

# Love Is Not Easily Provoked

*The Characteristics of Love*

By Steve Viars

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**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 13:1-4

**Preached On:** Sunday, June 8, 2014

## **Faith Church**

5526 State Road 26 E

Lafayette, IN 47905

**Website:** <http://www.faithlafayette.org/church>

**Online Sermons:** <http://www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette>

One of the best known and most beloved stories in all the Bible is that of the Prodigal Son and Jesus begins that tale in Luke 15 by explaining that a man had two sons. We can all relate to that, huh? We were all somebody's son or somebody's daughter. Many of us had siblings. Many of us have had children or have them as well so we can relate to this scenario that Jesus raises on multiple levels but then the story turns sinister right away because we learn that the younger son comes and demands that he receive his share of the state right then and there. The selfishness of that request is appalling. Such a division even in our day and age and certainly in Bible times would not have occurred until after the father's death and so this young son apparently was all in favor of accelerating that part of the program.

Amazingly, the father did what his younger son requested and he divided the estate, the Bible says, among them. Among them. Probably no one was surprised when Jesus next explained that not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country and there he squandered his estate with loose living. The story is fascinating for all sorts of reasons including the fact that there are so many things we don't know and how could you burn through your portion of your father's entire estate that quickly. Not a whole lot of detail there and that, I think, helps make the point, instead, we just read these sad words at the beginning of the next verse, "Now when he had spent everything," a severe famine occurred in that country and he began to be impoverished so he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country and he set him into his fields to feed swine and he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating and no one was giving anything to him." He had undoubtedly eaten well while under his father's roof and he and his new found friends probably had some great meals while he was on his binge but now he suffers the incredible indignity for a Jewish young man of working on a farm of unclean pigs and life got so bad and he was so hungry that the pig slop looked appealing. Note to self: you're probably on the wrong road when pig slop looks appealing.

You have to wonder, by the way, whether any of this would have surprised his father and some might even question why the heavenly Father sovereignly allowed a famine to strike at this very moment in this young man's life. Why, the father if he knew it was going to happen this way probably go ahead and provide the estate and why did the

heavenly Father depicted in this tale allow the famine. The answer in part is because of the high value godly fathers and godly people placed on the importance of genuine repentance which is why the next words are so full of hope, "But when he came to his senses." Thank God for that, huh? Not just for him but for us? "When he came to his sense, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will,'" here's the plan, the new plan, "I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight.'" No lame excuses, no, "You know, Dad, you were pretty mean to me and so I had to. My brothers were..." No lame excuses. It's a new narrative. "I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'" So he got up and came to his father."

That part of the story teaches us several very important principles about repentance. As we already mentioned, it was important to these fathers both the earthly and heavenly, so much so that they were willing to allow painful hardship and discipline in order to bring it about. We also learn that repentance involves a clear change of mind, a clear change of direction, a clear change of heart. That's what repent means, fundamentally, to turn around. It's not just something a person says, it's certainly not outward conformity. There is real change at the level of the heart.

The genuineness is also proven in part by what he started saying to himself. You see, he used to have a different narrative. You understand what I mean by narrative, right? It's a story you tell yourself to explain your existence. You have one, it's running through your brain all the time. You've been telling it to yourself this morning. You may have told other people this week if they would listen and this young man undoubtedly used to have a different narrative that he firmly believed was true and often repeated to anyone who would listen about how repressive it was to live under this terrible father's roof, how much better he would be in stewarding his father's wealth. Now the narrative in his heart and mind changes. That's a critical aspect of repentance. If that doesn't happen, repentance has not yet occurred.

Then he begins planning his new steps. You turn around and you start going a different direction. Just like he had planned that speech demanding the inheritance, you have to understand, that's not the first time he'd ever said those words. He had a plan and just like he had planned to go into a distant country, now the authenticity of his repentance is demonstrated by the complete change in the new plan. You see, truly repentant people don't keep singing the same song and truly repentant people don't keep acting the same way. So he decides to get up and go to his father and to admit his sin against heaven and against his dad. It's an entirely new narrative because of the existence of a freshly repentant heart and he humbles himself and he plans to ask not for his former position as a son but for a place among his father's other hired men. It sounds like repentance too.

