



The Sermon

Austin Duncan

1 Corinthians 13:7-8

"Love's Tenacious Power, Part 4"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Mark. I deny the allegation and I defy the alligator. We could talk about the Dodgers some more, but I can't find it in my Bible right now. So just know that I am happy to be with you, and it's a joy to be here. We had a great time at the lake. Mark did violate the principle, "What happens at the lake at Men's Retreat stays at the lake at Men's Retreat," so disregard some of the things about shoes. I will keep my shoes on, I promise; it's better for all of us, I promise.

Will you open your Bible to 1 Corinthians 13? It's been just such a joy to be here. MacArthur called me into his office a while back at the beginning of the year and said, "I want you to help these folks in Dallas, my friends, get this church going. Just fly in and preach on occasion." And I thought, you know, "Me and Southwest Airlines middle seat, we do great together, so why not."

And I had no idea how much God would knit our hearts together, and how much joy would come. We came out with the family this summer, had a great time, and so we're just grateful, grateful for what the Lord is doing here, eager to see what he does in the future. And it's wonderful to see new life, new spiritual life in a church plant; and that's what you get to see. To

be a part of this part of this is a profound privilege, so I remain very grateful.

First Corinthians 13 is where we spent the weekend, 1 Corinthians 13, which sounds maybe funny to you because 1 Corinthians 13 is the most famous chapter in the Bible, I think: read at Princess Diana's funeral, at Barak Obama's inauguration, at every wedding ever. First Corinthians 13 has been cross-stitched by more grandmothers in Texas than any other verse, and that's saying something.

So because it's such a famous passage, I think sometimes it's profundity is missed; and I don't want that to be the case. And I also don't want it to be seen as something merely romantic, because that's not the context. The context isn't even Christian marriage, though its impact on the marital relationship is obvious. The context of 1 Corinthians 13 is the church, and so we spent the weekend talking about leading with love, learning how to lead more like Jesus leads, and making sure that our understanding and definition of love one so corrupted in our culture today, even in the church today, is founded and grounded in a biblical understand and definition of love. And so that's what we're driving at up here. I'm going to move that so I don't break it.

So let's look at 1 Corinthians 13. We're going to focus this morning on verse 8 and following. Really just verse 8 will really give us enough to work with today. We're going to look at verse 7 and 8, just the very end of this passage. And so I want to do a good job of kind of getting everybody on the same page, and so I trust that you'll be able to follow me along as I give you a bit of an overview of this chapter. But it's one that's so familiar, so misunderstood. Let's just start by reading it. I'll start reading in verse 31 of chapter 12.

"But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong, or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of

prophecy, and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

"Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they'll be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy." So reads the word of the living and true God.

Such a chapter. Leland Ryken, father Phil Ryken, literature professor at Wheaton for a long time, calls this an encomium of love. It's a poetic description. And that's evident, isn't it? It's so beautiful the way that love is depicted, with a concentration of verbal words talking about what love does and her tendencies are. It's easy to just let it sit on its own; but because it exists in a context – and that context in 1 Corinthians is a local church with significant issues that they were facing: disunity, doctrinal laxity, and overexuberance.

This church had significant areas of immorality. They didn't understand how their mission was being compromised in their community. Their factiousness as they followed after different teachers: "I'm of Paul." "I'm of Apollos." "I'm of Jesus," the really spiritual ones would say that. All these different problems that this church faced.

And as a church it had a good foundation, started by the apostle Paul. He stayed and pastored there for 18 months. This was a long stay for a traveling missionary, a church planter. And the apostle Paul was their pastor, he'd brought many of them to faith in Christ. And so, his love for the Corinthians is evident, even as he rebukes them strongly.

And the language of this epistle is very strong. It's very confrontive. He sees significant problems that threatened their very existence as a church, and so he addresses those problems. And though their concerns in the Corinthians church had to do with their use and employment of spiritual gifts, Paul wanted to reorient their focus, to move their concentration away from which gifts were superior, which gifts were more up front, which gifts were more necessary in establishing this church, that they were out of order.

They were a mess. And instead of just putting things in order, which is one of the things Paul does in this letter. He tells them to stop suing each other. He tells them to avoid sexual immorality. He tells them that the gifts are divinely distributed by God, they're intended to be a blessing to other people. And after he does all that, there's so much instruction in this letter.

There's this chapter here towards the end of the letter. But connected to everything that's gone before and everything that will come after, and even going to be built upon in his other letters in the Corinthian correspondence in 2 Corinthians, that has such a memorable focus. And I think it's been too often viewed as a parenthesis in this letter. Paul didn't write this so that it would be read at weddings – though there's nothing wrong with reading it at a wedding. It exists in a context, in the context of love, of true, genuine, agape, God-honoring, Christ-focused love is in a local church. That's where the laboratory of love is best seen. And so as he gives us this poetic account of love; you can see how it could be broken up.

