

Qualities of Love – Patient

1 Corinthians

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

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If you would please turn to the book of 1 Corinthians 13, verses 4 through 8 and that's what we will read this morning. 1 Corinthians 13, but to put those verses in their context, let's begin with verse 1,

1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends.

Let's ask God's blessing on his word.

Lord, now we do ask as we have already asked this morning that your blessing would attend the preaching of your word. Father in heaven, may you fill me with your Spirit this morning in a way that makes the preaching effective. Lord, may you be at work in our hearts and in our minds as we listen, taking your word and teaching us and applying it to us so that our lives are changed. Lord, we pray for those in our midst today who don't know you and our desire is for their salvation. We pray today, Lord, for your church and our desire today for your people is that they would be edified, where we are in need of it, Lord, that you would correct us, but that also, Lord, you would encourage us today and strengthen us so that we would live lives that are worthy of the calling of which you have called us. Lord, we look to you for these things. You alone can produce all of this and so we look to you and we ask you for it. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, for his sake. Amen.

Well, last Sunday we began looking at this 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians and what we saw in verses 1 through 3 is the priority of love. Paul has been teaching this church about spiritual gifts. He has not corrected them in terms of their desire for spiritual gifts, he has

corrected a misguided desire concerning spiritual gifts. It's not wrong that they had a desire to operate in the giftedness that the Spirit of God had imparted to them, what was wrong was their misguided sense of value as they valued some gifts in a way disproportionate to what we see in Scripture and as they were operating in the wrong attitude and in the wrong mindset.

So he has been teaching them about spiritual gifts and then he comes to chapter 13 and he says, "Now this is the attitude, this is the atmosphere in which these spiritual gifts are to operate." I'm convinced that many times what we have done is we have read 1 Corinthians 13 outside of its context and it's still been beneficial to us. We have been blessed by reading it and preaching it and listening to it and understanding it, but never forget that this 13th chapter is sandwiched right in the middle of a discussion about spiritual gifts. In fact, when you go to chapter 14, verse 1, what does he say? "Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts." So chapter 12, spiritual gifts. Chapter 14, spiritual gifts. What then does chapter 13 represent? The attitude, the atmosphere necessary for the spiritual gifts to operate as God means for them to operate.

So love must be preeminent. Even as you think about spiritual gifts, what is most important is that we are living in, operating in the love of God so that if you speak in the tongues of men and angels but you don't have love, verse 1, you're just making noise. If you have all prophetic powers and you understand all mysteries and all knowledge, if you have all faith so as to remove mountains but you do not have love, you are nothing. You are no one. You are a nobody. And if you were to give away all that you had and even deliver up yourself to martyrdom but you don't have love, you gain nothing. Love must be the priority.

Then in verses 8 through 13, you have the permanence of love and we'll get to that eventually but what we have now in verses 4 through 8 then, sandwiched between the priority of love and the permanence of love, in verses 4 through the first part of verse 8, he talks about the practice of love. He shows us love in action, in fact, he shows us that love is action. It's not just words. It's not just sentiment. Where there is love, there is action. Love is patient. Love is kind. Love is overcoming what is natural to fallen man but is not godly. Love does not envy. Love does not boast. Love is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way. It's not irritable. It's not resentful. It doesn't rejoice at wrongdoing. But love does rejoice with the truth and love bears all things and believes all things and hopes all things and endures all things. You see, this is love. It is powerful. It brings change. It is impactful. It is a great testimony to the reality of the living God because this kind of love is his love. It is supernatural. It is only present in a life where there has been salvation. So when we live in love, we live as followers of Christ and our lives become a testimony to the reality of the Gospel.

Love is often misunderstood. It is often, especially, I would say in our own day and age, it is wrongly defined but we have to also say it is even less often practiced. That's the goal this morning and tonight. I want to be very clear: the goal is not just information, the goal is not just examination. Folks, it does us no good to stand before a passage of Scripture and say, "Wow, that really convicted me," if there is no difference on the other

side of conviction. How many times have we walked out of a sermon and said, "Do you know what? He stepped all over my toes." Alright, I mean, that's how people say it sometimes. "Well, he just walked all over my toes." Well, let me ask you: what is the difference now in your life as a result of that work of conviction? The goal is not information or examination, the goal of this section is transformation that when we are done studying this, listening to this, looking at this, reading this, that we would actually walk in this, that we would practice this. If we are believers, if the Holy Spirit lives in us, then we have been made recipients of the love of God; we have everything necessary to walk in this and so the goal is that we would walk in it.

