



'Til You Can't
Part 3 – Love for a Lifetime
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Today we finish this series, *'Til You Can't*. Make that phone call to your mom because one day you may not be able to. Say you're sorry, say I love you. As we talk about love for a lifetime, this picture always pops into my mind when I think about love for a lifetime. This precious couple... See, you're like *Aw, Ted, low hanging fruit with that picture*. Together since 1952. I've never been a big fan of the anniversary cards that say, "You made it!" I want to know the quality of the relationship. We have a couple in our church that did this a few years ago. This is Jim and Sharon Black. I hope they are watching from home after Sharon's surgery last week. Amy and I had the opportunity to go visit them in the hospital. They've been married 55 years, together since 1967. It was pretty precious, after Sharon's surgery, to hear Jim speak of his love for his wife and the 55 years they have had together.

The question I've been pondering, and I'd love for you to ponder it with me today, is how do we measure love for one another? How do we measure that? How do we know we're doing it? During the pandemic, we loved to use the "Love your neighbor as yourself" with the restrictions and the mandates. If you love your neighbor, your church is going to stay closed. If you love your neighbor, you're going to open it. If you love your neighbor, you're going to wear a mask. If you love your neighbor, you're not going to wear a mask. But how do we really know we love our neighbor?

Amy gives me a hard time on this all the time with my physical fitness. I like to compare my fitness to that of other people. I will look at someone that is not in the shape I'm in. I'm in a little bit better shape than them and I'll be like, "Well, at least I'm not in that kind of shape." Amy's like, "That is a terrible strategy for your health, Ted." I'm like, "This is the only reason I go to beach. So I can look around and be like I'm feeling pretty good about myself right now. That guy is trusting his swimsuit way too much over there." I know you're wondering where I'm going with this. That's a terrible way to measure whether or not you're in good shape – looking at other people. We do this all the time though with our love. "At least I'm not treating people like he is." "At least I don't talk to others like she does." "I must be a loving person..."

Today, I think we start with understanding that we don't measure our love based on the way other people love. We have another way, as followers of Jesus, to measure the way we are loving one another. Because it's Mother's Day, I had to pull out two of our favorite children's books. I think this is my wife's favorite children's book (title – *Guess How Much I Love You*). I can't tell you how many times we read this to our children. You know the story... It's Little Nutbrown Hare trying to describe and measure love for Big Nutbrown Hare. "I love you this much." This is where we get with our kids. "I love you this much." And then it's "No, I love you as high as I can reach." And what Big Nutbrown Hare

would say is, "Yeah, but I can reach higher, so I love you more." It ends with what is actually the title of another book – *I love you to the moon and back*. We would say this to our daughter, Corynn, all the time. "Love you to the moon and back."

Today, we want to dig into Romans 13. If you have your Bibles, we're going to be looking at Verse 8 -14, but we are going to start with this big idea of love. **Love is a debt we never pay off.** It's never paid in full. We understand what scripture teaches in Proverbs 22: 7 , which says we can actually become a slave to that. ***The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a slave to the lender***

The text we are going to look at in Romans 13: 8 doesn't prohibit borrowing, it just says when you borrow, you become a slave to that. I remember when my friend, Austin... I was 22 and he was 29 years old. I went to work for him in South Georgia right out of college. He was pastoring a church. He just got to a place that he felt he was owed an F-150, like "I'm going to get me an F-150. I'm going to get the best F-150 money can buy." He did; he went on the lot and bought at F-150. I don't know if you remember these days, 25 years ago, but they used to send you payment books. Does anybody remember the payment book? I bet if we got back to that, there would be less borrowing in our country today. Because I was there when Austin got his payment book on that F-150. I can remember the angst. Why? Because the new truck smell was gone. You've had the relief from when you make that final payment. So, you understand.

The scripture in Romans 13 tells us, ***8 Let no debt remain outstanding...*** Speaking primarily of respect and honor there, but money can also be included. ***...except the continuing debt to love one another...*** Love is a debt never paid in full. Follower of Jesus, we don't ever get to a place where we go, "I have loved that person enough. I can't think of one more thing I can do to show them love." Everyone in here has an EGR person in their life – an extra grace required person that you have poured love on. When that person comes to mind or you see that person coming at you, it's like *I can't do anymore for this person. I have loved...* And you start to measure your love based on all the ways you've loved.

