

**Date:** October 22-23, 2022

**Title:** 212: *Selfless*

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

**Speaker:** Kurt Bjorklund

Let's pray together. God, we thank you for the things that you have done through Orchard Hill in Wexford, Strip District, and Butler, and what you're doing now in those places and other places. And God, that it isn't just the expansion of services and buildings, but it's really about people and life change. God, as we're gathered this weekend, I pray that you would just continue to write your story and how my life and the lives of all of us who are gathered today are changed. And I pray that you would speak to each of us wherever we're coming from, whatever the week has been. And God, I pray that my words would reflect your word in content, tone, and in emphasis. And we pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

So, you heard a section of the Bible read just a few moments ago from First Corinthians 13. And if you've been to a wedding, you've probably heard that passage read at one time or another. It's fairly common in weddings that this passage is read and people say, yeah, that's great. And even if you aren't really a church person or that interested in faith, chances are even when you've heard that read, you said, that's a pretty good description of love. I would like to be loved like that. I would like somebody to care for me the way that those verses describe love.

And chances are that you've even had the thought of saying, I would like to be able to give love like that. And it isn't just in a romantic sense that we think about that. Although it's often read at weddings, we tend to also want to say, I would like it if my parents or my siblings loved me like that. I would like to love like that for my children or my friends in this world.

And as we think about this and consider love like this, this section is right in the middle of a section of First Corinthians that deals with the church and gifts. But I actually want to lean into the romantic side of this just for a moment, because I saw a book recently and interacted with it and the upshoot of it helped me understand something about love.

The book is called *The Science of Happily Ever After* by Ty Tashiro. And so, what he does is he basically does a bunch of research on romance, and then he presents it in this book. He doesn't write from a perspective of faith. But the reason that I found this helpful is because what he says helps us fall in love actually goes very closely with First Corinthians 13, four through seven.

Now, that shouldn't really surprise us, but the reason that I found this interesting is I have a hard time holding 15 qualities in my head. If you read through this, it's love is patient, love is kind. Love does not, does not, does not. And when I read 15 things, I just kind of blur over. I don't know if any of you have that moment.

But what he does is he says that when we fall in love, we fall in love for two reasons. And his first reason may not sound very good in church, but he says it's lust. That's what he says. You can basically say it's attraction. He uses the word lust. He says what it is, is you're first physically attracted to somebody and that you're also attracted to them socioeconomically where they are in a pecking order, status-wise, where you say, are they somewhat like me or close to me. And that's part of it.

But then he says this, he says, but the real factor is how much we like somebody. And he says that that hasn't really changed. If you go back, there's research that was done on friendships starting in the sixties and seventies, and that it's pretty consistent, he says. It's very similar to children, he said. Children develop friendships because of three factors that are part of liking somebody.

The first, he says, is fairness. And this is just really simple when you're young, if somebody is nice and says one for you, one for me, and doesn't take advantage of the situation, doesn't push ahead, you say, I kind of like that person. And then if they're kind, they do some things that they don't have to do to extend kindness to somebody. We like them.

And then as we get even a little older, he said, sometimes late grade school, maybe middle school, loyalty becomes big. And this is in essence the way that we live when we're in a place where we say, oh, all of my other friends don't want you at the lunch table, but I'm going to be willing to either say, no, my friend comes with me or I stay with you. That's loyalty.

So, fairness. You get one Twinkie, I get one. In a kind of kindness, I'm going to give you my Twinkie because you didn't have one. And if they want to go eat Twinkies without you, we all go together. Okay? That's kind of the way that works.

Now, you may say, okay, what does that have to do with First Corinthians 13, four through seven? Well, in this list of qualities, if you look and say the first two are positive, love is patient and love is kind, you could say that that's the kindness factor. Then there are seven or eight negatives depending on how you want to categorize the list and one positive kind of put back into this. And you could say that this is the fairness or justice theme. And then at the end, there are four qualities that say love

always protects, it always trusts, it always hopes, and it always perseveres. And you could say that this is loyalty.

And so, as somebody who likes patterns, I say that's kind of cool to say that research has said that these qualities work. So let me just walk through these qualities and I'll come back to these three things.

Love is patient, and I'm going to give you definitions that are partly from the original language and from the Zondervan Study Bible. Love is patient. It means long fused, that it endures provocation and perseveres peace. So, love means that we have a long fuse in essence before we get upset. Love is kind. It renders gracious service and gives friendly, merciful, and helpful attention to another.

Now we move into these, love is not statements, and you could say this is more the justice side or sense of fairness. Love doesn't envy meaning it doesn't boil over. It renounces negative, self-centered feelings with regard to others' success. So, it doesn't get bent out of shape or feel hurt when somebody else succeeds. Love doesn't boast. This has a meaning of being a windbag, but it means it doesn't heap praise on one's self. Love is not proud. It does not have an exaggerated view of oneself. It does not dishonor others. And to dishonor others means literally to be rude or disrespectful, that we don't make actions that are contrary to the conventions of decency.

