

Love is Patient

The Characteristics of Love

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 13:1-4

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If you're a regular part of our church you know that our theme this year is "Loving Our Neighbors." So far, we've tried to develop that concept with two different teaching series, one of them, the way we started this year was "Why Should I Care?" Loving our neighbors but why in the world should I care about my neighbors? We attempted to get at the core issues of apathy and indifference and because unless we combat those tendencies, we're never going to be motivated to grow in biblical love for anybody, especially our neighbors, especially those who live right around us. We did business, I think, with a number of important passages and a number of important categories of persons that we might be apathetic toward, we tried to overcome our indifference. Then the last several weeks we've been working our way verse-by-verse through the Upper Room Discourse in John 13-17, organized around the heading of "Loving the Way that Jesus Taught It."

This morning, we're beginning a brand new series entitled "The Characteristics of Love." This is going to be a word-for-word study from 1 Corinthians 13 and when you step back and look at everything that's happened so far this year, I mean, hopefully what we've studied and what we've applied you would agree are very important concepts, very important passages from the word of God. But we've not yet taken the time to thoroughly define or describe biblical love. Well, that could be problematic because if we're not all on the same page regarding the definition of one of the key words of our annual them "Loving Our Neighbors," you realize Sunday after Sunday after Sunday we could be talking past one another and so every time somebody says "love," a person across the room interprets it differently. This is clearly one of those cases where definitions matter.

Loving Our Neighbors. What does love mean? Part of the challenge is the culture in which we live offers a variety of competing and sometimes conflicting ideas about this. Would that be the understatement of the morning? And I'm not raising these illustrations now to be critical of anybody else but simply to point out that we all live in and around a culture many times that views this topic differently than the word of God would and if we're not careful, the ideas of our culture have a way of rubbing off on us and if that's the case, then we're not going to love our neighbors biblically. We're not going to love our neighbors well.

Well, how does our culture sometimes define and describe love? Some would say it's an absence of problems. Forget loving your neighbors if that's the answer, it's an absence of problems. One writer said this: "Healthy love is when you find someone whom you like, admire and respect. Love," now, listen to this, "love stops when you discover things about him you don't respect." Uh-oh. "He's not kind." Uh-oh. "Or has attributes you can't stand." Uh-oh. "Horrible manners." Whoa, uh-oh, what are those forks for? Horrible manners. "No tact. You realize you can't have the relationship you envision with this person." Really? There might be some truth about that, I suppose, as you're getting to know someone in a dating relationship but what about people who think that's true for love in marriage? It's an absence of problems.

A well-known divorce attorney, Marvin Mitchelson, wrote a book entitled "Made In Heaven, Settled In Court." I got a little ahead of myself there. What starts love is looking through rose-colored glasses. You idealize your future with this person, you put your best foot forward then real living sets in, problems. Romance takes a backseat to bills. Job aggravations, family problems. You focus on these things instead of cultivating the relationship. Well, can't you do both? Can't you identify and solve problems but do that in a loving way? Why does it have to be one or the other?

Some even suggest that finding lasting love is hopeless. Consider a magazine article that posed the question: what starts love and what stops love? One woman sarcastically said, "What starts love is meeting a man. What stops love is meeting a man." Another writer said there are many who believe we would be better off replacing St. Valentine with St. Jude, the patron saint of hopeless causes. If you believe any of that regarding love, we're not going to be very effective at loving our neighbors.

Then there is the belief that love is a relationship that makes you feel better. Oh really? And I'm thankful for all the wonderful godly jewelers, aren't you? Who live in our community and others? But let me quote from Terry Burman, the President of Barry's Jewelers who says, here's a theological gem, "Love starts when someone makes you feel worthwhile and an important gift can be part of that. I like to watch couples in the showroom looking at rings. They get closer together. There is a dreamy look of contentment. The end comes when you are no longer made to feel valued and validated by the other person. I wish," he says, "all relationships were as long lasting as diamonds." Aw. Well, maybe they would be if we had a more theologically robust view of the concept, huh?