And we covered all this at the lake; and so I want everybody to be on the same page, just in case your husband's recap of the messages was interrupted by a baseball game, for example. I want you to know how this chapter fits together, because I think it's important in understanding verses 7 and 8, our particular focus this morning.

You know these beginning verses, verses 1-3. I call that paragraph "Love's Essential Nature." And what's happening in that paragraph is a reminder that no matter what you have, whether you have the best words in the world, whether you have every ability divinely given, every spiritual gift; whether you have unfathomable knowledge of divine mysteries, even prophetic abilities; and whether you have a kind of charitable ability to give and give and give, even yourself away, verse 3, "If I give all my possessions to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing." And what's remarkable about those first three verses is they show us that love is that sine qua non. It's that one thing that if we don't have it, nothing else matters.

You may have a passion for evangelism because you like to show people that the Bible is true, and that Christ is God. But if you don't care about people, your evangelism is going to be hindered. More than hindered is what this verse says. It says that if you speak words that are true, but they're not motivated by love, then you're just a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal. If you have every doctrinal ability, you understand how theology fits together, you understand the incomprehensible things that really only abide in the mind of God, if you had all that figured out, if you're a seminary professor, seminary professor, if you are the most knowledgeable theologian on the planet, but you operate and teach and speak apart from love, then your speech is of no value. That's what this beginning section teaches.

I remember reading a biography, Isaac Abramson or Isaacson – it's musty up there. But I didn't finish it because you can't make me finish a book if I don't like it; and I didn't like it. The guy used to be the editor of Time magazine. It was The Definitive Biography of Einstein; and my interest in

science was one of the things that drove me to seminary. I have no interest in science. So his discussion of quantum physics, though very much, you know, built for laymen. Not this layman. So I was out on it pretty early.

But there was some things about Einstein's personal life that I found fascinating. To read about how he fell in love head over heels with his wife was an interesting part of the story, because you just see Einstein as this guy with the crazy hair and the math powers, and you never really think about who he was as a husband and as a father, and what it would be like to be married to that kind of intellect. I mean, my wife has an idea, but not a full grasp of it. I'm kidding. Like you didn't know better.

But I remember getting into that book, and his wife's name was Mileva, Mileva. And they were married for 14 years, they had a few kids, and their marriage started to deteriorate; and it had gotten so bad that Einstein wrote his wife a letter. And this is what he wrote to her, a little piece of it. He knew they had to do something if they were going to stay together for the sake of the children, so this is what Einstein, the smartest man who ever lived, wrote.

The conditions for their marriage to continue. "Number One: You'll make sure that my clothes and laundry are kept in good order, that I will receive my three meals regularly in my room, that my bedroom and study are kept neat, and especially that my desk is left for my use only. You will renounce all personal relations with me insofar as they are not completely necessary for social reasons. Specially, you will forgo my sitting at home with you, my going out and traveling with you.

"Number Three: You will obey the following points in your relations with me. You will not expect any intimacy from me, nor will you approach me in any way. You will stop talking to me if I request it. You will leave my bedroom or study immediately without protest if I request it. Number Four: You will undertake not to belittle me in front of our children, either through words or behavior." From Einstein, his life and his universe.

His wife accepted those conditions. A few months later she left her husband in Berlin, moved with their sons to Zurich. They divorced in 1919 after having lived apart for five years. All that intellect, all that knowledge, all that understanding of how the universe functioned in deepest space, and Einstein didn't know anything about love. That's a secular example.

It's true in the church. You may have plenty to say, and you may know lots and lots, and you may be the most sacrificial giver in the city of Dallas; but if you do not have love, you have nothing. Not less effectiveness, you've got nothing. That's verses 1-3.

What's interesting about this list is verse 4. You notice there's 15 qualities that love takes on; all verbs, some of them coined by the apostle Paul. In other words, it's a word like the word "kindness" that was noun, but there was no verbal version to show kindness. We don't have a verbal version either. So Paul made one and put it here.

These 15 words, most of them are put in the negative, except for the first two. The first two, I call them "love's leading qualities." This is love's leading qualities. When we think of love, the first thing we should think of is this couplet that "love is patient, and love is kind."

Patience is an ability to suffer long; that's what the word means. It's an ability to endure suffering and hardship, to be ill-treated, but to continue to not respond in a way that would in any way not show love to the person who treats you poorly. The patience of love is love's ability to wait, to trust God, to know that even when times are dark and hard, and you're being cheated or slighted, that you're able to respond in love. Love is patient.

The second word that leads this list, the leading qualities of love, the two most important things to help you understand what a biblical definition of

love looks like is that "love is kind." And though that is a seemingly slender word, "Have a piece of gum," sounds very kind, it's so much more than that.

Patience and kindness are the two attributes of God that we see most on display in the gospel. Romans 2:4 speaks of God's kindness leading us to repentance. The verse before that speaks of God's enormous patience in bringing the message of salvation to us.