Then the scene shifts and you can almost picture Jesus' original audience on the edge of their seats wondering how the father is going to respond to all of this. What an opportunity for revenge, huh? What an opportunity for a big fat "I told you so." What an opportunity to review all of this young son's failures for everybody to hear. What an

opportunity to dwell on how angry this young son's request had made him in the first place. This young man is about to get his comeuppance, huh? It's going to be delicious. Is that what happened? Is that what happened? No, no, because his father loved him and he'd been hopefully waiting for him and when he saw this errant but repentant son coming over the hillside, Scripture tells us that he picked up his garments and he began running to meet him and he didn't even allow his son to finish the speech. His son's repentance was so obvious to this loving father that he didn't even allow the young man to get the speech out.

His father said to his slaves, "Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him." Think about that. Think about what this young man would have smelled like right around now. You talk about one way to ruin a good robe, "And call the dry cleaners." No, "Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet and bring the fattened calf." Can you imagine what that would have meant to that young man? "Did you say calf?" Not just pods from the swine, fattened calf. "Kill it and let us eat and celebrate for this son of mine was dead." That's what it's like when you're not repenting. "This son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found. And they began to celebrate." My friends, that's what love looks like with skin on and everybody present recognized that this is forgiving love.

Well, like so many places in the Bible, regrettably that's not the end of the story. So many times in Scripture you wish there was a period, you wish everybody else would just shut up. There is one person who actually became angry at this spectacle and refused to join in the celebration. Seriously? It was the older brother who practically broke his father's heart because of his angry lack of love. And one of the morals of the story for people like you and me is: who are you most like? The loving father or the hateful brother? And what does that say about the depth and the genuineness of your love?

With that in mind, please open your Bible now to 1 Corinthians 13. That'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 to help us understand exactly what that means, these past several weeks we've been doing a word-by-word and phrase-by-phrase study of the great love chapter in the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13, called "The Characteristics of Love." It's interesting how many people have said to me and to our other pastors how much they have found this study to be particularly convicting and particularly helpful and I think all of us would say that when and it doesn't happen automatically but when we allow the word of God to do its work in our hearts and in our lives, the effect can make us more alive spiritually, to what's occurring, to where we need to go but there's a potential spiritual life that is enhanced as a result of letting the word do its work.

The author of the book of Hebrews said, "But the word of God is living." Do you believe that? Do you believe that book you have on your lap or on your phone or ipad or whatever you're looking at right now? Do you believe the word of God is living? It's active? It's sharper than any two-edged sword? It's piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit of both joints and marrow, able to judge the thoughts and the intentions of the

heart? Of course, when that happens, we run to the cross, do we not? Our former Pastor G. used to like to say that we don't believe in tearing people down without building us back up and what he meant by that is we're not just going to use the word to bring about conviction without also bringing about corresponding grace and clear biblical instruction about how to get to a better place through the life-changing gospel of Christ.

This morning we want to tackle the next two phrases in verse 5 where we learn that love "is not easily provoked and does not take into account a wrong suffered." You know, after I saw the way I worded that, I had an "or" there. Cross out the "or" would you, and put "and"? It's not like you get to do one or the other. I'm not sure why I even had that. Well, I'm sure why I did it: because I'm a goof. But love is not easily provoked and does not take into account a wrong suffered. Those two ideas work hand-in-hand with one another and hopefully that will become more apparent as we work through this text this morning.

Let's read beginning in 1 Corinthians 13, 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."

Here are our characteristics,

"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."

We're talking this morning about how love is not easily provoked and it doesn't take into account a wrong suffered and I'd like us to spend the rest of our time looking for two characteristics of love that can help us keep our sinful anger in check. Now you say, "Us who?" Us you, in case you're wondering. You say, "Well, I don't blow up." Well, there's

all kinds of ways to become sinfully angry. Anybody here who says, “Well, I don't need to hear this,” then we'll talk about lying.