Or this, here's one: love is finding someone who can help you explore deeper aspects of yourself. There's some love for you. This is J. Z. Knight who said, "When does love end? Well, I don't think it ever does if it's been established as a reflection of the individual's self-love. What ends is not the love but the way it serves us. When we stop growing in one relationship, we're ready for another." There you go. "One that will allow us to explore other deeper aspects of ourselves." Oh my.

Honestly, we could multiply quotes like that all day long which is why if we don't take the time sometime this year to define and describe this concept thoroughly, every time we

talk about loving our neighbors, one person thinks this, somebody else thinks that and the net effect would be something less than us accomplishing what the Lord desires of our ministry to those around us. So, we have a culture that is providing competing and confusing ideas for sure.

Now, you've got that in the crock-pot, pull the lid off again and throw these verses of Scripture in which suggest we'd better get this right. It's like it's confusing but it's not important that we know. Oh really? Consider verses like these, Hebrews 10:24, "Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love." I have to know what biblical love is in order to fulfill that command. Or 1 Corinthians 14:1, "Pursue love." Or 1 Thessalonians 3:12, "May the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love." Or 2 Corinthians 8:8, "I want to test the sincerity of your love." Or Philippians 2:2, "Maintaining the same love." Or 1 Peter 4:8, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another." If I don't know what love is, how in the world can I fulfill any of these verses? Or this, Colossians 3:14, "Beyond all these things put on love which is the perfect bond of unity." Or Romans 13:8, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law," and for this you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet. If there is any other commandment, it's summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor, therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law." Matthew 23, "And he said to him, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, you shall love your neighbor. On these two commandments, Jesus said," those two, "depend the whole law and the prophets." We even saw it in the text that we studied in the Upper Room Discourse where Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you that you love one another even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another."

Well, put those two concepts together: the competing and conflicting ideas from the culture in which we live coupled with the incredibly strong influence and emphasis that the Bible places on getting this issue right. Hopefully, we would all conclude doing a word-for-word study of the definition and description of love is exactly what we need at this point in the year. Thankfully, the Scripture has a marvelous passage that does exactly that.

Open your Bible if you haven't already, please, to 1 Corinthians 13. That's on page 137 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you. This morning we're talking about how love is patient. You might say, "Uh-oh." There's going to be a lot of uh-ohs the next couple of months but that's where the text begins: love is patient. Since we're just trying to introduce all of this this morning, I'd like us to organize our remaining time around these three ideas: 1. the context of love, 2. the meaning of love, 3. the first characteristic of love. I hope as we go through all of this, in the background of your mind you're evaluating yourself on each one of these matters. I can't tell you how many times people say to me, "Boy, I wish so-and-so would have been here for that sermon." It's like, "Well, did you get a little something or are you just going to get the cd for so-and-so? While we're going through this, don't be thinking, "Boy, I hope my wife's listening. Do

you hear that, Oliver?” Let's not be doing all of that. Let's be evaluating ourselves. Not just that but planting take-aways, planting the specific ways that I can get to a better place.

Please follow along as I read 1 Corinthians 13 beginning in verse 1 where Paul said,

“1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.”

Don't you just love the way Paul just says it straight?

“2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part; 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. 11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. 13 But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

What a marvelous passage of Scripture, huh? And I realize some of you may be brand new to studying the Bible but even if you are, you would probably say, “You know, I've heard those verses before. I heard them at a wedding or I saw them on a plaque or something.” Well, that's good but part of the challenge in Bible study is always considering a passage of Scripture in its context so really, the question we have to answer is: what was it that motivated the Apostle Paul to write these particular words to this particular group of people at this particular time?

Let's talk some about the context of love or the context of 1 Corinthians 13. It's very important that we remember that love was emphasized to a very troubled, very immature church. You've probably been exposed either in high school or college to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. I would honestly be surprised if many here this morning had not heard something about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs which suggests in part that a person has to have his own needs addressed before he can reach out and love someone else. Well, if that's true, then you would assume that the Holy Spirit would reserve his discussion about love for a really mature church or one that had attained a greater degree

of maturity first before they could try this so-called higher skill of love. Well, this chapter blows that notion out of the water. The Corinthian church if you know much about your Bible at all, you know they were the poster child for all things immature. Name a problem that a church could possibly possess and as you read through this book, you find Paul having to address it: they were divisive, they were carnal, they were taking one another to court. It was a hot mess of a church for sure. In fact, if you could just write that on the sign of the church, that's what they would've had: hot mess Baptists.

