

# Impossible Love

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**Bible Text:** 1 John 4:7-21  
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1 John 4, let's look there together as we continue looking at numerous texts in 1 John and 1 John has so very much to say about the difference, the new birth Jesus makes in our hearts and particularly the fact that he infuses into us a new love that comes from his Spirit that he has placed within us. 1 John 4, we'll read verses 7 down through verse 21 and we'll not cover everything that's here, but some of it we will. John says in 1 John 4:7,

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 14 We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 17 By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. 19 We love, because He first loved us. 20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

I call this "Impossible Love." As John gives us these descriptions and really these admonitions of how we ought to be and acting out our love one for another, and you see the things he says about it, the superlatives and the way he amplifies this thing, it truly is an impossible love. But as one said: to be a Christian means you become supernaturally

natural. It becomes natural to you to do some things that are supernatural in origin or in dimension, and one of the primary things, the key things, is love. The love we have, the love we express, the love we show, the love we serve with, is an impossible love. In other words, it's not within the realms of humanity. It's not within the realms of your inherited nature to have this capacity to love the way God wants you to love.

Now, there is great violence done to the Scripture. Great violence particularly by theological liberals or liberals in general, to take the teaching on God's love and make it this broad, generic, sentimental thing whereby we're supposed to just bring everyone together, all the religions of the world and everyone else, and we're just to love and care for and usually it expresses itself in socialism or social welfare concern, though there is some good in that certainly, but they say that's really what this definition and this admonition of love from the Scriptures is all about. That is absolutely not true. There is some truth to that, that we are to be about loving others, everyone we see, but this is a unique and special love within the family of God. A unique and special love God puts in the hearts of genuine Christians whereby they begin to cultivate and grow in a special and unique concern, service and care for each other that the world cannot understand.

Let's talk about it a little bit, first of all, I. let's notice the nature of our love. Where does this true, this impossible love come from? Verse 8 says, "The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love." Well, it comes from him. He distributes it uniquely and specially in those who are his regenerate, born again children. Now, when John says here, "God is love," it's very important to remember that love is not God. God is love, but love is not God. Now, again, theological liberalism and it's very prominent and it's amazing how these things cycle around. We thought that we had cleaned up Baptist churches of liberal influences and now under different names and different titles and with new cosmetics on, liberalism has come back into so many evangelical and Baptist churches to make us cool and relevant and nifty and the happening thing and the type of place all the world wants to be a part of, and then they'll come down to this low level, if you will, of love saying, "Well, wherever there's real caring and giving and compassion, well, that's God." That is not true. That is not true. God is love, but love is not God.

Love does not define God, but God does define love. Now, love is not a complete revelation of God but where there is true godly love, we see something of God, but it is true, rather, God gives love a complete definition. For example, the Bible also says God is light but, of course, he's more than light. The Bible says God is spirit but, of course, he's more than spirit. So you can't reduce God down to wherever people care for each other and are giving sacrificially to help the less fortunate, then that's God. That's absolutely not true. That's just not true. Christians may do that and should do that, but love is not God, even though God is love.

Many, many years ago, I jotted down what I felt like was a good biblical definition of love and you could argue that it ought to include this or that, but let me give you that because as I've studied on it and meditated on it, I think, by God's grace, it's a pretty sound way to view a biblical definition of love. Love is a decision. Notice I didn't say a feeling; I didn't say an emotion. Love is a decision to behave toward another person

according to the dictates of Scripture expecting nothing in return. Love is a decision to behave toward another according to the dictates of Scripture expecting nothing in return. And that is such a challenging thing for us to remember, that surely it is true and hopefully it is true there are loving emotions that stir in our heart but you must be very careful to make sure your emotions are dictated to by truth and you don't allow your emotions to try to define for you what truth is. You don't allow your feelings to define what love is and what love isn't. I mean, man is so fallen and so corrupt and so wicked, he can fill 100,000 different contradictory things in one lifetime. He'll be all over the place. That's why we need to say love is not a feeling, it is a decision to act according to the dictates of Scripture expecting nothing in return.

