

Love Believes All Things

The Characteristics of Love

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 13:1-4

Preached On: Sunday, June 22, 2014

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When I was working my way through college and seminary, the Lord provided a job building inground swimming pools. I don't know if I've ever mentioned that here before or not. The older I get, the more I see the Lord's direction and guidance in providing that job, not only because of the funds that it generated at the time for my education but also the many lessons I would need for what God had in store for me next. One decision I made at some point along the way was that if I ever had a family, we would never have a pool. Being on that side of the business, I knew far too well all the things that could go wrong, all the problems, all the frustrations they could cause so when I finished school, I gave my tools away to the fellow who was going to take over my business. I walked away a happy man never to mess with pools again. Well, then in the sovereign plan of God, we were blessed with our son, Andrew, who is blind and as he got older, we looked for activities he could do in the summertime because so many sports and so many hobbies are just not going to be a good fit for him and at some point, Chris and I decided, "You know, maybe we ought to build a pool. Surely, Drew would enjoy that. If only we knew somebody who could build one for us." So we made a plan where I would take a couple of weeks of vacation and along with a few other guys from the church who were available at the time, I would come out of retirement for one last pool job.

Part of the challenge was it had been nearly 20 years since I had done that kind of work and these pool kits had gone through several changes even when I was in the business. I started to wonder if I could do it and then I started thinking about all the mistakes I had made over the years and left them in other people's backyards. I wasn't sure I wanted to do that for myself and then I started wondering about whether I would even remember all the installation details and what would happen if I forgot a crucial step on my own pool so I decided to go and talk to the owner of a pool store that installed the same brands of pools that I had worked with because I was still going to have to buy a kit, meaning the walls and the filter system, the liner, all of that, and it was a franchise so I was going to have to deal with them if I was going to do this. I was fairly certain that he would try to talk me out of this. He could have actually made the argument that, well, I would be taking work away from his installers if I did it myself and since I had pretty much argued myself out of taking on this project anyway, I wondered maybe he would just finish the job and we could forget this whole thing.

So, we sat down and I gave him my background and then, of course, we started swapping pool war stories. You can't get two pool installers in the same room without a bit of that and then eventually I asked him what he thought about my plan. I'll never forget what he said. He said, "Oh, I know you can do it." Without hesitation, "I know you can do it. There is no question in my mind based on what you've told me. You can do it." And I don't know if he used these exact words at that particular time or not but he was saying, "I believe in you. You can do this. I believe in you." So we went ahead and bought the kit from him and I just asked him casually, "Now listen, I know you don't have to do this. I'm supposedly doing this myself but if I get in a jam, can I come visit you or can I talk to some of your installers just to help me navigate this process?" He said, "Listen, I can do better than that. I often go out and check my own jobs in the afternoon anyway, how about if I just add you to the list and so I'll stop by from time-to-time and just see how things are going." That's exactly what he did. That's exactly what he did and the job went amazingly well. I had some great help. Tony Christ. had just moved to town and even before he was working for the church, he was available so he helped me. Darrell C., Victor P., Scott W. I think we roped in Bill S., Josh H. along the way. All sorts of people got in the act but that pool store owner actually kept his word and he would stop by and if my memory serves me correctly, every time he stopped by, the one statement he made without fail was this, "Hey, you can do this." I'd be down in the hole doing something and he'd be looking down, "You can do this. I know you can do this." I can't tell you how many times I needed to hear that when I was worrying about some detail or doubting my memory or thinking about all the mistakes I had made in the past. Those simple words were incredibly powerful, "You can do this. I believe in you." It was a lot of fun when the pool was all filled up and working well and he stopped by one last time. Any doubt in your mind what he said? "I knew you could do it. I knew you could do that."

Friends, the way that man was speaking to me throughout that entire process is a crucial and marvelous component of biblical love and this morning I would like us to see how that's true. Open your Bible, if you would, to 1 Corinthians 13. It's on page 137 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that this morning.