Two characteristics of love to help us keep that sinful anger in check. First of all, don't allow yourself to be easily provoked. You see, that's one of the differences between the Prodigal Son's father and the Prodigal Son's older brother, right? The father wasn't ticked off. He wasn't nursing his hurts. He wasn't walking around with this low-grade irritation and anger. He was praying for repentance and ready to forgive. What about the older brother? The polar opposite, really. He was provoked. He allowed himself to be provoked by his brother's failures and he was even amazingly provoked by his father's grace so you want to see how goofy being provoked easily makes you: there's this sumptuous meal going on. Remember, where had the older brother been? Been out working in the field, right? And his Daddy has killed the fattened calf and he's having a sumptuous meal. If nothing else, go in and fill up your plate. If nothing else, enjoy the meal but this man had allowed himself to become so provoked that he wouldn't even go in.

My parents, I don't know if there is anybody here old enough to remember this phrase, but my parents used to refer to that kind of behavior as biting off your nose to spite your face. Have you ever heard that one? It's a really gross metaphor when you think about it. In fact, I tried it a couple of times as I was preparing this message. It is totally impossible to do but even the thought of biting off your nose, eww. That's why I spend so much time in therapy today. Some of these sayings my parents had but that's what it was.

Now, just to be sure we're on the same page, think about the meaning, what does that actually mean. “Provoked” is the Greek word *paroxunimai* and interestingly enough, it actually comes from a root word which means “sharpen.” Don't be provoked from a root that means sharpened. One lexicon said this word means: to cause a state of inward arousal; to be provoked; urge on; to stimulate, especially provoke to wrath; or to irritate. One commentator said this, “The heart of the word conveys a semantic force of 'to exasperate, to irritate' as a metaphorical extension of 'to make sharp.' There is the connection semantically: to make sharp; to make pointed; to make acid.” He went on to say, “Virtually every lexicon and primary source indicates the notion of reaching a level of exasperation.”

You've been provoked but how does this express itself? The English word “pique” and by the way, let me push the pause button on that for a minute. I realize that sometimes I have a bit of difficulty pronouncing words correctly, people tell me that from time-to-time, I know that. Do you realize, I learned something when I was preparing this message because I saw that quote and I said, “I don't know for sure how to pronounce that word.” Do you realize you can go on the internet, they have a pronunciation, I'm serious and it's a complete mystery and you can type in that word “pique” and there's a woman apparently sitting somewhere waiting and you hit the button and she says, “Pique.” I tried it several times just to see how many times she would do it before she got exasperated with me and it's just amazing so better pronunciation is in store for this church because of that mystery of the internet. I'm not going to say who created it but anyway...Let's get back to this. The English word “pique” combines the same range of nuances as the

Greek: something between irritation and anger which, here's the key, which takes offense because one's self-regard has been dented, wounded or punctured by some sharp point.

Another comment he made that might be especially helpful and/or convicting was this, "A loving person cannot be goaded into the sharp retort of irritation." Chew on that one for a second, my friend. A loving person cannot be exasperated, cannot be provoked, cannot be goaded into the sharp retort of irritation. Am I the only one feeling convicted about right now? Or would we all want to silently get in line on that?

Now, please keep in mind, whenever we study the Bible, we always want to do it in a balanced way. We call that from a principles of Bible study or an hermeneutics perspective, the unity principle meaning that however we interpret a particular word or phrase in the Bible like "love is not easily provoked," whatever we make that say, it has to be able to bear the weight of the rest of the Bible and so are we asking the question this morning or making the suggestion that we would never be provoked? Well, I hope not. It's very similar to what the Scripture teaches us about the issue of anger. There are times when followers of Jesus Christ ought to be angry and there are also times that followers of Jesus Christ ought to be provoked. In fact, the exact same word sometimes is used in those very texts, *paroxunimai*, like this one where the Apostle Paul was provoked in Acts 17, "Now while Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was being, *paroxunimai*, provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols." There is nothing in that text that would suggest that it was wrong for Paul to be provoked by the idolatrous lifestyle of the men and women in Athens. However, it's not because he was personally offended, it's not because he was being personally judgmental, it's because he knew the pain of an idolatrous life, he knew the eternal destiny of an idolatrous life and so he was provoked. But provoked to do what? Provoked to think about a creative way to proclaim the gospel which, if you know your Bible, is how we then got the great sermon on Mars Hill which has been an example for subsequent generations of followers of Christ of that one way to present the good news of Jesus to a group of men and women who may not yet believe in God or his word. Surely, every bit of that was right. In fact, it would have been a terrible thing if Paul observed their spiritual condition and responded with apathy or with indifference. There are times we ought to be provoked.