Friend, if you're a Christian today, it's not because you are smarter than somebody who isn't. If you're a Christian today, it isn't because you're a really good person, so God decided to give you the gift of forgiveness of your sins. If you're a Christian today, the sole basis for your salvation for having all your sins forgiven is the patience and kindness of God. It was God's patience that endured our sinfulness.

From the day you were born, you were a sinner by nature and by choice. But God in his mercy and in his patience endured that sinfulness. All we deserve is the wrath and curse of God. But God, when he brought salvation to us, that day that you believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, when you placed your faith in him, when you said, "I don't want to live for myself anymore, I want to turn my back on my sin, I want to embrace Jesus as Savior, as the one who died on the cross for my sins. I want to follow him as his disciple all the days of my life."

That moment was God intervening in your life, changing your heart, drawing you to himself, so that you could know the power and depth of the kindness and patience of God in Christ. And so when you see a cross, it's not just a symbol of the Christian faith, it's everything to you, because you know it's there that Jesus bought you. It's there, was the ultimate display of the love of God in Christ in his patience and in his kindness. That's why patience and kindness are love's leading qualities.

As we move down this list – and I know this is a long introduction, but you're comfortable, right? So we move down and we see this long list of words that are all put in the negative. You see that?

Look at verse 4. After, "Love is patience, and love is kind," now we have 13 more phrases that say what love refuses to do, and I call this "love's greatest restraints." These are the non-practices of love. These are some things that love will never do. And as you work down that list you see in the center of it is that, "Love does not seek its own."

There's a selfless to love that is so part and parcel of divine love that it gives of itself without regard for what it can get out of a situation. And so, it says that, "Love does not envy, and it does not boast; it is not proud." So when you see success in someone else it doesn't inflate your envy, and it doesn't make you say, "I want what they have." But instead, you rejoice in someone else's success.

And when you have success in whatever measure, you don't boast about it, because you're not proud because you're motivated by love, and you care more about others than you do about yourself. This impacts the way you treat people, verse 5, because, "Love is not rude, it's not self-seeking, it's not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs." Love isn't an accountant, love doesn't keep track of every wrong that's ever been done. Love has a tendency to forgive and to forget. Love has a tendency to be self-dismissive, to be others-centered. Love, the divine love that we see on display in the life of a true Christian is a love and care for others, a kind of affection for others, a kind of devotion to others that will choose their needs before it will choose our own.

The ultimate example of this is the Lord Jesus Christ, both in love's patience and kindness, and in love's greatest restraints. You picture the Lord in all his acts of kindnesses, all his many, multiple instances where we just saw the patience and kindness of Jesus, but also the things that love would never do when Jesus girds up himself and gets down on the floor and

washes his disciples' dirty feet. Or Jesus goes into the bedroom of that little girl in Mark chapter 6, and she's died, and her father is broken; and he puts his hands on her and he tells her, "Little girl, wake up," and she does. Or Jesus embracing those who had the most dangerous disease of his day, so contaminating, so unclean, that could wipe out a whole community, Jesus would walk among the lepers and touch them and heal them, and forgive them of all their sins.

And the kindness of Christ is on display, but so is Jesus' ability to show us that he embodies all these characteristics of love. Jesus is patient, Jesus is kind, Jesus does not envy, Jesus does not boast, Jesus is not proud, Jesus is not rude, he is not self-seeking, he is not easily angered, he keeps no record of wrongs; he does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. Jesus always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Jesus will never fail you.

And so we start to see that love is essential for the Christian, that a church cannot thrive, it cannot grow, it cannot find any kind of usefulness in God's economy apart from love. This is why the apostle John brought a letter to the church of Ephesus and told them that, "Your lovelessness is what's going to kill you, church." Remember, their love had grown cold? I mean, lovelessness can make you dead. And so we pursue it looking at love's leading qualities: the kindness, and the patience of God, especially.

We see love's greatest restraints, which is such a contrast to what the world thinks about love. We hear the word "love" in this world, and people think it means permissiveness to do whatever feels right, whatever feels good. "Well, we do this because of love." We change marriage because of love, and everything is under the banner of love.

But biblical love has restraint. Biblical love has a holy joy. Look at what it says in verse 6: "Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth." Love has non-practices, things that it will not do, so that our love is

intended to be a reflection of divine love, holy and pure and honoring to God. And so, that's the challenge that we face.

People look at 1 Corinthians 13 and they think it's so beautiful. I think it's devastating. I think it's absolutely devastating. When I think about how much affection I need to grow in in my love for Christ, and in my service to his church, and in being a better husband and a better father, I fall short of this list. Austin Duncan is patient, Austin Duncan is kind, Austin Duncan does not envy. Stop, it's too much.