And for the child of God, as you grow and you mature, you're beginning to love to stay committed to the truth of love even in those times when you are weak in the spirit of love. Did you hear that? You strive to remain faithful to the truth to live out love, even when the spirit, or you might even say the feelings of love, are not warm and active in your heart. Boy, I'm so glad I have a lot of church members like that. My goodness, the last thing we need is another church member dating the church. I'll just try on this church and maybe that thrills me, maybe that makes me happy, and if it doesn't, then I'll try on this church. If that doesn't thrill me, then I'll try on another church, and evangelicals today, especially those in larger cities, we have a lot of large "exciting" churches, if they live there 30 years, they may be a part of 7, 8 10 different churches. Now, trust me, there is a good, or there are good biblical reasons to find another church. I know God leads people to other churches, but there is a concept today of letting everything be on how I feel about it versus what does God say about it. So we've got to make sure that we stay committed to the truth of love, that is, to live out love, to act lovingly, to serve in love, even when the feelings or the spirit of love might be weak in our hearts.

So love is not an emotion. Love necessarily is not a desire. You could amplify the word "desire" out and just say the word "lust." Certainly, love is not lust. Lust is natural to man, lust is natural to dogs, but it's not love. James 1:15 says, "when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." If you're one that as a purpose and pattern of your life caters to the lust of the old fallen nature, then you eventually kill everything in your life. It will kill your marriage. It will kill your relationships with your children, or your parents. It will kill your financial stability. You can go on and on and ultimately it can kill you physically by yielding to your lust.

So love is not something you fall into like falling into a ditch. "Well, I fell in love." No, you didn't. Now, I think it's wonderful and I think it's good, especially for young single people who are getting to that point of maturity where their parents feel like, "Yes, it's time for you to find that life partner in the Lord," and they feel a warmth and an excitement. Man, when I saw Pam, I just, I'm telling you, I fell into something, I'm not sure what it was. Hopefully you feel something. That's good. That's proper, but that's not love.

Now, guys, you live long enough, you can fall into something about a lot of different women if you let yourself. And ladies, if you let your emotions go here and there, you

could fall into a lot of stuff about a lot of different men. That's why I'm saying we commit, we decide to behave according to Scripture. It's a decision, but there's a point in time when I decided and committed myself to love Pam B. and devote myself exclusively only to her according to the dictates of Scripture. Now, have I done that perfectly? Absolutely not. She's been very patient and gracious and understanding, especially those early years when I had too much pride to admit that I couldn't work 80 hours a week and all of those kind of things, but we're over a lot of that now and God is gracious to us there. But love is not something you fall into.

God is love and God's word reveals God's character. All true love harmonizes with the truth of God which means it harmonizes with the truth of Scripture. If one Scripture truth is willfully violated, you're not acting in love. I've heard parents before say, "Well, you know, I need to do, I know it would be right for me to do this for my son and daughter or correct them here or to forbid them, but I just love them." No, you don't. No, you don't. Not if you willfully and habitually are violating what you know the Scripture mandates in your actions or behavior toward that person.

Now, we have this God in us as Christians, this one who is love, and that is the nature of our love, the very character, the very attributes, the very reality of the God himself. Now, think about this, how unique and different we ought to be and we must be because the love we are to exhibit is the nature of God who lives in us. Now, let's go a step further. John says a little bit more here about this, not only the nature of our love but now the example of our love, if you will. Look at verse 9, the example of our love. Notice his condescension. What an example of love for us, "By this the love of God was manifested in us," or in our case. I think you could amplify that out and say, "In our behalf, or as God was showing how much he loved us, here's what he did, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him." He has sent him, the condescension.

You know, when we sang the song earlier that, "You are holy," and, you know, I don't think any of us grasp the holiness of God like we ought to. I don't think any of us. Well, actually, you won't grasp the holiness of God once you get to heaven because you'll have a perfect mind in heaven but not an infinite mind in heaven. Your perfect mind will continually for all eternity be learning of the infinite, awesome glory of the holiness of God, and when you begin to let the word of God sink into you, when you actually discipline your intellect to begin to grasp and study on and treasure and know, listen, God put your brain in there to meditate on the rich, mysterious, deep things of God so you could be in all of him. And then when you begin to grasp the infinite glories, duties and majesties of this infinitely holy God and then realize he chose in love for us completely offensive unattractive ones, at least in his sight, he chose to become one of us. John says, "That lets you have something of an example of the kind of love we have because the one who would leave the portals of glory and the infinite perfections of the Godhead, put on humanity, be subjected to the vile, corrupt, polluted, cursed earth and sinful men, just to come to be in our presence is a statement of love beyond comprehension." So he said that's an example of the kind of love we have living in us.