The very construction of this section is amazing to me. It speaks not only of Paul's organizational mind but the inspiration of the Holy Spirit because if you include the first part of verse 8 where he says, "Love never ends," then you have 16 qualities of love described in verses 4 through 8, 16 qualities. He begins with 2 that state what love is in positive terms and then he goes through a section where he lists what love isn't and so he describes love in negative terms and then he returns to positive descriptions of love and you have 8 on each side of the ledger. You have 8 descriptions of love that are positive, you have a descriptions of love in terms of what it's not. Love is patient. Love is kind. That's positive. It's not jealous, it doesn't brag. It's not arrogant. It's not rude. It doesn't insist on its own way. It's not irritable. It's not resentful. It doesn't rejoice in wrongdoing. That's what it isn't, that's negative but then he returns: it rejoices with the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, it never ends. So he has 8 negative descriptions and 8 positive descriptions.

Now, this morning, we begin to look at what love is and as I began to study this, what I want us to do in the service this morning is just focus on the first quality that he mentioned. Tonight we're going to move further into the verses but I want us this morning to focus on the first one because I believe we all have such a struggle with this first quality. He says in verse 4, "Love is patient." Love is patient. Are you walking in the love of God as a practice? And one way we could examine ourselves is to ask: are you a patient person, I mean a supernaturally patient person as a practice? Love is patient. Makrothymeo is the word. It means to delay long; to patiently wait. I looked at every place in the New Testament where this word was used and in every single case the idea of waiting is present. Waiting.

I'll just give you a couple of examples. Matthew 18:26, "So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me,'" give me time, right? "'And I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt." There is that parable that Jesus gave of the forgiven servant who then was an unforgiving servant and in both cases when he talks about patience, makrothymeo, he means, "Give me time. Wait. Will you allow me some time?"

This word is used to speak of us waiting on the return of Jesus or waiting on the promises of God as they come to pass. I know the very instructive place we find this word is 1 Thessalonians 5:14 where it says, "And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all." Now, that verse is instructive, I think, because it also gives us examples of why patience is needed. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 says, "we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle," so we're going to sometimes deal with people who are struggling with the sin of laziness, inactivity, being idle. He says, "encourage the fainthearted," so now you have someone who is unbelieving, discouraged. Then he says, "help the weak." You have idle people, fainthearted people, weak people and patience is needed with all of them.

We are also taught in that verse, though, that patience does not mean inactivity. Patience doesn't mean sit back and do nothing because with those 3 kinds of people he says, "You admonish the one who is idle. You encourage the one who is fainthearted. You help the one who is weak. And yet you are patient with all of them." So patience doesn't mean doing nothing, rather it is an attitude, it's an approach that's at work even as you are helping these people. So what does it mean to be patient? It means you delay. It means you wait. It means you give time. It means you give opportunity. It means you give space. To be patient at its core is to be willing to wait, to give time. Not to act swiftly. Not to act harshly but instead to be patient.

Now, I want us to think about this quality this morning around 5 questions, alright? Here's the first one: why is patience needed? Love is patient. Well, why do we need patience? Well, the answer is: because we are called by God to love people. Each of these qualities of love, where do you think these are being expressed? Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy. Love does not boast. In all of those things that we are reading, where is love being practice? It is toward people. We're called to love people. We are called by God to love lost people, are we not? We're taught not just to love people who love us, we are taught in Scriptures to love our enemies, to pray for those who spitefully use us, to pray for those who would persecute us, to love those who would oppose us. So we're going to be called to love people who don't know Jesus Christ even as they mistreat us, even as they would oppose us, even as they potentially would persecute us. Love is meant to operate right there. That takes patience. When someone is mistreating you, when someone is opposing you, when someone is speaking ill of you, when someone is persecuting you, instead of lashing out, instead of reacting in a way that is in accord with how they're treating you, instead of acting in like manner, no, you must know what it is to suffer long. That's how the King James version translates this word, long-suffering.