But then I remember who Jesus is and what Jesus has done, that he overcame sin and death for our sake, and that when he died on that Roman cross and rose from that grave, that he defeated death and sin; and we can walk in newness of life because of him with all our sins forgiven. And I want to walk in the way of love. I want to do what he says here in chapter 14, verse 1. I want to follow the way of love. I want to eagerly pursue love. Why? Well, the answer is, is because when you look forward, none of us know what's ahead, do we, with perfect confidence. We don't know if we're going to make it home today.

When we look forward in ten years from now, we don't know where we will be, where our children will be. When we look forward twenty years from now, we don't know what is in store for us; we're such short-sighted people. But when we look forward a generation from now, after our lives have drawn to a close, and our children live on, our grandchildren live on, when we look forward I want you to know what a certainty love will be in God's world and in God's plan. That's why he closes this passage the way he does.

Jonathan Edwards preached through 1 Corinthians 13, and one of his final messages there is called "Heaven is a World of Love." And that's what I want to look at with you this morning. I know that was a lot of prolegomena, that was a lot of, you know, "Here's how we get here." But I want you to understand verses 7 and 8, words that speak of love's tenacious power,

love's tenacious power, because it will give you a confidence in the future, a confidence a hundred years from now to know that love will always win the day.

And I don't mean a namby-pamby, squidgy definition of love that our culture has: "Love is whatever feels good. Love is whatever makes you happy." That is not biblical love. Thirteen, 1 through 7 and 8, that's a biblical depiction of love. Selflessness, God-honoring, holy joy – that's love. And that kind of love can never be destroyed. And it will be in heaven waiting for us, it will be the atmosphere of eternity, and it will be the tone and sound of the Christian life if you pursue the way of love.

So let me convince you this morning of love's tenacious power, verses 7 and 8. Look at those two verses just one more time. He stopped using the negatives: not angered, no record of wrongs; does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. And in verse 7 he changes the sound of it. "It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. Love never fails." Love's tenacious power.

You know the name Richard Wurmbbrand? He was a pastor in Romania. In 1936 he married the love of his life Sabina Oster. And they were Jewish background people, and someone, a carpenter I think, introduced them to Jesus as Messiah; and they not only came to faith in Christ, but God made Richard a pastor. He was ordained and began a powerful ministry right in the midst of the horrors of the second World War.

There was a non-aggression pact between the Soviet Union and the Nazis in 1939, which caused Romania to join the Axis military campaign. And soon the Third Reich was milking Romania for oil. Richard and Sabina saw violence, displacement, and they saw it only as an opportunity for ministry and evangelism. They were ministering and evangelizing to troops, they were rescuing Jewish children from ghettos, preaching to Romanians that were hiding in bomb shelters.

But soon the Romanian population grew discontent with the Third Reich, and rightfully so, and they overthrew their German occupiers. It was a massive coup in 1944. Romania aligned itself with the allies; German forces were defeated in 1945. This looks like the time of potential peace and prosperity for Romania and for the ministry of the Wurmbands. And they were such amazing missionaries to their own people and to whatever troops occupied.

But things went from bad to worse. After the German occupation was over, Soviet troops flooded the country. But this didn't deter Richard at all, he continued to minister. Now instead of ministering to German troops, he ministered to Russian troops. And instead of ministering to Romanians hiding from the Germans, he was ministering to Romanians hiding from the Russians. And he kept preaching, and he kept loving them, and he kept in the face of real changes in his society. I mean, there was no stability whatsoever, and he just continued to minister because he saw that Christ loved him, and he saw the gospel in his own experience and how much it transformed him and his wife's life and the life of their precious son.

And he was a minister, and now he was a Lutheran minister because there was all these political changes. But he was distributing millions of copies of the four Gospels to Russian soldiers and to people in hiding. And now Christianity was even in greater danger than under the Third Reich because it was Communism. He was having to disguise copies of the four Gospels in little fake covers of Communist propaganda, and he was handing them out. And he knew it was dangerous; he kept doing it. They wanted all the pastors to come to this meeting and to affirm the tenets of Communism, which was atheistic. And Richard couldn't do it. And so he wouldn't extol the virtue of Communism, he extolled the virtues of Christ.

In that moment when he was called to go up to the front and renounce, his wife looked up and said, "Richard, stand up and wash away this shame from the face of Christ, because pastor after pastor, to preserve themselves got up and read off the tenets of Communism, read it off, read

5622 Dyer Street, Suite 200 | Dallas, Texas | 75206 | 214.972.9679 |

trinitybiblechurchofdallas.com

it off. And it was disgusting to Sabina, and she said, "Go wash away the shame from the face of Christ." And Richard said to her, "If I do, you'll lose your husband." And she said to him, "I do not wish to have a coward as a husband."

And so he stood up in front of four thousand delegates who'd gone before him, all of them renouncing Christ; and instead of praising Communism, he bravely declared that the church had one duty, and that was to glorify God through Christ alone; and he was immediately imprisoned. Richard would spend 14 years in Communist prison. Eventually he would be bought by another government for ten thousand dollars and released, but only after 14 years of indescribable suffering.