Not only his condescension, but also his crucifixion. Look at verse 10, John continues elaborating on this and he says, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son," now this time he adds something, "to be the propitiation for our sins." The propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ that he took our place and became that substitutionary, vicarious atonement for us. I think we're too casual about it. I think we just run over it too quickly. Christ, God in human form, going to a cross and becoming the object of wrath before his holy Father. And, once again, it's not popular these days. And, again, evangelicals and Baptists slough off on this and that is the weighty thoroughness of God's description of our depravity, of our radical offensiveness to this perfect and holy God. Now listen to me: Romans 5 says we are the ungodly, which means that in every respect, every molecule of your being was diametrically the antithesis of who he is. Every part of your being is deeply repulsive to a perfect and holy God, and there's nothing wrong with him, there was just something wrong with us.

And we could go on and on. We could preach for hours about this. We were the enemies of God. Every, listen, every motive of your heart, every attitude of your life and every behavior that in the slightest way is disobedient to him, is an act of a traitor and a rebel. Well, I don't want to belabor it too much longer, but suffice it to say this: that God looked at what we were and died for us. That's the love that's in us. That's why I'm so thankful that many years ago when we got very serious about two things here, when we got very serious about biblical conflict resolution, when we began to teach what the Scripture says about how Christians ought to be able to forgive each other, how Christians ought to be able to get over stuff, amen? How Christians ought to be able to give in, even be wrong, the Scripture says it just doesn't matter in light of Calvary. It just doesn't matter. Listen sir, you're not that important. And for the benefit of the church and for the glory of God, we can forgive each other and go on and overlook stuff, and if you can't forgive it and go on and overlook it, there's a confidential biblical way to resolve issues. And I'll commend you greatly because as your pastor for many, many years now, that's been the overwhelming practice here. We just don't allow people to get gangs of people together to be opposed to this one or that one. That's the way the world acts. We have a different love in us, a different aspect in us. It's the God who lives in us and he gave us these truths. The other one, of course, being church discipline, that there is a way to lovingly, always lovingly, always compassionately and always with humility, go after a brother or sister who is in the strongholds of sin and help them come to repentance because, listen, the wages of sin is death and if you love someone, you go after them.

Well, I don't want to chase that too much further but let's end this thing on the nature or rather, I'm sorry, the example of this love. Look at verse 19, "We love, because He first loved us." So John is writing and he says, "You know, there's an example set for us Christians." Now look, if you're just a churchgoer, this is not that big a deal, but if you have been born again, if your heart has been changed by the Spirit of God and the God of Scripture lives in your heart, then there is something in you that is genuinely unique and it is your capacity to love and the desire to love and the devotion to love the things that God loves which is one another.

Well, let's go to that point, as a matter of fact, the third point: the object of our love. He doesn't say, "Beloved, now love the world," and there's a sense in which we love all men and do the best we can for all men, but that's not what the Scripture is teaching here. Not at all. Look at verse 7 there, "Beloved, let us," what? "Love one another." Then go down to verse 11, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." Then verse 20, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also."

So at least four times in this one section he talks about loving other Christians. Now, that's clearly a commandment to love those in your church family. Now, while Christians love all men, there's no way in the world you can show scripturally defined love to every need in every person you meet. That's why you marry one husband or marry one wife, because there's no way in the world you can take care of two husbands or three or four, and vice versa; no way in the world you can take care of two, three or four wives. So while you love other people in the community, you have a unique love for your spouse, well, so it is in the Christian family. There is that unique and special love for one another in the family of God.

I want to turn here, again. We looked at this not long ago, but one of these texts that liberals so radically violate, Matthew 25, would you look there real quick? Matthew 25, and the context here is most likely the end times but it's definitely a context of great persecution and suffering in the church. And he says in Matthew 25, beginning in 31, "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" There you go, it's the sovereignty of God. All of those who are saved before the Lord, he says, "I prepared your kingdom before the world began." Now, you can slice that how you want to slice it but God prepared the kingdom for his children before the world began.

Verse 35, "'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these,' in the world? No, no, no, no. "To one of your fellow brothers in mankind"? No, no, no. "'To one of these,' notice verse 40, "one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me."