Lost people, we're called to love them, but do you know what? We're also called especially to love God's household. We're called to love saved people. Now, we all know that once people get saved they are no longer sinful, right? I mean, once they come to know Jesus there is nothing that requires our patience anymore. Wrong. Listen, saved people are still sinful people. The people you live with in your home, the person you are married to, the children you are raising, the friends you have, the people we go to church with, we are all sinful people. We stumble, as the book of James says, in many ways. I tell you right up front: if you're going to love me, it's going to require patience because

there are going to be things in my life that challenge your ability to love me. But I've got news for you, if I'm going to love you, I'm going to have to be patient because there are things in your life that will challenge, that will test, my ability to love you. Patience is needed because we're called to love people, saved people, lost people. Saved people are not automatically sanctified in the sense of progressive sanctification, that is to say, God's people are still immature. In all of our lives, there are areas where we're growing. We are not yet fully developed. There are going to be times that you expect more of people you love than what you find. Greater faithfulness than you find. Greater obedience than you find. You expect greater reactions to certain situations you find yourself in than you will actually find. We all disappoint one another because we are not yet perfected. That requires patience.

We are to love saved people because they are our brethren, because they are precious to Christ, because the investment of love is worth it. Precious to God, they should be precious to us. One of the disappointing things that we find, I think, in today's church is a lack of understanding of what it means to be covenant keepers. I mean, to love each other and to be committed to relationships in a way that is in agreement with God's covenant faithfulness to us. You look at the world as a whole, lost and saved people, and you see people jumping out of commitments all the time. Just look at the divorce rate. But what's sad is when you come into the local church, unfortunately you see professing believers being pushed into the same mold. People don't know what it is to keep covenant with one another, to keep commitments to one another, to have a sticktoitiveness in relationships that stays there and remains there with ups and downs and successes and failures and good times and difficult times.

Listen, beloved, if we're going to love each other, that's what's required. That kind of sticktoitiveness. That kind of patience because the people of God are precious to the Lord and should be precious to the Lord's people. In a word, we are called to love all people and as we strive to love all people, God is developing us. Why is patience needed? Because we are under construction and as we face things that test our patience, we find opportunities to trust Christ, to obey the word of God, to display the love of our Savior and God is at work growing us through it all. God commands it. He is glorified by it and so we ought to do it. Love is patient. This is why it is needed, because we're called to love people.

Second question: what is patience producing? "God, you have commanded me to love and that means I am to be patient. What are you doing through this? What are you at work doing, Lord? As I'm loving, what are you doing? What are you at work accomplishing?" Well, when you look at how the word "patience" is used in the New Testament, some things stand out about what God does through patience. Let me give you a few things. First of all, when we live patiently toward other people, it is a testimony to the fact that we are God's servants. If someone arrived in an unevangelized area to preach the Gospel, what kind of qualities would say to an unbelieving community, to people looking at these people preaching the Gospel and listening to the message, what would say to these people, "Here are God's servants"? Look in 2 Corinthians 6:3 as Paul describes his ministry to the Corinthians. He says this, "We put no obstacle in anyone's

way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way." Paul, how were you commended as a servant of God? Listen, "by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness," interesting he links those 2 back-to-back, the same thing he does right here in verse 4. "Patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything." Paul says, "You saw us in a multitude of challenges and through it all by God's power, we were commended as his servants," and one of the ways that he was commended as a servant of God was the supernatural patience that was evident in his life. Does your patience testify to the fact that you are God's servant? Did someone see in you, are they able to see in you a supernatural patience that is really love in action? Then it says you are God's servant.

What else does it accomplish? Well, second it testifies of the presence of God's Spirit because this is the fruit of the Spirit, love is, and as a result patience is. Galatians 5:22, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness," again, those 2 back-to-back, interesting, "patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." How do we know that the Spirit of God dwells in you? How do we know that God has taken up residence in you? Well, the presence of love is an evidence of the indwelling Holy Spirit and one of the expressions of love is patience. Supernatural patience says the Holy Spirit is present.

Third, we're told this belongs to a worthy walk. Listen to Ephesians 4:1, "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." Alright, I'm going to live a life that is a testimony to the high calling of what it means to be a believer. What does that life look like? Listen, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Paul says, "I urge you to walk in a manner that is in keeping with your calling." What does that mean? It means patience. It means bearing with each other in love.

