

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Dare to Be LOVING

Introduction: Today we are continuing our series “Dare to Be Different.” And we are taking a deep dive into **Romans 12:2**: “Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” Our desire in this series is to be different from the world... Be transformed by the power of God’s Word and live differently in this world. And we’ve already addressed two topics in this series. I dared you to be **KINGDOM-MINDED** in the first message. Last week I dared you to be **TRUTHFUL**. Today, Harvest Decatur I dare you to be **LOVING**. Jesus was the perfect embodiment of love and truth. I dare you to be truthful, like Jesus. And I dare you to be loving, like Jesus.

Now here’s the problem whenever you address the topic of love in our world today. We need to get our minds around what real love looks like in this world and grapple with ways to demonstrate that kind of love to others. And this requires a pretty significant paradigm shift. Because in our day we are so accustomed to thinking of love in selfish and worldly ways. We’ve got to overhaul our thinking process to get to a place where we can love the way God intends us to love. **Pat Benatar was right in 1983: “Love is a Battlefield!”**

Aristotle spoke famously about the fish many years ago. **Aristotle said that the last creature you should ask about being wet is a fish, because he has no idea that he is wet. He has no point of reference. Why? Because he’s never been dry.**

And I’m going to steal Aristotle’s illustration for our purposes here. **We are like that fish.¹ We have been swimming in a sea of false love for years! Lust-driven love and self-serving love! And emotionally-charged, volatile kinds of love! These are really closer to infatuation than love as God describes it in his Word. This is the sea of false love that we are swimming in today. So we’ve got to renew our minds, Harvest Decatur.**

“How do we do that, Pastor Tony?” “How do we get ‘unwet’?” “How do we dislodge ourselves from the false loves that overwhelm us, and learn to love like God loves?” **Well we need transformation. We need metamorphosis. The only way we can do that is by being transformed by the renewing of our minds.**

Harvest Decatur, I want us to pursue real love together as a church. Are you up for that? I want us to demonstrate real love before the watching world. What does it really mean to love your spouse as God intended it? What does it mean to love your children... I mean really love them, as God intended it? What does it mean to love the Lord? What does it mean to love your neighbor? What does it mean to love your brothers and sisters in Christ, not in a superficial and capricious way... but really love them?

That’s our mission today. I dare you to be loving, Harvest Decatur, in the way that God defines and commands us to be loving! That’s where I want to take us in these next few minutes.

So let’s explore that. Today I want to give you...
Three ways to live a loving, Christian life in this World:

There are probably 300 ways to do this. But we don’t have time for 300 ways this morning. We’ve only got time for three. Write ‘em down, church. Here’s the first:

1. Be a **“1 Corinthians 13”** Christian

When I was about 15 years old, I memorized 1 Corinthians 13. And it was a momentous occasion for me as a Christian. Because it was the first time in my life that I actually memorized Scripture on my own, apart from a program at church, apart from AWANAs, apart from something that I was rewarded for at home or at church. I memorized 1 Corinthians 13, because I had a deep desire for love... to experience it myself and to show it to others. Because at that age my affections for people of the opposite gender started to rise, and I didn’t know what to do with it.

¹ This illustration is taken from Al Mohler, “Preaching with the Culture in View,” *Preaching the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007) 68.

And like most teenagers at that time, I was fully versed in the movies and music and media of the day which were presenting a certain perspective on love. And before I got lost in that world, I wanted to fill my mind with God's perspective on love. I knew that whatever the world was selling me as "love" wasn't what God intended. I knew that in the depth of my being. I knew Hollywood's understanding of love was askew. I knew that my friends' understanding of love was off. I knew that the world's understanding of love was not right and it wasn't working. And I wanted to know how God defined and described this term. I was a fish swimming in a sea of false love, and I knew it. And I needed to get dry. So I went straight to the horse's mouth. I went to the Scriptures and I memorized this chapter of the Bible.

¹If 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.