Love is not self-seeking. It means it's not narcissistically fixating on one's own advantage. It is not easily angered, meaning that it's not touchy or irritable and that it refuses to become irritated when it's provoked. It keeps no record of wrongs means literally it doesn't remember. William Barclay said this about it. He said, "One of the great arts in life is learning what to forget." And then it says, love doesn't delight in evil, but it rejoices in the truth.

And then you get to these always statements. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Probably speaking of loyalty. And most commentators say the word always here doesn't mean that there's never a time to say, you've given me a reason not to believe. Even Jesus, when he talks about marriage, gives us a time when divorce is understandable. So, true love doesn't mean that you look past everything.

But A.T. Robertson in his notes on this said it this way. He said, "That it isn't to believe anything, but in doubtful cases, this person will prefer being too generous in their conclusions to being suspecting of the other person that they're acting unjustly." And this is loyalty or saying, I'll always protect, I'll always hope, and I'll always believe.

Now again, if you just are tracking with what I'm trying to say here, there are 15 qualities and you can legitimately say all 15 stands on their own. But if you want to put them in three groups, the negative statements in the middle are fairness, the two up front are kindness, and the four at the end are basically loyalty.

But here's what I'm guessing, even as I just go through this very quickly, and that is if you are thinking about this, you say, you know, I'd like to be loved like that and I would like to love like that. But at least when I read the list, my first reaction is, I don't love like that very well.

There are a lot of things on that list that I would like to do, but I don't do them as frequently or as well as I would like to do them. And even though these descriptions indicate a sense of choice, and even though there's a sense in which this is commanded, it's hard to command love. It's hard to command us to say, you must do all these things because it's hard to do.

And so, I want to just draw a picture. I know that stick men are my specialty, but I want to expand on the stick man. This is a stick person with a bucket here, okay? This is a bucket. And our bucket gets filled from different places and different people with love. So, for example, if you had parents, your parents were people who had a bucket as well and poured into you. And if you had great parents who were really in tune and knew what was going on, they knew how to pour into you. And if you had less-than-perfect parents, then maybe they poured into you less and you might have a little bit of a deficit as you start life.

And then you have some friends along the way and they pour into you or don't pour into you. You have roommates, maybe you start dating, and maybe you get married and you have a spouse. And you think, now that I have a spouse, I'll always have somebody who loves me perfectly, and that will make me happy. Okay? I expected a little bit of laughter there from those of you who are married because you know that you go into it thinking this is going to be great, but what happens is you think now I'll have somebody who wakes up thinking about how can I help Kurt's day be better. But the truth is, I'm still the only one thinking about that because that's our human nature. Now, you have moments where you're loving and you're giving, but even your spouse will love imperfectly.

And then what happens is we think, well, maybe if I have some kids, that will be the way to be really loving and be loved and loved. But do you know what happens with kids? There's the laughter. It takes a couple of decades before your kids say, Mom,

Dad, you had a rough day, how can I serve you? When they're four, five, or six years old, all they do is say, I need, I need, fill my bucket.

And so, what happens is you are kind of working with all these things coming into your bucket, and now you're trying to give out maybe to friends, maybe to a spouse, maybe to kids, and you're constantly in a deficit because all human love is limited and flawed.

But not only that, your bucket has holes in it that seep out all of this water and love that's coming into you. And so, you're constantly, I'm constantly, in a deficit in terms of the love that we need. And that's why it's so hard to love well because if you don't have experienced love, it's hard to give love that you don't have.

Now, the answer from my vantage point is this and that is, what we really need is to experience divine love in such a consistent way because it's the only source of love that is endless, that our bucket is overflowing. So, if you think about maybe a fire hydrant, I won't try to draw it, but I'm going to draw the love coming in. What happens is when we experience divine love, now there's an endless supply. So, no matter how many outflows we have, how big our holes are in our own bucket, there's more love being poured into us than has to go out.

But here's what I would also guess is a problem. Even in saying that today, my guess is that there are many of us who say, yeah, I know that in theory, but it's hard to experience in reality and that there are probably some of us who are even saying, yeah, God doesn't love me like that.

God has let me down because I didn't have the parents who poured into me. I don't have a friend. I don't have a spouse. I don't even have kids to pour out to. Or, I don't have a job, and I don't have the resources. I don't, therefore God hasn't, therefore I don't feel divine love. And if that's kind of where you are, maybe that's even been a hindrance to your faith journey. Or you say, maybe there's a God, but it doesn't seem like God's very close to me, very real to me. And so, there is a sense in which you say, this sounds nice in theory, but I don't experience a lot of divine love.