I enjoyed looking at some of these pictures. I think this about a week and a half ago now about on Memorial Day but some members of our church were downtown right near one of our Community Development Corporation houses that we have purchased and we're just trying to be a blessing and one of the things that we were encouraged to do is to start a community garden downtown for the neighbors in that area. So here's people, I think, on a holiday taking time to make that possible. What was that? It's people who were provoked. That's what it was, people who were provoked, wanting to be sure that the good news of Jesus Christ had been heard by every person who lives in this community. We'll have folks who serve all week in a Vacation Bible School program and give up in all sorts of ways in order to minister to children and families in this community. What is that? That is men and women who have been provoked. Provoked in their spirit to the point that they want to be involved in outreach, absolutely, of course, nothing wrong with that.

You may have thought about this already theologically if you're trying to connect some of these dots in your mind, surely, the Lord Jesus was sometimes provoked and we would never say, "Well, he wasn't being very loving." No, he was the perfect picture of love like Matthew 21:12, "And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple and overturned the tables of money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves." I'm saying there ought to be things that provoke us. For example, another mass murder at Seattle Pacific University this week following right on the heels of one the week before at the University of California Santa Barbara. When we hear about that kind of senseless murder, surely our hearts would be provoked. Would be provoked. We're to be provoked by the wicked racist comments made by Donald Stirling, the owner and I think most of us hope the soon to be former owner of the LA Clippers. We ought to be provoked by that. We ought to be provoked by the kidnapping of 200 girls in Nigeria and on and on and on.

So it is not always and automatically unloving to be provoked in some way, right? However, do we need a "however" in that sentence? Unless we all just run over and say, "Yeah, every time I'm provoked it's righteous indignation." Yeah. Most of us would say that there are plenty of times when we are provoked for reasons that aren't quite as noble as the ones we just mentioned. Could I get kind of a little uh-huh on that? Thank you, B., I heard your uh-huh. John MacArthur said this, he said that being provoked that Paul is talking about here has to do with things done against us or that are personally offensive. Love does not get angry at others when they say or do something that displeases us or when they prevent us from having our own way. Love never reacts in self-defense or retaliation. Being provoked is the other side of seeking one's own way. That's an important sentence to mark: being provoked is the other side of seeking one's own way. The person who is intent on having his own way is easily provoked. He's easily angered.

Well, how can we avoid that then? How can we avoid being sinfully provoked? A lot of answers, here's one of them: by pausing and practicing the other aspects of biblical love instead. Think about this: much of what we have said in this entire series will be short circuited if you and I are easily provoked. If we're short fused. You kind of think of it like this: you have an array of possible characteristics of biblical love in a time of frustration and a time of difficulty and a time of depression but instead of picking up one of these characteristics of love and asking Christ to help us have the power and the conviction to do that, if we immediately are provoked, we short circuit everything we studied in this series. Instead, let's ask Christ at that moment to think through the characteristics. Instead of being easily provoked, "Lord, help me to work on being lovingly patient right now. Instead of being easily provoked, let me work on being lovingly kind. Instead of being easily provoked, let me avoid being jealous. Let me avoid being proud. Let me avoid acting unbecomingly." What I'm saying is we can default to being easily provoked or we can default to putting on one of these other characteristics of biblical love.

It's all like a casserole these characteristics. It's not like a barrel of marbles, it's like a barrel of molasses. It's meant to be served together. You might say, "That other person is trying to provoke me." Well, you can never say "they made me do it." Do you understand

that's part of being a mature Christian is to get off the blaming your thing on everybody else? I understand miserable people will often try to pick a fight, miserable people will often try to goad you on, they'll try to make you come down to their miserable level and God's word would want us to avoid being easily provoked in part by pausing and practicing the other aspects of biblical love instead.