So, here's where we start today – **it's never paid off.** We don't ever get to a place where we go, "I have loved enough. I've done enough, I've cared enough, and I've proven that I am a loving person. And I can't give anymore, I can't love anymore."

Keep going in Verse 8 because here's where we get number 2 – **Love fulfills the law. *...for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.*** What does that mean? Jesus came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. He is the very fulfillment of it, and he is our ultimate measure of love, not our neighbor.

And we get these commandments – ***"You shall not commit adultery,"*** What did Jesus say? "Before you pat yourself on the back for not committing adultery, if you have looked at a woman lustfully as to have her in your heart, you have committed adultery." That's what Jesus is saying. By the way, ***"You shall not murder,"*** "And before you pat yourself on the back because you've not murdered, if you hold hatred in your heart toward a brother..." Jesus brings all of these back to the heart, to the seed, to where it starts. And look at the heart, not just the fact that you've obeyed these commandments. ***"You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."***

I want you to see what it says and what Jesus gave us wasn't love your neighbor as they love you. It doesn't say that. Treat your neighbor as they treat you. It doesn't say that. Do for your neighbor to the same measure that they do for you. That is not the Great Commandment. It is love your neighbor as yourself. This is not a command to self-love. This is just saying whatever you would do for yourself. For example: If you are hungry, what do you do? You eat. If you're thirsty, you drink. If you have a need, you go to extremes to meet that need. Jesus said, "Love your neighbor and do for them as you would do for what you would need and how you would take care of yourself."

We are not commanded to love our neighbors as they love us. So, don't be this guy right here (picture of snow-covered steps that are only shoveled on one side). I've seen this picture a bunch. I want to know the story. You know there is a great story to this picture. I showed this a couple of weeks ago somewhere and someone said, "Well, maybe the house next door is vacant." I doubt it. There is no time needed to cover and remove the rest of that snow. Here's what we do. "My neighbor treated me a certain way so here's how I'm going to treat my neighbor." Our neighbor, the other person is not how we measure love.

That is what I do when I try to make myself feel better about not exercising or eating properly. "Well at least I'm eating better than that person." "At least I walk. You know I walked a half mile yesterday. I bet that guy didn't walk anything." You say that's crazy and ridiculous, but we do it with love all the time. Not like her. Not like him. I don't do it like that. And then when we see these videos and picture of what a good neighbor looks like... Isn't it something? Every time, we never side with the antagonist in the story. David and Goliath, we're always with David. We don't ever read that story and go, "Oh, I'm probably Goliath in that story."

Don't be this person. Video plays. I want you to not just see how she does it, but the response. Oh, an Astros fan. Look at that. The foul ball is in the little girl's hands. She grabs it and holds it tight. The woman rips it out of her hands. But I want you to watch the response. The little girl walks away with her head down. And we are like, "How dare you!" But we would be this guy right here [video plays] The homerun ball is caught by a Blue Jays fan, but that fan gives the ball to a kid that is a Yankees fan. I love the response. One walks away, head down, rejected, something stolen from them by an action taken, and the other... But let's get honest for a second. Of course, when we watch that, we're the Blue Jays fan. Of course, if I catch a foul ball, I'm going to find the nearest child. Somebody said, "Ted, how does this work with fishing?" Well, on the lake, it's every man for himself. I'm going to be honest with you. Fishing has nothing to do with what we're talking about today. If you find a good hole, you do not move for your neighbor.

We see it all the time. It's all around us. We have to stop comparing ourselves to how other people are loving and look to the true and only source. Know who the true and only source is and rely on the true and only source as we measure our love. 1 John 4: 15 - 16 reads, **15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.** We don't know and rely on the love others have for us. We don't know and rely on how other people treat us. God is love. We love because he first loved us. **God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.**

How do I know then? How can I know for sure I'm abiding in God's love? What's my test for that? How can I know I am relying on the love God has for me? I think the scripture speaks much to this. We go back to this passage often as a church, but I think we focus as a church on the second part of it more than the first part. Go back a chapter where we are going to spend a little bit of time, and then go and close out in Romans 13 again.

