. It's the clearest window that people can look through and they can see the gospel at work. They can see the power. They can see how relevant and trustworthy it is that Jesus can change our lives.

I believe that if Paul would be looking at us, I think he would say ... The fact is Providence is not the only church. There's lots of lighthouses but I believe that he would call us to look at our own life and make sure that there is absolutely nothing that we are doing that's intentionally boarding up the light from moving forth because God desires for his son to be glorified, not only in Raleigh but the ends of the earth.

And so, let's love for the mission of Jesus being glorified. So let me pray for us.

Father in Heaven, we thank you so much for your grace in our life. And as we come to this point where we want to sing to you and where we give, the great desire of our heart is that you would do a miracle in each one of us and that you would examine our hearts, you would help us to see love in Jesus Christ, and that you would inspire us. We want, oh God, we want to resemble you to the world. We want to reflect you. We want people to look at us and to see how loving you are.

And so I pray, God, that as we sing and as we give that you would use these offerings just as that, as a tool to get the gospel to the ends of the earth. So we love you. We thank you for your amazing love for us and we pray this in Jesus' name, amen.



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