Our church's theme this year is "Loving Our Neighbors" and so for the past several weeks we've been doing a word-by-word and phrase-by-phrase study of this characteristic of love in the great love chapter in the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13, and I realize if you've been here and you say, "Man, we have been stuck on page 137 for a long time." That's true and it's a bit abnormal for the way we typically study the Bible around here. Generally we do it in fairly large chunks but I think sometimes and this is one of them, it's best just to slow down and look at the actual words and the actual phrases and so that's what we've been doing for the last several weeks now. Last week, we began working through some of the final characteristics so if you're wondering, "Does this ever end?" Yeah, it does eventually so we're in verse 7 now, some of these final characteristics. Very short, very staccato phrases all ending with the words "all things." All things.

Last Sunday we thought about what it means for the love "to bear all things" from the Greek word "stego" which literally means "roof" or "covering" and perhaps this quote

sums up what we learned about all that as well as anything: “stego, to bear,” love bears all things; “stego” basically means “to cover or to support and therefore to protect.” Love bears all things by protecting others from exposure and ridicule or harm. Genuine love does not gossip or listen to gossip. It's like a roof. Even when a sin is certain, love tries to correct it with the least possible hurt and harm to the guilty person. Love never protects sin but it's anxious to protect the sinner. Love bears all things and I think for many of us as we've gone through these studies, we're responding to all of this with thoughts like, “You know, I may not be as consistently and biblical loving as I thought,” or, “I've still got a long way to go when it comes to growing in this particular aspect of the fruit of the Spirit,” or, “I surely need to run to the cross daily for Christ's help and strength and direction if I'm going to get the progress in this area of my life that I know God wants me to achieve.”

This morning, we'd like to turn our attention to the next “all things” phrase where we learn from God's word that love “believes all things.” Let's read our text together, 1 Corinthians 13, beginning in verse 1,

“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. 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.”

Friends, according to the word of God, love believes all things. Now, let me just offer a couple of opening salvos on this issue. We all know we're going to have to provide a generous helping of balance on this subject at some point this morning. Paul is speaking hyperbolically. No one would have heard this and concluded, “Well, that means that if a man claims that the moon is made of cream cheese, I guess the loving thing to do would be to believe it because, after all, love believes all things.” Obviously that's not it and so at some point, just like with all these phrases, we're going to have to be sure that we put the right amount of biblical balance on this but on the other hand, if we quickly dismiss

this characteristic because of all the things it doesn't mean, I really believe we very well may fail to work on an area that is crucial for Christians and churches to address if we're going to be effective in this or any culture and that is to avoid the issue of harsh cynicism or judgmentalism, believing the worst about people, painting others in the worst possible light, the polar opposite of what it means biblically to believe all things. Harsh cynicism or judgmentalism. Here's just a random example: the morning I was preparing this message, somebody from another part of the country who claims to be a Christian leader posted on Facebook that "Lois Lerner," who if you're not paying attention was a former official with the IRS, "Lois Lerner should be thrown in jail for obstruction of justice. Eric Holder should give up his job if he doesn't want to work and President Obama needs to get off global warming and the golf course and get to work on the economy and the Middle East." Well, my question for you would be: does that type of cynicism serve the church of Jesus Christ well? Does that meet the test of biblical love? If you say, "Well, you're kind of tapping on my toes a little bit right now." Well, get ready because they're probably going to get a stomp if that winds you up. I'm just asking you: does that meet the test of "love believes all things"?

Think about these five key areas in which we are especially trying to grow in loving our neighbors this year and how cynicism or judgmentalism could torpedo everything we're trying to do. 1. Implementing our soul care initiatives to achieve deeper friendships within our church family. People who are cynical are not going to be willing to risk building a friendship with someone who may eventually disappoint or hurt them. You've got to understand, love by its very definition is risky. You may believe all things, enter into that relationship and eventually be disappointed so you're opening yourself up to someone who may hurt you. Cynical people will not take that risk. They start by assuming the worst and walking away. Or as individual church members we've said we want to grow in our ability to build strong relationships with those who live right around us. You see, this is even more challenging as you move outside of our church family. Judgmentalism always finds a reason not to love. Thirdly, as a church family, developing our parish mentality to especially serve those who live near our two ministry campuses. It gets more and more challenging as we expand this circle, "Well, we don't want those kind of people around here anyway because of what they might do." Love believes all things. Fourthly, we've said we want to launch our Faith Community Development Corporation to serve urban neighborhoods with excellence. I can tell you right now: if we are unwilling to lovingly believe all things, yes, properly defined, yes, properly balanced but if we are unwilling to lovingly believe all things we are not going to be effective at urban ministry. Cynics will not care about their community. Constructing the first phase of our Senior Living Community, "Those old people this... Those old people that..." lumping everyone from a particular demographic through the lens of our worst experience or fear with a person from that age group. My point is: yes, this needs to be balanced but what this verse is teaching is crucial for every last one of us and some of us fall into the ditch of being cynical and therefore unloving, of harshly judgmental and therefore unloving. This would be a really good day to get all over that and get some repentance going on if necessary, wouldn't you say? Well, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Thank you so much for your joyful enthusiastic agreement with that idea.