We read this all the time and on Mother's day, we share it often. Romans 12: 15 – ***Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn.*** As the family of God, as the local church, as believers in Christ Jesus, we are called to walk alongside people in whatever they're dealing with in whatever season or stage of life. Every Sunday when we gather, there will be people mourning and there will be people rejoicing. And the body of Christ is about rejoicing with those who rejoice, being happy with those who are happy, and mourning with those who got bad news, mourning with those who have experienced loss.

I think this is a great test for us because here's how we know we're abiding in God's love. Here's how we know the love of God is coming through us. It is not flowing through me, I am not relying on God's love if I rejoice with those who have bad news, if I mourn when I hear someone share good news. Who are you rejoicing with and who are you mourning with? I think we get this backwards. We want those who hurt us or don't treat us well to not experience the good in their lives.

I'm going to just dispel a rumor for just a brief second because I hear it around town a lot and I frankly don't think it's true. You hear the churches are competing with each other and pastors don't get along. I have to be honest with you, some of my closest friends in this town are pastors in this town. And in the pandemic, if I can be honest, as terrible as the pandemic was, it really helped with this. We all bonded during the pandemic. We spent time talking to each other and caring for each other.

I had a great coffee this week with a pastor friend in town for an hour and a half. We laughed and we got frustrated together as we talked about you. We were bonding. I know other people that were there at the coffee shop saw me and this other pastor together. Afterwards, I texted him... because he truly... I can say this. He is a friend, someone I enjoy walking alongside in life. He has a great sense of humor. I texted him; Hey man, you're the real deal. Thanks for the time today." He responded with, "My brother, I can't thank you enough for meeting. You encourage me so much. I mean, you didn't really say anything that was directly encouraging, but somehow, I was super encouraged by you." He said, "You can talk about dark, depressing stuff for an hour and a half and somehow I walked away encouraged." That's kind of our dark sense of humor. We both have a dark sense of humor. Anyway...

Because we are on the same team, when I hear God doing great things at his church, I rejoice. I should rejoice. When he's going through a difficult season, I can mourn with him.

Let's get clear on this today. Right now, in your mind, I want you to think about someone you just don't care for. It's easy. It's won't take long. Think about someone who has wronged you. Think about someone who just put the knife in your back and twisted it a little bit. They said some things. They did some things. They're going after you and your livelihood, your reputation, your family, a child. Just think about someone who has wronged you.

Here's the emotion. You want to get even. Some of you are like, "I'm not there. I'm not doing anything actively to go after them." Well, okay maybe you sit on the sidelines, but you still want them to pay. You want them to hurt like you did. As human beings, we all deal with it. And you hear something happening to them and deep down you're like, "Uh... Good, they had it coming." You want them to hurt like you do. You want them to feel it.

Here's how we know we are abiding in the love God has for us. Rejoice when your neighbor wins. When something good happens to the person that has wronged you, can you rejoice. Someone in here just rubs you the wrong way – extra grace required. When they share good news, can you rejoice. It's actually one of the best ways to know if someone is for you is how you they respond when you share the good news. Ah, that person is on my team.

Today is Mother's Day and Mother's Day is an opportunity. It's a difficult day for many. It's a great day, though, to test everything we're talking about right now because today we mourn alongside those struggling with infertility and those who lost a child or a mother and Mother's day is a very difficult day for this person. It's a very challenging day. At the same time, as we already have this morning, we celebrate, we rejoice alongside those expecting and those spending the day with their child or mother. I hear from people often leading up to this day, "I won't be there Sunday. I won't be there on Mother's Day. Mother's day is too painful for me."

One way to know God is working in your life and in my life is that even when I've been through difficult seasons and stages of life and I've experienced great pain, I can look at someone else who is rejoicing and rejoice with them. That's hard. I'm not saying what I'm talking about today and what we're looking at is easy, but it's one way to know God is working in your life and you're abiding in him that you can celebrate in the life of another person what's not happening in yours, that you can rejoice with the one today who is having lunch and dinner with their mom while you can't. This is not easy, this is challenging I know, but we rejoice with those who rejoice, we mourn with those who mourn.

We're going to stick in Romans 12, but finish out with Verse 10 in this section. **10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.**

If you go back to Romans 12 where we took **Rejoice with those rejoice and mourn with those who mourn**, you get this bulleted list. It's a great list for us to process the measure of our love. How well am I loving?