When you become impatient with someone, when you become impatient, do you ever stop and think, "Do you know what? My impatience right now does not agree with what it means to be a believer in Jesus Christ. I mean, this is not a life that is worthy of my calling." Do you ever think in those terms? When you're being impatient, do you stop and think, "Do you know what? This is not in keeping with the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is not an attitude that the Holy Spirit would produce." Do you ever stop and think, "Do you know what? This attitude doesn't speak of me as a servant of God because a servant of God is someone who is characterized by supernatural patience."

Folks, do you understand? This is not me coming up with a list just out here sort of thinking about, "What would patience produce?" I'm just taking you to some examples we see in Scripture. This is what patience speaks of: a servant of God, the presence of the Spirit, a worthy walk. Here's a fourth thing: patience speaks of the power of God. Colossians 1:11, "May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all," or unto all, "endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." "May God strengthen you," Paul writes, "in your inner man. May he strengthen you according to his glorious might unto endurance and patience with joy," and there the word "patience" is used in terms of inheriting the promises, looking for the return of Christ but, folks, it's the same patience as to characterize our relationships. It's the same kind of patience that is to permeate every part of our lives.

How do you walk in patience? It's the power of God. I mean, this is not something that we can do on our own. This is something we need the Lord for. We can't bear long with each other. We can't be patient with each other. We can't love each other that way if it's apart from the power of God. Do you ever ask God to grant you patience and mean it? I'm not talking about in the midst of your grumbling, you know, "O Lord, help me not to kill this person right now." I'm not talking about that. I'm saying: do you ever begin your day by saying, "Now Lord, I know I'm going to face many challenges in many different relationships in many different realms, would you today strengthen me in my inner man according to your glorious might so that today others might see in me a patience which is love, a patience that would otherwise be impossible apart from your presence and me?" Only by the power of God can we be patient.

Something else we see, the last thing and then I'm going to move on to the next question. Something else that patience produces or that is required for is faithfulness in ministry. We cannot be faithful with what God has called us to do if we are not patient. 2 Timothy 4:1, Paul writes, "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching." You patiently plow the row. You patiently preach the word. You patiently take people to the word of God. Why do we need such patience? Verse 3, "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." He says, "There is a day coming when the truth will not appeal to their ears and what will you do, son, then? What will you do when the faithful preaching and teaching of the word of God is not what people want?" He says, "I charge you in the presence of Christ, you preach the word and you do it enduringly. You do it patiently. You just keep waiting for the reward. You just keep waiting for the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ and the blessing that will come with him."

Third question we'll ask this morning: why is patience missing from my life, from your life? Why is patience needed? We're called to love people. What is patience producing? A testimony to salvation. He took all those things we just looked at and it is all a

testimony to salvation. Why then is patience sometimes missing in us? The simple answer is: sin. But though that is a simple answer, do you take that answer seriously? When you are impatient, do you count that, do you consider that to be sin? When you are not walking in love so that you are patient with others, if you think about those specific situations, instances where you are not patient, do you count that to be sin? Do you identify it for what it really is? In the context of 1 Corinthians 13:4, if you have a problem with impatience, is it really a patience problem? According to 1 Corinthians 13:4, what kind of a problem is it? It's a love problem. Do you ever think of it that way? "I just have a problem with patience." No you don't. Oh, you do but you have a larger problem: you're not loving. The reason you are impatient is because you are not practicing love.

Why is patience missing from my life? Because I'm not loving. Because I'm sinning. We could say it another way: you are not filled with the Spirit because what is the fruit of the Spirit? Love. And what is one of the expressions of love? Patience. When I am impatient, it is because I am yielding to the flesh, I am not being led by the Spirit. Every believer in this place, present in you is the Holy Spirit but also present in you is unredeemed humanness, the flesh and it is as wicked as ever. You do understand, beloved, the flesh doesn't improve through time. You can't redeem it. You can't develop it. You can't make it better. In fact, I'm convinced the older I get, the flesh gets worse over time and the only way to live that supernatural life that we have been saved to live is in the power of the Holy Spirit. I must submit myself to the word of God, be saturated with the word of God, that's Colossians 3, and as I am submitted to the word of God in devotion to Christ, I will be filled with the Spirit of God and he will enable me to live a life I otherwise cannot live but that I have been saved to live.