Yet right in the middle of that, think about this: Paul gives them one of the most extended discussions of love as anywhere else in the Bible with the full expectation that they could and they should start applying these ideas right away. And I would suggest that that ought to give all of us hope because if the Corinthian church could grow in this area, so can I and so can you. It's also very important to understand that love was emphasized in the larger context of a discussion of spiritual gifts. We need to remember that this passage and any other passage was not given in a vacuum. You need to understand that chapters 12, 13 and 14 actually form one unit. You say, "Do I really have to understand stuff like that?" Yes, you need to know your Bible and you don't want a pastor who is just spoon-feeding you. You don't want that at all and hopefully you'll listen carefully to what's being said but then you'll go home and study the Bible on your own to check out whether or not what I said was so. So, over time, I hope one of your goals is to know your Bible and to know your Bible well.

So, 1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14 are all about a particular topic. So, what we just read, chapter 13, the middle, that's embedded in a context. A context about what? About the use of, or in their case the misuse of, spiritual gifts. It started – remember one chapter earlier than what I just read, chapter 12:1, "Now concerning spiritual gifts." And Paul goes through an entire discussion in chapter 12 about their misuse of their spiritual gifts. Then, we have the chapter on love, 1 Corinthians 13 and you might say, "What's that got to do with it? Is he still talking about gifts?" Yes, because right after what I just read to you about love, Paul picks it right up again. 1 Corinthians 14:1, "Pursue love yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts but especially that you may prophesy." So, the point of the matter is: 1 Corinthians 13 about love is embedded in an overall context about spiritual gifts.

Now, why is that so? Because without love you're nothing. That's what Paul said. Without love regardless of your spiritual giftedness, you are nothing. Even for those who possess the gift of tongues. Paul said in verse 1 when we started reading, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels but don't have love, I become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." Now, let's just push the pause button on that because you might say, "What? Tongues? What is that?" Well, in the Bible the gift of tongues was always a known language of some kind and the miracle was that the person could speak in his language and if there were others present who spoke a different language, they would understand the word of God in their language though the person speaking it was speaking a different one. So, let's say that you only spoke Spanish. That's the only language you knew and I only speak English and not that very well. Well, if I were speaking in tongues this morning biblically, I would be speaking in English and you would be understanding it in Spanish. That's what the gift of tongues in the Bible was.

On the one hand, it was a marvelous blessing. You say, “Why would God do that when you have a bunch of different people groups together and they would actually understand his word in their own native tongue even though the speaker had never studied that?” Well, to communicate that the message of the gospel was for all nations. It's a beautiful message that the gospel is available for all people groups. But you need to understand at the same time, tongues were a sign of judgment on unbelieving Jews because of their unbelief. Essentially what God was saying was if you will not believe my word, I will bypass you and allow my message to be proclaimed to the Gentiles which is why Paul would eventually say, “I don't want the gift of tongues to die out.” He made it clear, “I know it will but I don't want the gift of tongues to die out because that will be a sign that the judgment of God's people, the Jews,” and Paul was a Jewish man, “the judgment of God's people will complete in this age.”

But the point here is, kind of come back for air: even when the gift was operative in the church, if it was exercised in a way that just drew attention to one's self, that's unloving. It might be showy but it wasn't meaningful, it was a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal. Paul says, “You become nothing because you were exercising that gift not out of love for the body but out of a desire to promote one's self. You're a noisy gong.”

He goes on to say it's true for those who possess the gift of prophecy or knowledge. Verse 2, “If I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but I don't have love, I am nothing.” You noticed in verse 8 that Paul made it clear these sign gifts would die out but it's the same as tongues, even when they were needed in the church, and you might say, “Why were the sign gifts needed in the church?” Well, to authenticate the apostle's message of the resurrected Christ and also to give truth to God's people until the canon, the word of God, was completed. But even when they were necessary in the church, exercising those gifts in an unloving way cancels out the benefit of the gift.