I was being led in an exercise this last week on Psalm 23, and I was reading it, rereading it, and going through some different verses and translations. And what struck me was this. You often think of Psalm 23, the well-known Psalm of David, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He leads me beside still waters and, you know, green fields and all of this. But in the last verse, we read this, "Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life." In the message, it says that these qualities, whatever words it uses, will chase me all the days of my life.

And I took a few moments after I saw that, and I looked it up in Hebrew. And the Hebrew word means to pursue or hunt or chase. And so, what you could say that this verse says, isn't that God's goodness and love will follow me because that's kind of a weak picture, it's like wherever I go, it kind of follows me, but the picture is that it chases you, it hunts you, it pursues you. And the word for love, some translations say mercy, surely your goodness and your love will follow me or your mercy will follow me all the days of my life, the word there in Hebrew is the word hesed. It's a word that's roughly equivalent in the New Testament to the word agape because hesed is God's loyal love for us.

And here's what this means, when you are going through life and you're feeling like your bucket isn't very full of love, whether it's from people or God's love, what it means is that God's love is still pursuing, chasing, hunting you, and wanting to lead you beside still waters and into the green pasture and to restore your soul. And you, at some point, if you continue to run, it will continue to chase you, but you have to let it catch you in order to experience the love.

And here's how that happens for many of us. And that is it's when we first come back to the recognition of what God did on the cross and say that God through Jesus' death on the cross demonstrated his incredible love for you. That was God chasing you, pursuing you with love and goodness, and saying, come and experience the goodness of God.

But then God continues to do it through the circumstances in our lives. And sometimes that's harder to see. And so, when we can't see it in our circumstances, what we need to do is go back and say, but I know that God's love chases me because He's already done it on the cross. So, when my circumstances don't feel like God's love is chasing me, then I can say, but I know that He's still pursuing me.

And what I know, the psalmist says it, and I've heard people of faith say it, that when they were young and now, they're old, that they've never seen God's goodness basically not come to fruition. It may not be that your circumstances change to be what you think you want, but God's goodness is being woven through every situation, every event, and every disappointment. And He is still pursuing you with goodness and love. And when you understand that, what happens is the love of God begins to pour into you in such a way that you're able to say, now I can love the people that God calls me to.

In a way, you could take this whole passage and just simply say that God's love has been given to me because He's been patient with me. He's been long fused with me

in the times when I've run, when I've provoked him, and he has continued to be patient. God has been kind to me. His love has been kind to me. He's rendered graciously to me when I didn't deserve it. God has, in his love, not boasted and not been proud. He hasn't dishonored me and hasn't been self-seeking. He's not easily angered with me and his love doesn't keep record of wrongs once I come to Jesus and ask for forgiveness.

God's love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and it always perseveres. And when that becomes my rubric, then what happens is I begin to experience God's transformation. In fact, we've been talking about transformation in this series. We've called the series 212 representing the boiling point and talking about how when we encounter God some things help raise our spiritual temperature to this transition point. And what selflessness, choosing to love does is it raises our boiling point because what we're doing is we're saying, I'm going to love even when I'm not necessarily feeling full, and I'm waiting for God's love to fill me.

And there's something about that trust, that step that says I'm going to love even when I don't feel love. That is significant because when you say I'm going to be somebody who isn't just fair but kind and loyal, I'm going to give instead of choosing self-protection, self-promotion, self-preservation, because those things lower our spiritual temperature, what you're doing is you're saying, God, I'm going to choose this today.

And ultimately this passage is not really written to instruct us on how to have a good dating relationship or marriage. It's written to the church that the context is to the whole church. And so, the expression of divine love, the idea is that there should be something different that happens for the people who say that they're followers of Jesus Christ. There should be something of the divine in the gathering and the community of the church. The people say there's a difference in the way that people live here than what I experience anywhere else. And when that's true, that creates a different atmosphere here and in any true church than what people encounter anywhere else.

In business, there are two ways that companies launch products typically. There's probably more, but there's what some people call perfecting launch, which is often how we think about a product. If you're getting a piece of technology, that's generally the idea. An automobile where something is tested and when they launch the product, they hope that there's nothing really wrong with it.

And then there's another approach which is called launch and perfect. In fact, this is something like Google Docs where they say it's out here and let us know if something doesn't work and we'll try to fix it at some point down the road.

And here's what happens for some people when it comes to love. And that is they basically say, I want to perfect this and then I'll launch when I feel it, when I have it, when I'm capable, then I'll start to express love.

But here's the reality of a Christian journey, and that is it's really a launch and perfect. It's saying even when I can't love perfectly, I will start the journey and I will begin to express love because of the great love that God has given to me. And that will bring about a change in the spiritual temperature for you personally and for the community that we're part of, our families, our marriages, our parenting, our kids, all of those things.

Father, we pray today that you would help each one of us here to encounter your love in such a way that it moves us outward in love, that we would know what it is to have your son pay for our sins and know what it is to be pursued in God. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.