Now, how many times have you seen some politician, some liberal teacher somewhere take that very phrase and talk about when you do it to the least, when you give to the poorest in the world, and we ought to do that, by the way, that's what this verse is talking about? That is not what this verse is talking about. He says when you are caring for each other, other brothers and sisters in Christ, who are being persecuted violently in this case and in many cases throughout church history and, by the way, I believe it's coming again for us. I believe suffering is coming for us again. As a matter of fact, I just in my car of all things driving home, thought, "How long will it be before there is some active government intervention in this pulpit that you can no longer say the things you say? You can no longer speak the way you speak? It's going to be classified as hate speech or something along that line." Here's what he's saying: in those kind of situations, Christians won't have the medical care they ought to get and they're going to be sick; Christians are going to be locked in prison just for preaching the Gospel and proclaiming the truths of God, so they're going to be in prison; some of them won't have necessary clothing or necessary shelter. And Jesus says, "In that context, when just for being a true follower of Christ, they're suffering, the love in your heart will not let you deny them. You will passionately, actively love and take care of those who are suffering for the faith. Do you know why? Because you have a love in your heart for them you can't deny. That's how you know you're one of mine, even though it's costly and difficult."

Now, let me just share three thoughts here, three words here about this love that we're having for one another. We're talking about the object of our love which is other believers, particularly in our church family. First of all, it's a selective love. We've talked about that. This isn't a love in this content for all mankind, it's a love God gives you for other believers, particularly those in your church. Now, for us, the way we're organized particularly for those in your small group, there's not enough of you, there's not enough time in your life to care for a thousand active people, okay? But you might care for five or seven or eight or ten in your small group. So it's a selective love for other Christians.

Secondly, it's a serving love. Everything about this is action. Everything about this is doing something, ministering to others, caring for others, providing for others, whatever the need may be. Now, both in Matthew 25 and in 1 John, John's epistle, the context is desperate suffering. We're not talking about they only have two wide screen televisions and they want three. I remember when I went to, did my graduate studies in Memphis and we would go through midtown Memphis and there would be the most dilapidated little houses that very poor people lived in, but it wasn't uncommon to see a very valuable car and a great big television in the den, and you wondered just, "Are they really poor? Or just are they undisciplined and not purposing to take care of themselves?" But in the Christian context, at least the scriptural context, these are talking about people who are really struggling with the essentials of life, but that doesn't change the fact that this is a serving love. There are 1,001 things we do in our small group body life in living out our service of love one for another that God commands of us.

Here's three little statements that I've used for years. When you say, "Well, what am I, how do I, how do I love my brothers and sisters in my church? Do I just kind of sit at

home and wait until it hits me?" No, you function under the oversight of your church elders and we organize our body into small groups so that nobody can fall through the cracks and everybody can be cared for, and it's a reciprocal relationship, one for the other. Here's the first thing: what needs to be done? Go to your small group leader and say, "What job needs to be done? How can I serve and love my brothers or sisters or brothers and sisters in this small group?" What needs to be done.

Secondly: can you do it? Now, I would never ask you to do something you're uncomfortable doing. I would never ask you to do something that you're not gifted to do, but a lot of times you really can do it. It's just being willing to do it.

Thirdly: does the leadership affirm you doing it? You may go to your small group leader and they may already have somebody doing the kind of job you'd like to do. So let's be coordinated. Let's be strategic. Let's be effective and efficient in serving and loving. Ask the leadership what needs to be done, are you able to do it, now, does the leadership affirm you doing it and then go for it. I really believe with all of my heart you'll not be able to go before the judgment seat of Christ one day and say, "Well, I really didn't know how to serve you, Lord, in my local church." You won't be able to say that here. You know how to serve the Lord here and so many of you do such a wonderful job. The testimonies are absolutely legion of how many wonderful ministry services go on in this body and it's a blessing to my soul.

Well, it's selective, it's a service, and the third "S," it's sacrificial. It's sacrificial. Jesus in this parable of the end time judgment talks about bringing the righteous before him and commending them that he visited him in the hospitals or when he was sick, rather, and clothed him and fed him and all the things he would need and they said, "Lord, we didn't see you. How, what do you mean?" He said, "When you did it to the least of these brothers of mine, true believers." Sometimes you have to do without. Now, to have helped a Christian when the government has made being a Christian against the law, to go on and visit them in prison when that would label you one of them and bring the wrath and the persecution of the government on your household, that's a sacrifice. And even for us, and we're not in that kind of culture today, but if you're going to care and love for one another, there's something else you'll have to give up. That takes some time. The something else that will have to go. So there is a sacrifice always in any culture and in any setting if the church is going to love the way God wants us to love.