Richard Wurmbrand was tortured in ways that I don't feel comfortable talking about in front of you this morning. But he would, in the face of horrible torture – one small example that's appropriate, I think, and one that stuck with him his whole life, is he was beaten on the soles of his feet repeatedly, lacerated until the bones were showing, and then caused to stand up for hours on end. He was in solitary confinement for three years.

Just give you a quote, he says, "We were drugged, we were beaten. I forgot my whole theology; I forgot the whole Bible. One day I observed I had forgotten the 'our Father,' I couldn't say it anymore. I knew that it began with 'our,' but I did not know the continuation. I just kept happy and said, 'Our Father, I've forgotten the prayer; but you surely know it by heart.' For a time, my prayers were, 'Jesus, I love you,' and little else. And then after a little time again, 'Jesus, I love you. Jesus I love you,' and it became too difficult even to say this, because they doped us so much. The highest form of prayer that I know is the quiet beating of a heart which loves him," he would later say. "Jesus would just hear the tick-tock, tick-tock of my heart, and he will know that every heartbeat is for him." They tried to drive him mad. They told his wife that he was dead; and then they imprisoned her, leaving their son homeless and destitute.

The beatings, the psychological torture would continue. He learned to tap Morse code and deliver sermons to other prisoners through the cell walls. His wife was humiliated, he was humiliated; he was tortured. The book that he's famous for is called Tortured for Christ.

I think the most powerful testimony of that whole 14-years captivity would come at the end. When he was finally released he founded an organization that's celebrating it's fiftieth anniversary this year, I believe, called The Voice of the Martyrs. The idea behind it is to give a voice to Christians around the world. Today there are Christians all over the world who are persecuted, who you cannot hear; and it was his intention in starting that ministry to give a voice to pastors and Christians like him who'd been imprisoned for Christ and tortured for Christ, so that the church in the Western world would be able to pray for them and minister to them. And so, the ministry, a wonderful ministry called Voice of the Martyrs was started by Richard and Sabina.

But the moment that always comes to my mind as I'm thinking about his ministry and his lacerated feet is when he was in a particularly gruesome hour of torture. And what marked his time in the prison – and this drove the guards crazy – is that he would never stop loving Christ or his captors. This particularly vicious guard, an expert in torture said, "You think your God is almighty?" Well, in this situation as he sprawled out bloody, he said, the captor said – yeah, his guard said, "I am like your God. I am almighty. I have power over you to take your life from you." And Richard, through a whimper, was able to say, "My God and his power are on my side, and to prove it, through all of this, I still love you."

It was this tenacious power of love that we see in verses 7 and 8 that remind us that the true force and power of Christianity in this world is not a militancy that you saw in something like the crusades. The true force and power of Christianity is this unbreakable love that has an ability to always protect, always trust, always hope, and never fail. "My God and his power are on my side, because through it all, I love you."

Love suffers long, you learned earlier in this chapter. But here we look at four things that love always does, and I want to help you understand them as more than just poetry, as more than beautiful language. Let's look at all four. It says, "Love," first off, verse 7, "always protects, always protects."

I love this aspect of love. Your Bible may say, "Love bears all things." The Greek word is *panta*, it just means "all," it means "every." It's an all-encompassing kind of a word. What does this mean, that love always protects? What about those Christians who died in the Gulag? What about those Christians who were gassed in the gas chambers? How does love protect?

Well, the thing is is that love, whether it's divine love or love by one Christian to another, will never tire of offering support. That's the idea behind this phrase. "Love bears all things." In other words, you're never able to exhaust the love of God in Jesus. You're never able to outrun the love of God in Jesus. You're never able to be in a place of solitary confinement where you are apart from the far-reaching love of God. In the darkest catacombs, God is with his people.

In the greatest battles, God is with his people. This was true for Joshua when he was taking over for Moses. What kind of a job is that? Nobody wants to take over for Moses; and he was afraid, rightfully so. And he was on the brink of crossing the Jordan river, and God reassured Joshua that he could be strong and courageous, not because he's trying to give him some build-up speech, but because he said, "Joshua, I'll be with you."

You see, the love of God is always protecting us, always supporting us. And it needs to be our tendency as followers of God that our instincts are towards protection, towards support, towards always bearing along with other believers. That's why love's patience is so important. Love's ability to suffer long, and love's, hmm, love's incredible selflessness as it sees other's needs and puts them first.

This is true in your own devotional life with God to know that God holds the future in his hands; and there's nothing coming on the horizon that the love of God will not be there with you. There is no diagnosis that you cannot face that God will not be alongside of you encompassing you with his love. There is no trial, there is no loss that you could endure that will outpace or outstrip or overwhelm the love of God in Christ, because, as John reminds us, God is love, it's his core attribute; that there is no depth that can be fathomed by suffering, or loss, or trouble, or trial, or tribulation.