This too, by remembering how this is emphasized in other places in Scripture. Do you realize there are some very powerful words to speak to individuals who tend to be easily provoked? Like this, Proverbs 25:28, "Like a city that is broken into and without walls is the man who has no control over his spirit." You see, what goes along with being easily provoked? Foolish angry words. Foolish angry out-of-control words and it is amazing how much can be destroyed by a person who is easily provoked and not in control of his spirit, not allowing the Holy Spirit to control his spirit. Or this one, James 1:19, "This you know my beloved brethren but everyone must be quick to," what? "Hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." That's part of the problem, people are easily provoked and they just start yapping without thinking about praying, without thinking about what would biblical love have them to do, without thinking about what would be pleasing to Christ.

There are times I am tempted as a pastor, in fact, we may do it before the summer is out, where we just order a big dumpster and we have the dumpster right at the front door and we're going to have a hallelujah time of everybody walking by the dumpster and throwing all their smartphones in it and all their ipads and all their laptops and all their goofy devices. You say, "Why in the world would you say that?" Because it's amazing how so many people send a tweet before they've thought or they respond on Facebook before they've prayed. It's amazing. Can I just say here: don't have arguments with people on Twitter. Don't have a fight with your spouse through text messaging. For crying out loud, write the good things, talk about the bad things and it's just amazing, and you send that thing off before you pray, you send that thing off before you've thought, you've sent that thing out before you wondered what would please Jesus. Am I not telling the truth that revival could come to the house of God with fewer electronic goofy devices? Maybe I need to find that in the original Greek but I'm going to look really hard this week. I got off my notes or maybe that was right in my notes, that's kind of a little secret.

How about this: being sobered by how sinful anger can impact the family. Paul said this, "Fathers, don't provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord." You see, this being easily provoked many times hinders God's goals for you and your children. There are a lot of different ways to interpret that verse but we've often emphasized here that it involves a parent and especially a father, avoiding anything that causes or allows his children to develop a wrathful lifestyle. I really think John MacArthur was right on when he said this, "Telling our wives or our husbands that we love them is not convincing if we continually get upset and angry at what they say or do." Just stop saying it. It is such an offense. Your family members are just coming off from your latest explosion and you say "I love you"? Seriously? It's hypocrisy. It's offensive. Telling our wives or husbands that we love them is not convincing if we continually get upset or angry at what they say and do.



Telling our children that we love them is not convincing if we often yell at them for doing things that irritate us and interfere with our own plans. Then MacArthur said this, "It does no good to protest, Well, I loose my temper a lot but it's all over in a few minutes. So is a nuclear bomb," he said. "A great deal of damage can be done in a very short time. Temper is always destructive and even small temper bombs can leave much hurt and damage especially when they explode on a regular basis. Lovelessness is the cause of temper." Did we all get that? Lovelessness is the cause of temper and love is the only cure.

Ultimately seeing this as an opportunity to be like Christ, we need the gospel to do this. We need the crucified Savior to help us do this. He already did it. In fact, it's interesting, of everything that could have been prophesied about the Messiah 700 years before he came, Isaiah talked about this very thing: he wasn't easily provoked. "He was oppressed and he was afflicted yet he," what? "He did not open his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to slaughter and like a sheep that is silent before its shearer, so he did not open his mouth." You realize even Pilate was shocked that he couldn't provoke Jesus. In fact, after the scourgings and we get so used to that word scourging that we don't even think about what that would have meant to our Savior, and after the crown of thorns was placed on his head, think about the pain of all of that. Pilate still tried to provoke him and what happened? Pilate said, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave no answer. Pilate said to him, "You don't speak to me. Do you not know that I have the authority to release you and I have the authority to crucify you?" After all the physical torture and abuse, so please don't say, "Well, if you knew what I was facing right now, you would understand why I have to be so easily provoked." Really? And I don't want to minimize the pain you may be going through but I want to put it in balance theologically. Did anyone physically scourge you this week? Scourge? How many crowns of thorns did you wear?

Even after all of that, our Jesus would not allow himself to be provoked. Are you allowing the Holy Spirit of God to do his work in your heart this morning? Do you find yourself to be easily irritated? Do you walk around with a low-grade anger just under the surface? Do you have a short fuse with those around you? Do the people in your life have to walk on eggshells when you're in the room? Does life always have to be organized around your current mood? Have you ever connected those tendencies to a lack of biblical Christ-like love?