If I'm not patient, it's because I'm not loving and if I'm not loving, it's because I'm not filled with the Spirit if indeed I am saved. But we could say it another way, couldn't we? If I'm not patient, it's because I'm proud. You notice that at the root of our impatience is just pride. Think about the times you lacked patience. Why is it? When is the last time you really exhibited impatience? This morning getting ready for church? Or the last time your wife was taking too long? Or you've told someone, maybe a child, to do something and you say, "100 times and here it is again." By the way, is it wrong to correct? Of course not. Is it wrong to admonish? We've already seen 1 Thessalonians 5:14, "Admonish the idle." It's not wrong to correct but what's the attitude in which we're operating? What's the mindset? What's the atmosphere?

Now, here's why we get impatient: because we think we deserve better. "I don't deserve this," we say. Or because we think we could do better. "Just let me do that. I'll show you how it ought to be done." But running through all of it is we forget in our pride how patient God is with us. Folks, if God took his patience away from you, where would you be? If God dealt with you according to strict justice every day, if he marked all of your iniquities every day, if he didn't give you any room, any time to develop and grow, where would you be? We're like that forgiven servant who is an unforgiving servant. We want to hold people to a different standard than we want God to hold us to. We thank him for forgiving this debt that we could have never paid. We thank him for all his forgiveness

and then want to take a fellow servant by the lapels and say, "You pay me every cent right now." Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 1:16, he said, "But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."

What kind of patience is Paul describing? One that he knew so well in his own personal experience. Here was Saul of Tarsus persecuting Christians, having a hand in putting them to death. He should already have been in hell but God gave him space for repentance and, in fact, arrested him on the road to Damascus and opened his eyes and converted this man and saved this man and he is able to say, "Do you know what? That perfect patience in my situation is a testimony to the world of the saving power of God and of the open opportunity for eternal life. If he could save me, if he would be willing to save me, won't you respond to the Gospel call and repent of your sins and trust in Christ? He will save you." Well, can we not all look at our own lives, our own case and say, "God, how patient you have to be to me. Now let me display that same patience toward others."

We could also describe it this last way: we are impatient because we are unbelieving. God commands us to be patient. Here he tells us this is what it means to love. We are commanded to love and love is patient but are we taking his commands seriously? Do we hear this as a command? Do we recognize today, "I am commanded to love and love is patient. That means I am commanded to be patient. Do I hear my Master's words and then act like they don't really matter? Do I hear my Master's words and then act like I'm not really responsible to heed them and to submit to them and obey them?"

Why is patience needed? Because we are called to love people. What does patience produce? A testimony in a multitude of areas of salvation. It speaks of salvation. Why is patience missing? Because of sin. Because I'm not loving. Because I'm proud. Because I'm not believing. I'm not heeding my Master's commands.

Now, I close this morning with a final question and that is: how will we respond to these truths? What will we do with what we have seen this morning about love? What will we do with what we have seen this morning about patience? I'm going to give you wrong responses and then I'm going to finish with right responses. Here are some wrong responses. 1. I demand others to be patient with my sin issues. We walk out of here this morning and we say to a loved one, "Did you hear that sermon about patience? Now, you be patient with my sin issues," when really what we're saying is, "I'm going to use the word of God as an excuse to continue in what I know to be disobedient." That's a wrong response. Has anybody here ever used the word of God in the wrong way? To excuse our sins? To excuse our disobedience? To expect others to live with our disobedience? Wrong response.

A second wrong response is to imagine that, "I really do love others even though what we've talked about this morning is painfully absent from my life." We continue to insist that we're walking in the love of God even when we don't practice patience. To imagine that somehow my life is an exception to what the word of God says. The word of God

says that if you're loving, present will be patience. And guess what, friend? You're not an exception to that so if you're not walking in patience, you are not walking in what? Love. That's a fact. So don't imagine that so now you're an exception. You really are a loving person. You really are walking in the love of God even though everyone around you would say patience is painfully absent.