Friend, you could lose it all, and I mean it all, and you will not lose the love of God. He will still be protecting; he will still be supporting; he will still be bearing alongside of you. It's why you don't need to live with fear and anxiety. It's why you don't have to worry. The love of God is your answer to worry.

Martin Luther, the Great Reformer Martin Luther would walk out of his house in the morning, and he would hear the birds singing, and he would say he would greet them each day by saying, "Good morning, theologians. Good morning, theologians." You know why he said that? Because he knew that they knew more than he did. He said, "You know better than I, little birds, because I worry far too much."

That's why Jesus uses them and flowers as examples of God's protection and providence. We can bear all things, we can endure all things, because we know the love of God will be there to meet us. Jonathan Edwards describes it this way: "Love is willing to undergo all sufferings for Christ's sake." Friend, there's nothing that you will not be able to endure having the love of God at your side.

I remember – I don't know if I've told you guys this story, I don't think I have – when my son turned two, we had just gotten back from a trip, a preachcation as we like to call it. And it's what pastors kids go on,

preachcations. So we had just gotten back. We didn't have any groceries. We went to the store in the morning and I think we might have gotten a doughnut or two.

And Owen was two years old, my son, and he was like, "My eyes. My eyes." He's in the backseat, you know, kids get the sun in their eyes; they complain about everything all the time. So we're trying to figure out what's going on with him. We looked back and his eyes are all crisscross, like weird, you know. The eyes a lamp to the soul; and when something's weird with the eyes, something's wrong.

And so we quickly turn the car around, run home. I get him out of his little car seat, I sit him down – he's two, you know; there's nothing more fun than a two-year-old – and he slumps to the ground. And he can't balance, he just keeps talking about his eyes. Throw him in the car, we drive to the hospital; it's the hospital he was born at – I don't know why we went to that one, it was just, you know, take him back where we got him from, I guess.

And we had the pediatrician on the phone. He met us at the hospital. They rushed into CT scan, they thought he had bleeding on his brain, and they were really concerned. We was in a pediatric hospital, so within an hour they couldn't figure out what was wrong in the CT scan. He was too little, the machine was too big; it was a disaster.

We get transferred in an ambulance, me and my little boy riding in this ambulance to Children's Hospital in LA. And I remember seeing Merilly; she was pregnant, driving behind us in her car, and we didn't know what was going on. And that's when we met neurologists. Neurologists are doctors that don't have stethoscopes, but rubber hammers. And they travel in groups of like thirteen, it's a really strange kind of doctor.

But they did. I got to watch someone teach an intern how to do a spinal tap on my son; that was great. I got to watch them do every test and

experiment. And finally, I got to MRI time, because they were confident there was a small tumor on his spinal cord, and they said, "These kind of things happen, they're inoperable. We'll try to make him comfortable. We think that's what it is."

His eyes were going different direction all week, just kind of locked. And they wouldn't give him any food. I remember him in his little hospital crib, and he just kept going, "Dad." He had a deeper voice then than he does now. "Dad, juice, juice," and he would just get more desperate for juice, and he couldn't have anything because they had to figure out what's going on. And I put my hand on him and said, "Little buddy, we'll get you juice really soon." For five days I told him that. Now I give him juice whenever he wants it.

The story ends well, just so you know. So precious little guy, they get the test of the MRI and there's nothing there, there's nothing wrong. The next day his eyes right themselves. The only thing they actually gave him was Tylenol. I don't know if God healed – I know God healed him. I don't know how, I don't know what. Maybe it was a virus, they said, that attacked his brain, but he's totally fine. We brought him home the day before his second birthday, and he's never had another problem with it since.

I remember looking out the window at Sunset Boulevard, just millions and millions of people everywhere, and just knowing that no matter what happened, my only son, if this was the last time I got with him, that God's love would sustain me and my wife and our other kids. And it's trials like that that remind you of the tenacity of love. Gordon Fee says it this way: "Love has a tenacity in the present, buoyed by its absolute confidence in the future, that enables it to live in every circumstance and to continually pour itself out on behalf of others." You see, when God brings you through a trial the tendency needs to not go inward, it needs to go out. Then you continue to serve, you continue to love, you continue to reach out, and you watch God use this and sustain you by his love.

Love always protects, number one. Number two, love always trusts. That's a good way to understand it. Love believes all things. That sounds empty-headed for foolish, doesn't it? Why would love believe all things? It sounds like love has some kind of naivety, that love would believe something wrong. That's all things, but that's not the intention of the verse.

It's not that love believes things that are wrong. Remember, love has a holy joy. Love doesn't delight in wrong, or error, or evil. So when we see that love believes all things, the way to understand that is that love has a courageous trust. Love always trusts. Love's believing isn't that love believes false things, or that love acts irrationally. So that's how a teenager would define love: "That was a comedy."

Love isn't irrational. You know, when you fall in love it's usually described like falling into a big hole or something. That's not how love functions. One author says it this way: "It's not foolishly credulous and utterly indiscriminate in its believing and obeying."