For sake of variety, let's just organize our outline like this this morning: let's just start with a few examples of the opposite, hatred, not believing all things; and then the meaning of what it is that we're talking about this morning; and then we'll do some clean-up applications along the way. There will be some as we go all the way through, of course, but let's start with some examples of hatred. What's the opposite of love, believing all things? What are some examples of hatred, not believing all things? Here's one: choosing to think the worst about a person's circumstances. In other words, when a person is going through hard times, automatically assuming it's God's judgment upon their sin even if there's no obvious or gross sin apparent in that person's life. This kind of individual or individuals, they're hateful by putting the worst possible spin on what's occurring in another individual's life.

Now, can you think of a clear example of that tendency in the Old Testament? Yeah, Job's so-called counselors. Job's so-called friends. You see, we know more about what was occurring than they did because the Lord throws back the curtain in the early chapters of the book and he shows that Satan accused God of having followers who only loved him because of his goodness. Satan said if those material and circumstantial blessings are removed, your people will curse you to your face. So you understand, the book of Job essentially was not a challenge of Job, it was a challenge of God and whether or not he could develop the kind of faith and trust in his people that would stand up to adversity so God is the one who said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job?" Do you realize that? Everything that happened in Job's life was God's idea in the sense that he's the one who recommended Job for that test, "Have you considered my servant Job?" And the book makes it clear even in the very first verse, "There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil." Yet, what did Job's so-called friends do? And by the way, undoubtedly if you had interviewed Job's friends at that time, they would have said, "We are being very loving," wouldn't they? "We're representing God right now in what we're saying. We are being very loving."

But here you have a man who has just experienced an incredible series of hardships and now his counselors are putting the worst possible spin on what has occurred. Just one random example is Eliphaz in chapter 15, "Then Eliphaz the Temanite responded, 'Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge And fill himself with the east wind?'" Who is he talking about? Job. "Should he argue with useless talk, Or with words which are not profitable? Indeed, you do away with reverence And hinder meditation before God." Eliphaz is saying that to Job. "For your guilt teaches your mouth, And you choose the language of the crafty. Your own mouth condemns you," he said to Job, "and not I; And your own lips testify against you." Are those the words of a loving friend? What is it that love does? Love believes all things. By the way, how did God eventually deal with these so-called counselors? Did he? Yeah, he did. At the very end of the book, "It came about after the Lord had spoken to Job that the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, my wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends." Mark it down: when God says that, it's going to be a bad day. "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right. You have not spoken of me what is right as my servant Job has. Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and

seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job will pray for you. For I will accept him so that I may not do with you according to your folly, because you have not spoken of Me,” the second time this was said, “you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has,” and so they did that, they “went and did as the LORD told them; and the LORD accepted,” not them, “the LORD accepted Job.”