Now, what about this companion characteristic where Paul tells us that love also doesn't keep a record of the failures of others. What does that mean? And how does it fit together? Well, a very common word in the Bible, it's the Greek word *logizomai*, keeps a record. It's an accounting term: to determine by mathematical process; to reckon, I reckon the failures of that person; to give careful thought to a matter; to consider it; to hold a view about something; to think. MacArthur said, "Logizomai, to keep a mental record of events for the sake of some future action." Boom, that's what we're talking about. You say, "Well, how does that fit together with being easily provoked? How does keeping a record in my brain of somebody's wrongs and keeping it right in the forefront of my mind, how does that fit together with being easily provoked?" Well, here's the answer: if you do that, if you keep a running list of the failures of those around you, you are primed

and ready to be provoked, right? That can happen in the home where even if everybody is gone from one another during the day, maybe the spouses are at work and the kids are at school, but if they have cause to think about one another, they're keeping a record of wrongs. "My Mom's this. My Dad's a that. My husband always this. My husband never that." They're away from each other but they are logizomai, they are keeping a record of wrongs.

Then as soon as that group comes together, there's almost immediate what? Provocation. They are so easily provoked. It's almost as if the people come together and because they've been keeping a record of one another's wrongs, they are just picking a fight. "Well, how was your day, honey?" "What do you mean how was my day? You're always getting in my business." Or, "What would you like for supper?" "What do you mean by that crack? Are you trying to say that I'm putting on weight? Are you trying to say I'm eating too many suppers?" Where is the love in all of that? Where is the love in that hot mess?

My son Andrew and I like to play electronic Battleship and because he's blind, we work together as a team against the computer so we're constantly fighting against the computer playing electronic Battleship and a lot of times we just frankly whip the computer but sometimes it whips us and you can tell based on how many of our ships is blowing up, you can tell pretty much when and if it's going to win. Drew likes to say to the computer in those moments, "Where's the love, computer? Where's the heart? Where's the romance?" he says.

Maybe we ought to get in the habit of asking that same question, huh? Where is the love with me keeping such a record of wrongs? Where is the love in me being so easily provoked? One of the early church fathers, John Chrysostom, said a wrong done against love is like a spark that falls into the ocean. Is that depth and nature of your love? This is a marvelous opportunity to be like God, logizomai, blessed is the man whose sin the Lord won't take into account. 2 Corinthians 5:19, "Namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself," here it is, "not counting their trespasses against them." Friend, I hope you've trusted Christ as Savior and Lord so that you can live in a way that is consistent with what we're talking about this morning but it's by getting into that condition that you can have a right relationship with God.

This is especially important after clear repentance has occurred. I know we've talked a lot in this series about 1 Corinthians 5, the incestuous man, about how Paul was concerned about the Corinthian church because they would not deal with the incestuous man. Well, it dawned on me that maybe we have a number of people in our church who don't know the rest of that story. It would appear that the Corinthian church repented and disciplined the incestuous man and thankfully the incestuous man repented and then the Corinthian church would not forgive him and so we read in 2 Corinthians, "Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority. So on the contrary, you ought to forgive him." You don't keep a record of wrongs once genuine repentance has occurred.

I realize some might wonder, “You know, this is just a summer Sunday morning, I mean, is this really that important? This whole matter, do I need to work on this love is not easily provoked or love does not keep a record of wrongs?” Well, let me answer that question with this: just ask Moses. Why was Moses kept out of the Promised Land? It was because of this very issue, remember? On this occasion, God told him to speak to the rock so that he could glorify his gracious self but Moses was provoked and Moses had kept a record of wrongs and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock and he said to them, “Listen now, you rebels,” in the very act of rebelling. “Should we bring forth water for you out of this rock?” There's some pride. “Then Moses lifted up his hand and he struck the rock.” If I were God, nothing would have come out. “But water came forth abundantly and the congregation and their beasts drank but the Lord said to Moses and to Aaron, Because you have not believed me to treat me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel,” and that's the issue. When we are so easily provoked in a situation where God wanted his grace to be on display, we upstage him and we draw attention to us and how mad we are. May God help us grow in love including not being easily provoked or holding a record of wrongs.

Let's stand together in prayer.

*Father in heaven, thank you for your word. Lord, it does convict us but we know that in Christ it is possible for us to grow even here and so I pray that you would help us to do that. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.*