So as we began, we talked about the nature of this love. The God of the universe, the God who's loved like no one has ever loved, lives in us. The examples of this love God has for us: his Son's condescension, his Son's crucifixion on our behalf. And then the object of this love for us, or the object, rather, of our love is one another, four times in at least this section. It's for your brother, it's for one another so there's a unique and special love for each other. Now, lastly, and we'll close: the source. The source of this love.

Look at verse 12, if you would, back in 1 John, 1 John 4:12, "No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another," here it is, "God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His



Spirit." The second way he says it. He is the source. He is the reality of it. Sometimes I want to look at Christians and say, "Will you stop trying to do this in your strength." It is God who works through us both to will and to work for his good pleasure. So it's God. It's his Spirit. It's him working in us.

Verse 14, "We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God," here it is, "abides in him," that's it, him in us. Verse 16, "We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God," here it is again, "and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world." Now, that's interesting, as he is and he is the one who gives love its full and true definition, as he is so we are in the world. So that's the source. One evangelist we had here some time ago said he's our source, our force, and our course. Think about that. He's the source. He's the energy and the power to do it, and how we do it is defined by him.

Again, there is just a unique capacity in the child of God to be humble and when he sees what the word of God says in a situation, to catch himself, to reprove himself, and to purpose to line up with God's way in that situation and live out the love God wants you to live out. Now, we struggle, we wrestle, and we fail, but we don't stay in a routine or a pattern of struggle or failure. We get back up out of it and repent and go forward. Romans 5:5, talking about this source, "the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

Now, you may remember a message that I preached some time ago that was entitled "Cultivate a Continual Crush on God." Now, I used the word "crush," I took it out of the puppy love of today's world where young people will get a crush on one another, and they actually cultivate that crush. Do you remember I talked about my older sister and the crush she had on her, who is her husband today, her high school sweetheart. And she would wear his shirt, she would spray his perfume, she would listen to his kind of music. She didn't just sit back and separate away and thought, "I hope I fit." No, she cultivated it. She cultivated it. Well, when you're saved, God comes to live in you, God put new desires in you. There's a new reality to you but you're still in a fallen world that's against you and against this God. You're still in a fallen unredeemed human body that's against God and that's against the pureness and the love of God so you're going to have to strive toward cultivating this love, stirring it up, working it out, repenting of other things. But it's not a woeful thing because there's that ever present desire that, "Yes, this is truly what I want to do."

Do you have that going on in you where you have these desires but you hate them and you're most blessed and enjoy your life the most when you're walking in the new man? Scripture talks about putting on the new self. I'll be so glad when the old Jeff is crucified completely and the new glorified me is put on. Some of you wouldn't mind that either, would you? I don't know if you're laughing about you getting your new self or you'd like for me to get a new self. But that's true. We hate the old unredeemed humanity we're housed in, but there's a new man in there and you've got to stir him up. Turn him on.

That's why you need to get in your small group and go to that teacher and in some way obligate yourself in there. That's what you're here for. Obligate yourself to care for the body of Christ, and they're going to care for you, and they're going to love you, and they're going to encourage you, and they're going to stand with you, and they're going to weep with you, and they're going to pray with you, but only to the end that you're going to do it back.

I'd don't like to say this to this crowd, but don't date the church. Find one that's glory of God focused and Christ honoring and Bible saturated and truly striving to be biblical in all aspects and marry that church. You say, "I'm here through the thick and thin, the ups and the downs, the good and the bad because this is a godly love I have for this church, not a fickle, shallow, worldly infatuation that may go away in a month or two." We've had enough of those birds fly through here. Fly in, perch for a little while, crow, crow, crow, and then fly off. You've got to cultivate a continual love for the brethren. It's in there but you've got to stir it up.