You see, love believes all things. Instead of choosing to think the worst about a person's circumstances since we rarely know why God is allowing something in a particular person's life anyway, love assumes the best, not the worst. Or this, choosing to think the worst about a person's actions. If you were with us last week, we mentioned a story, I love this story of the paralytic whose friends lowered him through the roof so that he could be healed by Jesus. The crowds were so big, they couldn't push him through the crowds and so they just cut a hole in the roof, I love that, and they lowered their friend to see Jesus and Jesus healed the man. Don't you love that? And more importantly, he told this man that his sins were forgiven because of his faith. You understand the focus of that passage though is on the Pharisees who were present and instead of praising God for what had just been done for this man, being happy and thankful for this man being delivered and choosing to respond to Christ how? With love. How could you not love a Savior who could do that? Instead of choosing to love Christ for what he had done, they put the worst possible spin on his actions imaginable. In fact, they said, “Who is this man who speaks blasphemies?” Seriously? Who did you heal recently? “Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone.” You see, love does what? It believes all things and by their words they proved they hated Jesus and what should especially give us pause in both of these examples, Job's friends and the Pharisees, is that they were speaking in the name of God. I wonder how often we followers of Christ have done exactly the same thing?

Choosing to think the worst about a person's motivations. I think Kent Hughes really helped us with this quote. He said, “Judgmentalism is mercy-less. Whereas love believes all things, the judgmental person disbelieves all things.” Did you hear that? “The judgmental person disbelieves all things. He presumes the worst. He reads evil into the most innocent of actions; he impugns motives; he refuses to give others the benefit of the doubt. Judgmentalism is the opposite of the magnanimous big-souled person. A judgmental person is certainly not a true disciple or follower of Christ and might not be a Christian at all.” Judgmentalism, thinking the worst about a person's motivations. Paul told the Romans, “Accept the one who is weak in faith but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.” The church of Jesus Christ can be an incredibly judgmental place and I'm not talking about things that are clearly violations of Scripture, I'm talking about judging people's motivations. Who are you to judge the servant of another without any biblical truth on your side? “To his own master he stands or falls and he will stand for the Lord is able to make him stand.” Ken Hughes is right, the judgmental person disbelieves all things. He presumes the worst. He reads evil into the most innocent of actions; he impugns motives; he refuses to give others the benefit of the doubt.

Now, we have a lot more to put on the table but let's just push the pause button there for a moment. You see, we're often in situations where we don't know for sure if the person is telling us the truth. Or, we don't know for sure what the person's motivations are. Or, we don't know in advance if the person will actually follow through on what they're saying. What does love do? Believes all things. It assumes the best unless there is clear and undeniable evidence to the contrary. It gives the benefit of the doubt and I would just you this morning: does that describe the way you choose to live and relate to those the Lord has placed around you?

Let's push this a step further: what is the meaning of this word and what is the meaning of this phrase? Well, even from the lexical definition, this is the Greek word "pisteuo," very common in the Bible. Here are some aspects of the definition even from the lexicon: to believe the best in; to have faith in; to trust; to be trustful; to have confidence in; to be loyal; to maintain faithfulness; to believe in; to be convinced of something. You see, it's the polar opposite of the way Job's friends counseled. It's the polar opposite of the way the Pharisees evaluated Jesus' actions. It's the polar opposite of the way judgmental people behave. Love believes all things.

Here is some help from some other key writers as well. Leon Morris reminds us of how this sees the best in others. He says, "Always trust points to the quality that is ever ready to allow for circumstances and," here it is, "to see the best in others." This doesn't mean that love is gullible. There is some of the balance. It doesn't mean that love is gullible but that it does not think the worst.

I've been invited to come back to the campus of the Bible college that I graduated from a long time ago and to speak at their fall Bible conference this year and that's a great honor, it's a great privilege. I'm looking forward to that but honestly, I know it's going to be bittersweet. I do not understand people who say, "I have no regrets." It's like, "Seriously? Do you want some of mine?" Here's one of them: I remember a day we were sitting there me and some of my buddies, fellow smart-alecks frankly, in the lunchroom and the way our lunchroom was set up, all the tables were in one end of this large room and people would come in to check in and you would see them and they'd have to walk down the other side of that room and we were just making snarky comments about every person who walked in, finding something to criticize them about, finding something to make fun of them about, pointing out some of their failures and how they wouldn't make much for God and blah, blah, blah. Just ripping people to shreds. Next person, next person, next person, next person. We found something to criticize about them all. Then our head basketball coach came. I have no idea, to this day I don't know if he knew what we were doing before he came up to us but he sat down with our group and it was amazing how people would start coming in and of course, we were shutting it at that point, but he would say something kind about them. He would point out something that he appreciated about them. He would talk about how he was hoping God would use them and some of the just marvelous characters and gifts of the same people that a moment before we were cutting down, he was building up. The same people a moment ago we were hatefully and oh, by the way, did I mention that it was a Bible college and I was studying for the ministry? We were hatefully seeing the worst in – he was lovingly seeing the best in in

those same people. What's interesting now with the perspective of age and having watched the way God has used so many of those people I went to school with around the world in marvelous ministry opportunities, Coach Huckabee was right and we were sinfully and unlovingly wrong.