I think of the example of Jesus with the twelve. I mean, the kind of confidence he puts in those men, knuckleheads to the man, and Jesus had a kind of trust and a kind of future for them. I mean, to hear all the crazy stuff that Peter would say, pushing himself forward, or rebuking the Lord, or all the different times he did the things that he did. But Jesus had this absolute confidence in Peter that, "This is the rock on which I build my church," that he's the one who had the right confession, that he's the one who God would use amazing on Pentecost to preach to thousands of people. This goofball fisherman who could not say a single thing right for four Gospels suddenly becomes the greatest leader of the early Christian movement. That's the kind of trust that love can have.

We should be able to look at our junior high kids and know that God can make them great for his kingdom in his time. That's the tendency of love. Love doesn't have a tendency to think, "Eh, I don't think much of you." Love doesn't have a tendency to look at a person and minimize what God can do

with them; it's just the opposite. Love has this incredible trust. It is discriminative, it is wise; but it looks at people's potential, it looks at what God can do in and through them. And that's why always trusts. Love never loses faith. Love keeps on believing.

Third, love has a compelling hope, a compelling hope. When it says, "Love always hopes," there's this wonderful future, forward-looking confidence in the love of God in Christ and in our acting out of love in our relationships, in local churches, in our families, that love always has a hope. It hopes in all things. It never runs out of hope. The fuel level, when the light comes on in your car and says you only have 22 miles left – and if you're like me you get it down to 1 and then you start to concern yourself with it.

That never happens with hope for the Christian. You never get to the point where you're out of it, "You know, I'm straight out of hope. I've bounced the check of hope." You can't, because love has in it this ability to never give up. It never has a failure to love, even in the face of death. That's why 1 Corinthians 15 follows 1 Corinthians 13, that even in death Christians have a hope of resurrection, that we know that our salvation isn't just God rescuing us from the power of our sin now, but God completely forgiving us, so that we can inhabit perfect heaven with a holy God; that we can die, be laid in the ground, and like a seed rise again, just like Jesus did. And we can have absolute, unshakable confidence in the future knowing that God will change us, and God will make us new, and God will keep his promises.

Christian hope is not vain. We use the word "hope" like, "I hope it rains in California," which there's no hope of that ever. Or, "I hope I win the lottery," and fat chance, you know. That's how we use the word "hope." The New Testament uses hope as a synonym for "confidence," a future confidence not yet revealed. There's never like a percentage of a maybe in New Testament hope. Fee says it this way: "Paul does not mean that love always believes the best about everything and everyone, but that love never ceases to have faith, and it never loses hope."

You know, just as we keep on believing that God can work in these people, and we keep on believing that God can reach these people, we keep on believing that God will accomplish everything he promises us in the future, because the future belongs to him. We're always hopeful because of the goodness of God and his ability to work. And that's why we love to hear testimonies of brothers and sisters who come to faith in Christ, right?

And sometimes we hear a testimony of a kid who grew up in the church, and he never had this big time of rebellion or whatever, but he was a sinner, you can ask his parents. And he says, "I've believed in Christ since I was a little kid, I want to follow him all my days." And then the next guy goes up and gets baptized, and gives his testimony and says, "You know, I was in some El Salvadoran gang, and I killed guys, and I ran drugs. And then somebody told me the gospel, and I repented, and I got out of prison. And I'm a new man, and I love my family."

And we hear those two testimonies, and we hear the second one and we go, "That's a miracle that guy got saved; that guy's a bad dude. He had a switchblade, et cetera. Whoa!" But I think that idea kind of subtly undermines how we think about salvation, because every time someone gets saved it's a miracle.

I don't care if you're a little kid and you're singing gospel songs your whole life, "Jesus loves me," since you were little, tiny; and then God saves you when you're eight years old. That's my testimony. Or, you were some notorious criminal, and God brought you to faith in himself. It was the same sovereign act of salvation that happened in both of those people, and they're both a miracle. It's a miracle. And that's why we can always have as much as hope as God will give us; and it is an unfathomable hope that there are no hopeless cases.

Do you have a friend you've been praying for for decades that they'd come to know the Lord? Do you have a person in your family who's antagonistic towards Christ? Do you have a wayward child? You can have hope,

because they're not beyond the reach of God's sovereign arm. You know that God can reach them. God can change them; God can make them new.

Love endures all things. Love always trusts, love always hopes. And so we know the love for God, the love that God has for us in Jesus will never end. That's why this next phrase is, "Love always perseveres. Love always perseveres." Love's compelling hope.

Let me give you one little more line on hope. Edwards, "Love tends to hope." I love that. Love tends to hope. In other words, it has a posture towards hopefulness, a tendency towards hopefulness. In other words, a tendency of love is toward hope, but a spirit of love is a spirit of a little child. In the morning one feels in himself this childlike spirit towards God, the more natural it will be for him to look to God and go to God as his Father.