Then he says in verse 3: that's true even for those who possess the gift of giving. “If I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.” Some people give but they want something in return: they want their name on the side of a building; they want attention; they want prestige. Well, Paul says giving ought to be done out of a heart of love. I'm so glad, by the way, for the cheerful and selfless givers associated with our church. But as we think about these characteristics the next several weeks, love is this, love is this, love is this, let's always remember the context in which this was given. Paul was speaking to a troubled church filled with people who in many cases coveted the showy gifts. Paul wanted them to and he expected them to grow in biblical love.

That's the context of love, what about the meaning? What's the word mean? We can't possibly love our neighbors well unless we have interacted with that concept biblically. You may know that there are at least three Greek words that could have been chosen for a passage like this. One is the word eros and we, of course, get our English word erotic from the Greek word eros. That's alluding to romantic or sexual love. That word is never

used in the Bible; you won't find that word or its cognate anywhere in the Bible. However, that doesn't mean that God is embarrassed about erotic love. God created sex. Do you understand that? And within the boundaries of monogamous marriage, it is a holy and righteous thing to enjoy. In fact, I'm in a really good place to talk about that because just a few chapters before you have the most extended discussion of human sexuality anywhere in the Bible. 1 Corinthians 7, you ought to have that one highlighted in your Bible if you're married and the bottom line is, you may remember this if you were a part of our church several years ago. I preached through the book of 1 Corinthians verse-by-verse and took an entire year to do it and that meant that we got to chapter 7 in the summer and I announced to our church family: we're not speeding up or slowing down on human sexuality in the Bible, it's going to be the summer of love. We had a great time. Sorry you missed it if you did.

But even though that word is not used in the Bible, it's certainly alluded to many times in Scripture but that's not what's talked about here in 1 Corinthians 13. There is also the word phileo. Sometimes we think about that as brotherly love or friendship love. You probably visited Philadelphia. Have you ever been to Philadelphia? Well, Philadelphia means the city of brotherly love. I actually went to school in Philadelphia and I had some reason from time-to-time to ask some people, "Do you know what the name of this city means and why aren't you doing it?" But that's what the word phileo means. It's a beautiful thing, brotherly love, friendship love and that word is used a number of times in the Bible.

But that's not what's in focus here. The third word is the Greek word agape, by far the rarest word in the Greek culture, the Greek language but by far, the one that is used most regularly in the Scripture and here's one way to define it: it's a choice of the will to sacrifice one's self to meet the needs of the other person for the glory of God. Friend, I would suggest to you that if we as a church family do not have that etched in our hearts, we're never going to be able to fully accomplish the theme that we have adopted for ourselves this year: loving our neighbors. It's a choice of the will to sacrifice one's self to meet the needs of the other person for the glory of God.

Now, just think about that for a minute. In fact, I would suggest some probably need to write that out somewhere and laminate it and memorize it. That needs to be etched on our hearts for sure but think about that definition. What it means is biblical love is a choice of the will. It's not a feeling first so when some married person steps in my office or one of our other counselors and says, "Well, I don't love her anymore," that's not simply a status update on that person's feelings, it's an indication of their sinfulness. That person is saying I am no longer going to exercise my will in a sacrificial way toward that person.

Now, are there feelings involved? Of course. God created us with our feelings and where your treasure is, where you sacrifice, where you invest, where your treasure is, that's where your heart is also going to be. And that can be celebrated, that can be embraced, that should be expressed but our feelings are not the basis of love. That's not the primary indicator of its existence on a given day. So, we acknowledge our feelings, we enjoy

them when and as we should but we don't live by them and if you do, your Christian life is going to be like a roller-coaster. That's just the way you're going to be.

Remember this also biblically, you say, "Well, do I have to go first? This sacrificial love?" No, God went first. God is our model and our example. You know this verse, don't you, if you know any verse in the Bible, "For God so loved the world that he gave." Notice the juxtaposition between love and giving, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." Or, husbands, listen up: "Love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and," what? And gave and gave and gave and gave. Verses like these help us understand the sacrificial aspect of this definition.