Some of this may be as simple as following our parents' adage: if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all. Love believes the best, it sees the best in others and John Calvin adds this idea: it's willing to risk giving others the benefit of the doubt. He said, "Love believes all things, not that the Christian knowingly and willingly allows himself to be imposed upon, not that he divests himself of prudence and judgment that he may be the more easily taken advantage of, not that he unlearns the way of distinguishing black from white." That's all a good balance but then he says this, "What then he requires here as I have already said simplicity and kindness in judging of things and he declares that these are the invariable accompaniments of love. The consequence will be," now here it is, "that a Christian man will reckon it better to be imposed upon by his own kindness and easy temper than to wrong his brother by an unfriendly suspicion." True? Than to wrong his brother by an unfriendly suspicion, he gives the benefit of the doubt.

I've had to learn this in ministry. I grew up in a home where people told the truth so I wasn't accustomed to being around people who just lied and then I went in the ministry and I saw that – you say, "Wait a minute." I'm not talking about you, I'm talking about people who aren't here. I saw that some people will stand right in front of you in an office in the church house and tell a huge whopper like, "I'm from Florida and I'm heading to my mother's funeral in Colorado and I'm stuck in Lafayette because I don't have enough money for gas." Did you know you were somewhat off course here? "Oh, did I say Colorado? I meant Wisconsin. That's where dearly departed Mom is, Wisconsin." If you're not careful, you'll let experiences like that make you cynical and unloving toward people who genuinely do need help. You start viewing everyone through the lens of somebody else's failure or viewing everyone through the lens maybe even of one of their past failures. As we decided long ago, yeah, we're going to take the time to gather facts, we're going to try to be as careful as possible, you don't just give out cash indiscriminately but in the final analysis, I would rather be duped from time-to-time and possibly help someone who didn't really deserve it than become closed down and cynical and fail to help someone who did. You see, a lot of times it comes down to on what side am I going to err because I don't know. I don't know for sure if this person is telling me the truth. I don't know what their motivations are. I don't know if they're going to carry through what they're telling right now so if I'm going to err, I would rather be duped than be cynical. Charles Hodge speaks about how this helps us avoid being needlessly suspicious. He said, "Love always trusts. It's not suspicious but it readily credits what people say in their own defense."

Think about it from the other perspective for a minute: have you ever been unlovingly or unjustly accused? Where someone was needlessly and unlovingly suspicious of you wrongly? It's amazing how events like that can be seared into your memory. When I was growing up, our youth group took bike hikes. That's when I really just developed a real enjoyment of bicycling. It was in high school and our church youth group and one

summer we rode our bikes from Gary to Cincinnati and back and I realize you might say, "Why did you come back?" Well, my Mom and Dad were there. Another summer, we went from Gary to St. Louis and back and there was a fellow who rode a motorcycle to escort us to do whatever advance planning needed to be done and trouble-shooting if that was necessary and that sort of thing and one evening, the ride was over for the day and we were staying in a gym. By that time, all of our bikes were parked inside the gym all lined up and then there was this man's motorcycle and I just casually walked into the gym and here's this man all red in the face accusing me of cracking the windshield on his motorcycle. Now, this was one of the few times in my life when I wasn't guilty as charged. I don't have time to tell you all the other ones but this was a time when I wasn't guilty as charged. I hadn't even been in the gym. I had no idea what he was talking about. Apparently he had borrowed this motorcycle from a friend, he is mad that the windshield was damaged and so taking time to actually gather facts or just calm himself down wasn't part of the plan resulting in him being needlessly and in this case, incorrectly suspicious and therefore unloving.