Romans 12 - **14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.** Follower of Jesus, you have an opportunity right now with what's going on in our nation. That's something we, as a church family, have prayed about for years. Travis spoke about it in January. I am praying fervently that the Supreme Court of the United States overturns Roe vs Wade, but I have to warn all of us on this right here. With that will come persecution. With that will come people wanting to go after you online. Bless and do not curse. If you are knowing and relying on the one coming after you and your faith, you will return the favor with whatever they are bringing at you. But if you are knowing and relying on the love God has for you, you will rejoice and celebrate without cursing and pointing the finger and doing all the nastiness

that's going to be coming out. It's already coming out. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. We have a very different way of going about all of this, and it's not what you are seeing.

Last week, a pastor told me that he had to get off social media altogether because he found himself preaching angry. I told him I could relate to that. He said, "The bigger problem is the more I preach angry, in the last two years, the more our congregation loved it." I'm not going to talk to that pastor any more. I didn't want any more of the conviction. "Well, that's not true of our church." It is though, isn't it? I find myself standing up here at times preaching to three or four people who came at me and it's ridiculous. Bless and do not curse.

15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

19 Do not take revenge... Here it is going back to what we looked at first. Love your enemy as yourself.

20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. Care for him. Do not be overcome by evil. What did Jesus say? In this world, you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world. Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.

The last few verses of Romans 13 in our text today... This is what Paul says. **11 And do this, understanding the present time...** What does scripture say a chapter earlier? **Don't be conformed by this world...** the word can actually be seen as age, everything going on in this time. ... **But be transformed by the renewing of your mind. The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber...**

I heard a pastor say this week, "We're all sleepwalking through this present time. And it's time for us to wake up and not sleepwalk." And then he gives this great word picture. **...because our salvation...** it's not speaking here of your justification by faith. It's talking about the Second Coming, something that's in the future. **...is nearer now than when we first believed.** Meaning from the moment of your salvation to the today. Today, we are closer to the return of Christ than we were when we were saved. **12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.** And we are not children of the night. This is imagery for Satan's domain. We are not of our Father the devil and children of darkness, we are children of light. So, how long do we keep loving. It's a debt that is never paid off. We love until the Lord returns or you die. Take that away from today's message. How long am I supposed to love? Until the Lord's return or I'm dead.

So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime... Jesus is the light of the world. You and I walk in love and we walk in light, **...not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.** In the context of loving one another as you love yourself.

John Piper puts Verse 14 this way. *“Let your friendship with Christ be as close as the shirt you wear. When you get up tomorrow morning and get dressed, put on Christ. Receiving Christ daily and fully is the key to love.”*

If you’ve never placed faith in Jesus, that today would be the day of your salvation. That you would put away the evil desires of the flesh, that you would confess your sin before your father in heaven, and receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior. That today you would repent of that sin, turn to Jesus, confess to him that he is Lord, believe that he has been raised from the dead, and the scripture says you will be saved.

I pray, Woodland Hills Family Church, we are known as a loving, caring, body, where we care for each other well, we care for those outside of our church well. And all that’s gone into today... I just think of all the blood, sweat, and tears that people poured into making today happen. That is so when new people show up here, they know they are loved and cared for and they leave and go out to their car and they can know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, they matter to God, and they matter to us. And how people treat us will never be the standard for how we love. God is love. We love because he first loved us, and we will know and rely on that love. And all God’s people said... Amen

Father, it is in the name of Jesus that I pray for the one who has never repented of their sins and are children of darkness, walking around in this present time and this dark age, living for themselves and living their own way, that today would be the day they confess that sin before you and receive Jesus as their savior.

For all of us today to really think through the measure of our love and how well are we loving. Not just to have a checklist that we keep track of, but that in all of our interactions and all of our daily walk around ordinary life we are loving our neighbors as we love ourselves.

I pray a blessing on every mom today as they spend time with their kids, grandchildren. I pray for every son or daughter who this is the first Mother’s Day without their mom. This church family mourns with them. For those who have experienced great loss through miscarriage, through abortion, through those struggling with infertility, we mourn with them today. Thank you for being love and being our ultimate measure and our ultimate prize. We pray all of this in the name of Jesus, and everyone agreed and said... Amen.