Now, let's just push the pause button for a second, shall we? Let me ask you to open the dictionary of your mind because everybody here came in with a definition of love and so, open up the dictionary of your mind and check your definition of love. Is it possible that you have been operating with a definition of love derived from a source other than the word of God? And would the people around you characterize you as a loving person? And it's highly likely that as we go through this series, there is going to be plenty of need for repentance. Do you understand what that means? I understand that word is not very popular in this culture and it's seldom used in churches. I think it ought to be used like all the time. Repent means turn around, it means change your mind, it means think about what you think and then compare that to the word and if what I think or act is contrary to the word, I need to repent. I need to turn around and I would just say that if you need to change your definition to bring it in line with the Scripture, I would encourage you to do that or to say, "I need to find ways to sacrifice and meet the needs of those the Lord has called upon me to love."

Well, that's the context of this passage and it's the meaning of the word agape or love. What about this first characteristic of love? Love is patient and you might say, "Uh-oh." Yup, a lot of uh-ohs in this series. Take heart, I have to hear this message three times today. I've been saying uh-oh all morning. Love is patient. What is that? What do you mean patient? Well, it's the Greek word makrothymeo. You say, "Do I need to know that?" I think in this case it might help because you can probably break down the word makrothymeo. Macro what does that mean? We use it a lot in culture. Macro means much or long or large in scale. So makrothymeo is the word patient. Much, large, long at what? Thumos is the word energy or passion or anger. So, when you put that together, now, you really have to listen carefully to get this balanced but patience biblically is learning to hold off sinful expressions of anger for a long period of time. That's really what it is.

Now, you might have a question. If you're trying to process this, you might have this question in your heart: does that mean that we hold off all expressions of anger? Is that what patience is? I never express my anger? I never embrace my anger? Oh no, no, no. In fact, that would be a violation of another important principle of Scripture: be angry and sin not. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. What I don't want to do with this message on patience is reinforce people who tend to clam up anyway. Don't confuse

patience with clamming up and I realize you might say, "You've totally confused me." Okay, let me un-confuse you. If you're saying, "How do I obey Ephesians 4:26, don't let the sun go down on my anger, so I have to use it right away but still practicing patience, makrothymeo which is holding off sinful expressions of anger for a long period of time? Oh, by the way, what does that have to do with love?" Well, here's the key I think: it's understanding anger in the Bible. You can't be patient without understanding anger and you can't be patient without understanding love. It all fits together in this package. Anger in the Bible is a God-given emotion which produces energy intended to help you solve problems biblically and help you solve problems today. That's why there are plenty of examples in the Bible of God the Father, of God the Son being angry and that does not mean they were being impatient, it does not mean they were being unloving and so, there are certainly times when we ought to be angry as long as we're using the energy inherent in anger in order to help me solve problems biblically and help me solve problems today. Don't clam up. Don't ignore the problem. But since it's so easy to become sinfully angry, could I get an uh-huh on that? Since it's so easy to instead of using my anger for the reason God gave it to me, since it's so easy to become sinfully angry, be makrothymeo. Be patient. Avoid that at all costs for as long as possible and, hopefully, forever.

Now, here's a great opportunity for some evaluation wouldn't you say? Of course it is. Thank you for begging for it so strongly. How are you doing at the matter of patience? How are you doing at the matter of avoiding sinful expressions of anger? And let's just be honest about this: there will be some people who listen to this message today and the plain fact is you are a sinfully angry person. You know it. Your spouse knows it. Your children know it. Your in-laws know it. Your neighbors know it. Your co-workers know it. Everybody knows it. Friend, if that's the case, there is no question that in your impatient anger threaded back together with what we're talking about in this series, if you have impatient anger in your life, unloving words are going to be spoken or unloving actions are going to be taken. If that's the case, you need to repent like right now. Right now. In fact, I'm convinced that there will be some people who hear this message today who have such a sinful anger problem, such a lack of patience in their life that it would be cause for them to ask whether they genuinely know Christ as Savior and Lord or not. If that's true, one of the ways that I can shepherd you the best as one of your pastors is to encourage you to make your calling and election sure. And if you are a sinfully angry person, habitually over time, it may be that you don't genuinely know Christ.