Earlier in **1 Corinthians**, Paul wrote, "knowledge puffs up while love builds up" (**8:1**). Paul says here, **"You have faith that can move mountains. So what! You don't love anyone, so it's meaningless. All you're doing is drawing attention to yourself. And that merits nothing."**²

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. ... ¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Before I get into the specifics of what **1 Corinthians** teaches about love, allow me to debunk a few perspectives on love that are common in our world. **In other words, let me give you a short list of "Counterfeit loves." Here's the first.**

Love is not **Feelings-driven Emotion**

The NT scholar, **Craig Blomberg**, says this: "The need for genuine Christ-like love remains as great today as ever. Yet one of our greatest problems is defining love. Popular culture—in literature, music, advertising, and the visual arts—uses the word [love] to mean just about everything *except* what the Bible means by it. So even Christians are easily misled into thinking love is primarily a feeling, something you fall in or out of. We equate it with lust or sexual intercourse itself, speaking of one's 'lover' or of 'making love.' But in [1 Corinthians 13], as throughout Scripture, love is first of all an action, an unconditional commitment, a promise that is never broken."³

If you surveyed 100 people today and asked them to give you a definition about love, they'll probably give you some variation of "feelings-driven emotion." They will say, **"Love is not something you can will or determine, it just kind of hits you like a bolt of lightning. And you let it take you wherever it goes."** It's like that song by **B.J. Thomas**, **"I'm Hooked on a Feeling."** **"I'm just hooked on a feeling, man, I can't stop it."** Love is unpredictable and uncontrollable. You just go with it.

If you watch movies in our world or listen to songs on the radio, this is the impression that they give you. Love is a feeling. You can't stop it or control it! But I'll tell you the problem with that. That's not love, that's enslavement to your own emotions. Unfortunately all the songs that are exported from America to other parts of the world promote this kind of enslavement. And most of the movies made in Hollywood promote this kind of love—Love as feelings-driven emotion.

When **Mike Vernon** and I were in Malaysia a few years ago for a mission's trip, we had a men's conference at Harvest KL. And we had this group of men come, and these men were from all over the world: Malaysia, Australia, Africa, Canada, the United Kingdom, etc. And I was tasked with teaching on the topic of "Christian Love." And I remember apologizing to all these men for the foolishness that my country had exported to their countries from Hollywood and elsewhere. I apologized for **Brittney Spears**. I apologized for **Justin Bieber**. I apologized for **Beyoncé**. I apologized for **Adam Levine** and **Maroon 5** and all the other stuff that my country had sent over to their countries. And then someone told me that **Justin Bieber** was Canadian, not American, so thankfully I didn't have to apologize for him. I told them that I was sorry that all these movies and music from my country had diminished our human understanding of love and reduced it to feelings-driven emotion.

² That's not just true inside the church, that's true in other spheres as well. The best teachers out there are not the smartest and most educated. They are the ones that give of themselves for the benefit of their students. The best coaches are the ones that love their players. The best parents are the ones that love their children. It's not that education is unimportant. You don't want a teacher who is ignorant of his or her subject. But they need to be more than knowledgeable to be effective.

³ Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, NIVAC, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994) 264.

Because when I read **1 Corinthians 13**, this great chapter on love from the Bible, there is very little in there about “feelings-driven emotion.” Paul writes,

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.

Sometimes love has to endure when our feelings are prodding us in the wrong direction. You might say, “I love my wife, Pastor Tony.” Okay. Well can you love her, when you don’t feel like loving her? Can you love her when she’s unlovely? Can you love her after 40 or 50 years of “in sickness and in health, till death do us part”? Can you do that?

“Pastor Tony. I love my children. I really do.” Okay. Good. But can you love them when they are unlovable? Can you will to love them even when everything inside of you, emotionally, is telling you to walk away from them, or give up on them, or lash out at them? Love has to be an act of the will not just whimsical emotionalism?

Now let me just clarify. **We talked about this at my Small Group last Thursday, and it’s imperative that I say this.** I’m not down on emotions. Emotions are not a bad thing. I’m actually a more emotional person than you might have guessed. **I tell people all the time I used to be an emotionally-stable person... but then I became a pastor.** Emotions have their place. Affectionate feelings have their place. **But here’s the key—“Feelings are a great caboose, but they make a lousy locomotive.” Y’all ever heard that before?⁴ You can’t let emotions drive your train. If you are driven by your feelings and your emotions, it’s going to be a train-wreck. If you only love the people that God has put in your life when you feel like loving them, that is a recipe for dysfunction. There will be times throughout your life where you’ve got to say, “I don’t want to love these people right now. I don’t feel like loving them. But doggin’ it, I’m going to love them! Emotions get in line! Emotions, get to the back of the train! I’m making a decision right now to love them.”** **And love needs to be an act of your will.**

Here’s another “counterfeit love”:

Love is not **Self-Indulgent Lust**

The characteristic example of this in the Bible is David’s son Amnon who was inflamed with lust for his half-sister Tamar. And because of his so-called “love,” he forced himself on her (**2 Sam 13:1**).⁵ It says that he loved her, but after he had violated her, it says “he hated her with very great hatred” (**2 Sam 13:15**). He never loved her. All he cared about was himself. All he cared about was satisfying his self-indulgent and self-gratifying lust.