Someone challenged me, I don't know, it was a Christian seminar one time, that God has designed you to desire to have emotions toward what you're committed to. He said if you've got someone that's unpleasant, someone that bothers you, then do something gracious and kind and nice for them. Well, I was a single guy back in those days, 30 years ago, and I had a roommate. I'll not tell you his name. And he was a slob. Now, I was slobbish, but he was a slob, and dirty dishes and dirty socks and just stuff everywhere. And I would whine and complain and the Spirit of God convicted me, "Well, wait a minute, why don't you act like a Christian? Why don't you do good for that one who's done no good for you, at least that you can say as far as being a roommate?" So I started cleaning up his clothes and I started putting them away and I started washing his dishes and it wasn't just a week or two that I had the warmest heart of affection and love for that brother, and the griping spirit was gone, the irritability was gone, the upsetness was gone. I'm not saying that's the exact way to handle that all the time. The Bible says each man should carry his own load, there's a place to reprove a brother and get him in line at times, okay, but for me, that was a good lesson to learn to do for someone who wasn't doing anything for me, and it changed my heart.

So if you're going to live out and cultivate and stir up this love that's in you, there's going to have to be an act of the will from time to time. An act of the will. You're going to have to be intentional. You're just going to have to decide, "I'm gonna do this. I'm gonna be a group leader in small groups. I'm gonna call some folks for my small group teacher. I'm gonna bring a meal or two to somebody who's hurting. I can at least go by and tell somebody I'm praying for them. I'm just going to be intentional about loving and serving my brothers and sisters."

And for you who are in leadership and so many of you are, Sunday night folks and so many of you work so hard, and one of the things that's so challenging and difficult for you is that you have, many of you, some of you, how many of you I don't know, but you have people in your small group who are absolute energy drainers. They can't be counseled enough. They can't be prayed with enough. You can't hold their hand enough.

Now, look, there are seasons when we all need that, amen? But some folks never get out of that season, and they're just takers, and they're the ones that need some admonition, honestly, to say, "Look, you might feel better if you'd actually do something for somebody else." And, look, if you're going to be effective and loving and serving the body as a small group leader at Grace Life Church, or a leader in any capacity, you're going to have to learn how to be kind but to say no to some people who are just energy drainers.

Do you know who the perfect example of that was? The Lord Jesus Christ. He intentionally, intentionally neglected thousands and thousands of needs and needy people. Now, he met many needs and he ministered but there are many, many occasions, the Scripture points out, where he intentionally neglected those needs, turned his back on them, and poured his energy into 12 leaders so they could multiply and be more effective and ultimately meet more needs than if he had spent his time by himself meeting needs. So you're going to have to learn to not allow some people to pull and drain all of the energy out of you.

Let me give you a couple of quick thoughts and we'll close. 1. Ask God to give you one new convert. "God, this year in our small groups, give me one new convert in this class." I'm just going to tell you: if you'll get a hold of God, get on your knees, whatever you need to do and say, "God, I am not going to go through this year and not see one person converted in this class. I'm just not going to do it. I'm just not going to do it." I've had the blessing of talking to three adults this week who believe God has wonderfully saved them. Well, it's such a blessing. I'd love to meet with three adults every week. Now, it's very, it's honestly, it's very rare a week goes by that somebody on the staff doesn't report, "Hey, talked to So-and-so, they believe God has saved them." God has let us see a good steady stream of new converts. So I talked to three this week and I believe God will do that if you'll just get a hold of the horns of the altar and say, "God, for the glory of your name." Now, that's what you've got to be passionate about. Not the success of your class, but that God would be glorified in your class. "God, we're just not going to go a year and not see a person converted here." And just keep working, keep enrolling, keep witnessing, keep reaching out until God does it.

Secondly, raise up one new leader. It might be a small group leader. It might be an outreach leader. It might be a social care group. Whatever, but by the time this small group year is over there would be one other person that you spent some quality time with this year and they're ready to go be a reproducer in next year for the glory of God.

I was going to use this earlier but I skipped over it so I'm going to close with it.

"I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene,  
And wonder how he could love me, a sinner condemned, unclean.  
For me it was in the garden he prayed, "Not my will but thine,"  
He had no tears for his own grief but sweat drops of blood for mine.  
He took my sin and my sorrow, he made them his very own.  
He bore the burden to Calvary and suffered and died alone.

When with the ransomed in glory, his face at last shall see,  
Will be my joy through the ages to sing of his love for me."

Now, let's live that love, particularly, primarily in the body of Christ.

Let's stand together in prayer.