If you say, "Well, I think I'm a believer but I am struggling here." Well, ask God's forgiveness. Run to the cross. Ask the forgiveness of the people in your life that you treat that way. Get a verse of Scripture like this in your DNA, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you with all malice." Those are the marching orders of the follower of Christ. "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." You might need to make James 1:19 your life verse. You say, "James 1:19, what's that verse say?" Well, here it is, "Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God."

You see, for some followers of Christ, their homes are filled with wrath. They just are. They are filled with impatience and there is no love to be found. What is the relationship of patience to love? Threaded back together biblically? Why is the first description of biblical love wrapped up in this concept of patience? Well, it's because impatience says, "I care more about my schedule than I do about yours because I'm the king here. I'm selfish. I care more about my convenience. I care more about my pleasure and when I'm not getting what I think I deserve from you..." Notice how many "I's" there were in that? "When I'm not getting what I think I deserve from you, it's okay for me to be sinfully angry." That is selfishness, not love.

But conversely, a loving person says, "I can wait." Do you understand that? Love is patient. A loving person says, "I can wait. I can wait until the timing is best for you. I can wait and get my preference another time. I can wait for my circumstances to change on God's timetable instead of insisting on my own."

Now, let's throw this in the mix: what about the person who says, "Well, I can't change. I can't change. Yes, it's true but I can't change. I'm Irish. I'm a redhead. All my family members are angry people. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." Some people say that and then they act as if that's the end of the story. It's not. Here's what that is: that is an attack on the gospel and that is an affront to our resurrected Christ and I would call on all of us to stop thinking that and stop saying that because it is lame. We can change. Galatians 5:22, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace and," what? "Patience." Don't offend the Holy Spirit of God by saying we can't do this. 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow about his promises as some count slowness but is patient toward you." I'm suggesting the resurrected Christ stands ready to help us change.

Now, remember this: it's not a matter of, okay, the resurrected Christ is going to help me slap some waxed fruit on an unchanged heart. No, the resurrected Christ many times is going to help me evaluate what's going on in the inside that is resulting in this lack of patience on the outside. So, maybe this would be a good exercise, some questions we could ask ourselves: what are the situations in which you tend to be most impatient? Who are the people with whom you tend to be most impatient? What are you not getting when you tend to be impatient? What needs to be put to death so that item will not be as important in the days ahead? How can you replace that idol with proper love and concern for the person you tend to become most sinfully angry with? Do you need to talk to God about this? Do you need to talk to the other person about this? And if so, today would be a really good day. Do you need to get some additional help to overcome this area that displeases God? Your deacon would be happy to talk with you about this. Your ABF leader. Your small group leader. One of our pastors. Someone in our counseling ministry. There are all kinds of resources, all kinds of resources to help us.

How about this: what would new life in this area look like for you? Can you imagine yourself without sinful anger? Can you imagine your life having gotten to a better place on the matter of patience? How can or will growing in patience help you be a more loving person? Do you really believe our resurrected Savior can help you in this area? Do you really believe Jesus is alive? Or do we just say that but we don't think it's real for us?

Here's another way of thinking about this: do you have any people in your life who have been patient with you? If you're breathing you do. Have you thanked them recently?

Lastly, what's the relationship of patience to our annual theme of Loving Our Neighbors? Oh man. I'm going to tell you, some of this community outreach work, working with neighbors, working with home-owner associations, working with other churches. Oh my, oh my, oh my. Yeah, here's a problem: some people are just not as smart as you are. Some people just aren't as smart as me. That's what we think, huh? That's what leads to our impatience. Listen, if we're going to be effective at getting the job done in our community, what are we going to have to really grow in? Grow in patience.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

Father in heaven, thank you for this marvelous text and I thank you for the living nature of the word. We needed to hear this today and, Lord, I pray that you would help us to plan our steps so that we can be growing in biblical love for all sorts of reasons but especially so that it can help our church accomplish the mission you have for us in this place and time. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.