Fourth, and finally, love's eternal invincibility. And I take these last two phrases together: "Love always perseveres, and love never fails." This is its eternal invincibility. Love even unto death. That's the testimony of Jesus on the cross, as he looked down at his soldiers, at the soldiers that killed him, and said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," as he looked at that penitent thief and he said, "Today you'll be with me in paradise." Love has this eternal invincibility where it can never stop, never be exhausted, never be defeated, never be overcome. There's no more powerful force in this world than the love of God in Christ.

I know I've talked to you about Augustine before. Probably my favorite Christian theologian from church history is Augustine. The name "Austin" doesn't come from Stephen F. Austin. I mean, it probably does, but in my heart it comes from Augustine. The Latin shortcut of that name is Austin. Your fair capital, keep Austin Weird.

And I love Augustine because he was such an amazing testimony, such a brilliant mind. We wouldn't have the kind of understanding of how to defend the Trinity if it weren't for Augustine's writings. Just a really important figure in church history. But nobody would have guessed, except Augustine's mom. Her name was Monica. And if you've ever been to California and you've walked around Santa Monica to look at all the beautiful tourists, you know of her, because that's what it's named after. Augustine's mother is Santa Monica, Saint Monica. And she was a prayer warrior.

Augustine was a rebellious teenager, smart as a whip. He was an expert in rhetoric, got the highest possible education, became a tutor for the elite of Roman society. He was living in Carthage in North Africa. He called it a seething cauldron of lust, and he loved it there. Took on a concubine, fathered a child with her, Adeodatus; and in five million words, Augustine wrote five million words, he never named this girl. She held him captive big time.

And he knew he was living a life of sin. And his mom wept every day, and prayed every day for her son. Until that day, he was walking through one of the benefactors' beautiful, lavish gardens, and he hears from some distance some children singing a song, "Tolle, lege; tolle lege." They were singing a kids song, but one that he'd never heard before. It means, "Take up and read. Take up and read."

And there on the bench in front of him in his friend's garden is a parchment of Paul's epistle to the Romans, and he opens it and he reads from the book of Romans. And as he reads through the book of Romans he's seeing himself in display; and he gets to Romans chapter 6 and he reads these words, "In the same way count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who've been brought from death to life, and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace."

At that moment Augustine walked away from his concubine never to speak to her again, renounced all sexual relations. He was celibate the rest of his life, devoted himself to the Lord; eventually would become the Bishop of Hippo, an important role in North Africa. And in the Roman Empire he would be one of the predominant leaders of Christianity during the fall of the Roman Empire, a time when Christianity was on the brink; and God would use Augustine mightily, a man who was just only about one thing, his lust; but would be transformed; and that desire that he had for immorality was changed to desire to serve and honor God.

Best thing he ever wrote is a book called The Confessions. You should read it, or at least read Book VIII – it's not really a whole book, it's a chapter, Book VIII – and where he talks about his conversion. Inside of it he says, thinking about how he got saved, he says, "How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose. You drove them from me, God, you who are sweeter than all honey, brighter than all light. You drove them from me and took their place. My God, my light, and my salvation." I love that quote because it speaks of the sweetness of God's love and able to take away from us the sin which was once so precious to us and replace it with a love for God. He would also say, "Late it was, O God, late it was that I loved you."

And so, we see love's tenacious power in the testimony of Augustine and in every single testimony of every single believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, as we know that love always protects, that love always trusts, that love always hopes, that love always perseveres, that none of God's purposes can be thwarted, and that love will never fail. And as this chapter goes forward he talks about childhood and adulthood, and seeing things clearly, and finally knowing God fully. It's just a reminder that this all ends with us being together in a world of perfect love for all eternity.

Heaven is a world of love, and so we sing songs like, "Here is love vast as the ocean," because we have experienced the love of God in Christ and its eternal durability, its invincibility. Our ultimate confidence in God's grace

5622 Dyer Street, Suite 200 | Dallas, Texas | 75206 | 214.972.9679 |

trinitybiblechurchofdallas.com

and love always remains, and it will be there until the day we breathe that celestial air of the new heavens and the new earth, when we walk in God's presence, Eden restored, a city rebuilt, a people reclaimed for God and his honor; and forever and ever will inhabit a world of perfect love and charity and peace. And there'll be no more sin, and no more sickness, and no more disease; and all we'll have is Jesus, and it will be enough, because Jesus' love is eternal.

[Prayer] O God, how we need to know the love of God in Christ more and more. Thank you for love's courageous trust, love's bearing of all things, love's compelling hope, love's eternal invincibility. This isn't abstract, this is what you've done for us on the cross. We're grateful, God, for the love that you've shown us in Jesus, the tenacity that you have to redeem, and save, and protect, and to provide, and to deliver.

Thank you for these dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Continue to bless the church. Thank you for your work among them, God, all that you're accomplishing in this place. May they be a bright light of the love of God to the city of Dallas, in Jesus' name. Amen.