It's very interesting the impact words like that can have. Solomon said "death and life are in the power of the tongue." If you don't know what you're talking about, shut it. If you're not sure about whether you should believe it or not, believe it. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue and those who love it will eat its fruit." I have alluded to this all the way along but D. A. Carson especially points this out: how love believing all things avoids being cynical. He said, "It always trusts which does not mean it's gullible but that it prefers to be generous in its openness and acceptance rather than being suspicious or cynical." That's why I would encourage you to avoid social media posts that are highly charged politically. I just would. I think that many times, that's lead to comments that imbalanced and lacking Christian love. Now, you might say, "There are some things about what the President does that I don't like." Oh well, if you were President, I'm sure everything would be fine. There would be no joblessness. The economy would be soaring. There would be peace in the Middle East. I mean, I'm sure if you were the President everything would be fine. You say, "I'm not sure love is supposed to be sarcastic." I'm sorry, I'm off my notes.

You can be discerning and you can have disagreements with our President and with different political leaders etc., etc., etc. but did you know the Bible calls upon you to pray for your political leaders? Some of God's people would do much better to pray more and criticize less. And I'm going to say something that some of you might not like, that's alright, that's why God gave you a pastor: not everything our President does is wrong. It's not like every last thought he's had is wrong, every last action he's had is wrong, every last word he's ever said is wrong, blah, blah, blah. Love believes all things and I'm not saying that you're unwilling to discern things properly but God deliver us from approaching the world in which he has sovereignly placed us with harsh cynicism. By the way, if you don't like the President you have now, just wait. If you can read those tea leaves, the future could be very interesting for the church of Jesus Christ and God is still on his throne and some of us need to act like we believe that a whole lot more instead of believing that we're going to solve all the world's problems by being so harshly judgmental.

In fact, while we're on that topic, thank you for getting me on that: I would encourage you to carefully evaluate the tone of the news you watch because some of you are surrounding yourselves with cynics. I think I may have mentioned last week, I don't know, you hang around the crock long enough you'll start smelling like a pickle. Do you know that? "Yes, but I think they're right." It's possible to be right and unloving and therefore be wrong. Do you understand that? Do not surround yourself with cynics if you want to accomplish with your life what God wants you to accomplish. Love believes all things.

Dean Merrill wrote a book several years ago entitled "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry Church," a take-off on the title of Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Is that the way we're going to relate to the world of those around us? You are all failures. God has no place for any of you. You can't do it, I don't believe in you. No, loving people never forget that God is still at work in the midst of a lost and dying world. Do you believe that? And we want to be sure that our message is one filled with love for people who may repent and believe in Christ. If you repent and trust Christ, God can use you. He can use you mightily. We're not mad at you, we love you, we're choosing to believe the best until the facts clearly demand otherwise.

What are some key ways that we can practice this aspect of God's word "love believes all things"? Well, it starts by choosing to believe God's word. My morning devotions before preparing this message included the final chapters of the gospel of John which contrasts the response of some of the women to the empty tomb, to the response of some of the men to the empty tomb. Interesting contrast. Who was most loving? Mary Magdalene showed her love by believing what Jesus had said about the resurrection. Thomas, on the other hand, said, who was not with them when Jesus came, so the other disciples were saying to him, "We've seen the Lord," but he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the imprint of the nails and put my finger into the place of the nails and put my hand into his side, I will not," what does love do? And hadn't Jesus clearly told them he would be resurrected from the dead? "I will not believe." Amazingly, Jesus allowed him to do that but then he explained to Thomas, "Because you have seen me have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see and yet believed."

Love believes all things and certainly at the head of that list would be believing what God has said to us in his word. You've been praying for Kevit Brown. Kevit is one of our dear deacons who has been struggling with cancer now for 12 years. I've been told, by the way, that Kevit is going to be in our services today. I haven't had the privilege of seeing him yet but that would be a miracle if Kevit is able to be here. He's got serious cancer. There is no question about that; nobody is minimizing this. Joe Blake, the chairman of our deacons and I went down to see Kevit in Indianapolis and had a fabulous conversation, a fabulous conversation with Kevit. He was talking about how much he loves God even in the midst of this trial. He was talking about heaven. He was talking about how much he loves his family and that's a great family picture going on right there of them just loving on each other. But, you know, one of the times that Kevit started tearing up in that conversation was when he was talking about some of the people that

he's witnessing to who have not yet believed and what was fascinating was it's not like Kevit with anger was saying, "And I'm going to write them off. I'm going to stop talking to them anymore." In fact, Kevit said to us, "Boy, I can't wait to get out of here because I've got a study that I would like to do with some of the people that I've been talking to who have not yet believed in Christ."