Which gets to another wrong response and that is: we explain away and we justify our impatience. "You just don't know what I'm going through. You just don't know the pressures that are on my life. You just don't know what's going on at work. You just don't know what's happening in my family." Folks, do you believe that God commands of his people what he is unwilling to produce in and through his people? Do you believe that God can, by his Spirit, enable his people to love even their enemies, to love in the face of the greatest test, to demonstrate patience where patience is severely tested, is God able to do that? What's the answer? Yes. Now, are you wanting to walk in that? Are you wanting to walk in this supernatural patience no matter what's going on at work? No matter what's going on with relationships? No matter what pressures are on your life right now? Do you believe that God is willing and ready and are you willing and ready to walk in this?

What are the right responses? To repent of our lack of love and of our impatience wherefore we find it. To deal with it as sin. Would you today in light of what we've seen be willing to deal with your impatience as sin? To say, This is sinning against God so I won't justify it and excuse it. I'll look straight into the face of it and call it what it is. It is a lack of love. It's sin. Something to be repented of."

Second, a right response is to seek the Lord for the love and the patience that you need. To acknowledge, in a sense, you already have it. You have everything you need for life and godliness in Christ Jesus but what you're asking God to do is to strengthen you to walk in what you possess. We can say it this way and I don't mean by this quietism. I don't mean let go and let God. But we could say, "Lord, would you love people through me? Would you strengthen me by your Spirit? Would you so grace me that when people come in contact with my life, I will by your grace be able to demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ to them no matter how they are treating me, no matter what they are saying, no matter what they're doing?" I have failed this test more than I would like to say that I have but I have and I know I have. You have too but do you know what? The Lord gives us opportunities to learn this, doesn't he, along the way?

In the first church that I ever pastored, a little country church, 35 people in it. My wife and I would have to go in early on cold mornings and light the heaters, little gas floor heaters. We cleaned the church. We were everything, janitor, everything. This church had been in existence about 100 years at the time. When I first got to the church, behind the pulpit on the wall was a picture of the founding members. That was behind the pulpit on the wall and every week there was a lady who would take the Baptist Standard and leave it on my desk and circle in red the things she thought I needed to work on.

When I first got to the church, there was a woman teaching the entire church and Sunday school, one of the founding families of years gone by. And we just, like we do now, we

just said, "That's not what the Bible teaches," and we began to teach the Scriptures and she stopped teaching the adult Sunday school. At some point they got mad enough that they left and I'll never forget the day they left, they called me and said, "We're coming to get the desk and the bookshelves." They had given them to the church, I guess, years ago. So what do I do? Do you know what I did? I helped them load it up. They brought their trailer out and I took my desk which was their desk, and my bookshelves which were their bookshelves, with all my books on the floor and I helped them load it up. Do you know what? God by his grace gave me the ability that day to just display his love, to just be sweet to them and kind to them anyway.

The grandmother, by the way, stayed in the church and I used to have to go pick her up and drive her to church every Sunday and I'll never forget one time driving to church and she was telling me some story but she's in the midst of the story told me because I was curious about how she kept coming and she told me she could go to the church even if the devil himself were preaching. What do you do? You seek the Lord. You seek the Lord for the love and the patience that you need.

So finally we can say this: aim at love in all your thoughts, in all your attitudes, in all your words and in all your deeds. Aim at love. Folks, listen, we can't feel right and act right if we don't think right. We can't have unloving thoughts and then loving words attitudes and deeds. That's called hypocrisy. It begins in our mind. "Lord, help me to think of these people the way that you would have me to. Feel the way you would have me to. Speak the way you would have me to. And do what you would have me to do."

What is love? Love is patient. Tonight we'll come back and look at the rest of the list.

Let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we recognize that we did not have love until you loved us first. Love is not natural to us. Lord, you gave us your love. You shed it abroad in our hearts when you saved us and when your Spirit took up residence within us. So Lord, we thank you for the love that we have, your love in our hearts, but we also confess that we need you every moment of every day to walk in that love. Apart from Jesus, as our Savior told us, we can do nothing. So Lord, we ask you to remind us of that daily and strengthen us to just rely on you so that your love can be seen in us, your people, and in that way, Lord, that we would be individual and as a corporate body, a testimony of the presence and the love of the living God. We love you, Lord. We thank you for loving us. We pray for anyone here who doesn't yet know your Son, people who do not yet know what it is to experience the love of God. I pray, Lord, that you would create a hunger and a thirst in hearts to know you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.