You see, what is he focusing on? The fact that they've not trusted Christ yet? Or the fact that they've rejected up to this time? Is he focusing on the worst? No, love does what? Love believes all things. Also, by choosing to focus on a person's potential right choices. Do you remember this? When Jesus said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat but I prayed for you that your faith may not fail and you when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." Do you see what Jesus is doing? "Peter, I know you're going to fail. You're going to fail badly even though you're saying you won't but I believe in you, Peter." Love believes all things so let's not focus on your failure, let's focus on how you can be used after you repent. "Peter, I love you." There is a sense in which what we're studying this morning really falls under the heading of encouragement. "Let no unwholesome word proceed out of your mouths," something that tears others down, "but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment." Love believes all things. It sees people in the best light, not the worst.

Someone in our town, I think, whose especially good at this is Pastor Dave Henderson over at Covenant Church in West Lafayette. We've pastored together in this town for a long time and you realize in towns, churches and pastors can get kind of snarky with each other and look for ways to put the others in the worst possible light and do all this sinful competition and all that kind of stuff. It's not unusual at all for me to have a voicemail from David Henderson where he's just calling me out of the blue, thanking me and thanking God for something about my life or something about what's happening in this church. That's incredibly loving for a pastor to do.

Think about these Vacation Bible School workers. You realize, we have people who we will be worshipping with today who they are dead tired because they've been working so hard with all these ragamuffins. Why were they doing that? Because they love them. You see, you can come up with all kinds of excuses not to serve, right? "Well, they're probably not going to listen to the word of God anyway. They're not going to pay attention. They're going to be smelly and it's not going to make any difference so I don't need to serve." Really? Love does what again? Believes all things. Maybe that is a child God is going to draw to himself. Maybe that's a child who is going to grow in his or her faith during the time they're in their parent's home. Maybe that's a child that God is going to use some way down the line. I'm going to think the best about them and as a result of that, love causes me to open up my life and sacrificially serve. Thank you, those of you who did that this week.

Maybe the bottom line is erring on the side of grace. You say, "There are so many times I don't know if they're telling me the truth. I don't know what their motivation is. I don't know if they're going to keep their word." Then err. "Huh?" I'd much rather get to heaven

and have the Lord say, “You know what, you were duped. You were so gullible.” I'd rather hear that than, “You were incredibly cynical. I sent someone across your path that you could have served but you wrote them off because you weren't loving.” Love believes all things.

You know, over at Vision Of Hope, that's our residential treatment program for at-risk girls struggling with unplanned pregnancies and drug abuse, alcohol abuse, eating disorders and self-harm. It's a marvelous ministry, challenging, but a marvelous ministry. Do you know they just recently had their Race For Hope and by God's grace they were able to raise the \$40,000 that they needed as part of just support for that ministry because it is expensive. After they had done that work and that's organized by the staff, by the residents, by graduates, God blessed them this week. They opened up the mail this week after that event and someone from another state sent them a check for \$20,000. That's a good day, huh? Now what was that person saying? You see, because you can come up with all sorts of reasons not to give, “Well, those girls aren't going to turn out. They're not going to listen. The ministry might go liberal some day.” You can come up with all sorts of goofy reasons not to do something. Those donors were saying – do you realize the message that just screamed to those young ladies? The message that screamed to that staff? “We believe in you,” just like the pool guy said to me, “You can do it. You can do it.” Why? Because love believes all things.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

Father in heaven, thank you. We've needed this and we need the risen Savior working inside of us in order to make this kind of transformation of focus possible. Lord, may we follow him and therefore serve you by believing all things. In Christ's name. Amen.