Back to **1 Corinthians 13** for a second.

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;

Look, the kind of evil that Amnon perpetrated against Tamar is perpetrated in our day all the time. In fact it’s a criminal act that is severely punished in our court systems, as it should be. But here’s the thing, there are also less heinous, non-criminal, but just as selfish ways in which we demonstrate this kind of love all the time. We love ‘em and leave ‘em. We use them, and then abuse them. And then we start the whole process all over again with some other unsuspecting person.

And that’s not limited to the marital relationship. **A few years ago I read a biography of Winston Churchill. And that biography said of Winston Churchill’s mother that she didn’t think very much of her son when he was young.⁶ He was an awkward and rambunctious kid that was always cramping her style. But when Churchill got older and his influence began to grow because of his boundless intellect and charismatic personality, that’s when his mother took an interest in him. He was nothing more to her than a means to an end, a means to advancing her own social and political ambition.**

Do you love your children, Harvest Decatur? Do you really love them? Or do you just love what they do for you? Do you just love the way that they give meaning to your life and maybe make you look

⁴ This familiar refrain has been made by some of my favorite preachers including Tony Evans and Alistair Begg. See the article by Tony Evans on the intersection of “Feelings and Truth”: <https://tonyevans.org/feelings-and-truth/>. See the following article from John Piper for a different (but not altogether contradictory) perspective on this issue: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/fact-faith-feeling>.

⁵ The word used for Amnon’s “love” for Tamar in the BHS is the verb **אָהַב** and **ἀγαπάω** in the LXX. This Greek word is more flexible, along with its counterpart **ἀγάπη**, than some would suggest. Either Amnon’s love for Tamar was sincere and then changed drastically in a matter of minutes, or his love for Tamar was counterfeit, and the word **ἀγαπάω** is flexible enough to include this.

⁶ See the first volume of William Manchester’s *The Last Lion* trilogy *Visions of Glory* (Little, Brown and Company, 1983). See also the excellent one-volume biography by Andrew Roberts, *Churchill: Walking with Destiny* (Viking Press, 2018).

good to other people? If so, that's closer to idolatry than love. And when your kids sniff that out as they get older, they will resent you for that.

And how much "love" in our world today is basically just narcissistic, self-serving, self-indulgence? That's not how it should be, church! That's not how God would have us love one another. There's a better way than that! **Here's a third counterfeit love.**

Love is not **Truthless Tolerance**

Have I mentioned before that "Truth" and "Love" are friends? Have I told you already not to create a false dichotomy between them? Have I beat that horse sufficiently dead?

⁶ [love] does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

When the United States legalized gay marriage in 2015, there were many people even professing Christians who kept saying, "LOVE WINS." "LOVE WINS." What's the problem with that? Well according to 1 Corinthians 13, love doesn't rejoice at wrongdoing. It doesn't celebrate sin. Instead it rejoices in God's truth. Love as truthless tolerance is a counterfeit love.

Now tolerance isn't all bad, don't misunderstand me. There are actually some good aspects to tolerance. To be intolerant of a person because of their age or gender or ethnicity or socio-economic status is wrong. America is one of the great defenders of diversity and commonality in our world, and I love that about our country. **We are a great melting pot.** And we need brotherly love and tolerance for one another.

But when tolerance becomes an ultimate virtue that trumps the truth of God's word, that's when tolerance becomes a problem. When tolerance is the ultimate virtue, and the search for truth becomes irrelevant... that's a problem. That's not real love. Truthless tolerance compromises love.

Truthless tolerance isn't love in any realm. To truthlessly tolerate your children is to hate them and to cripple them for life. To truthlessly tolerate criminals in society is to enable them to commit more crime. Love has a backbone. Love cannot be divorced from truth. Love rejoices in the truth. And love cannot be relegated to a truthless tolerance.

So enough about what biblical love isn't. Let's talk about what it is. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 13:4**,
⁴ Love is patient

You know that guy at work who's always hassling you for your Christian faith, and rubbing the failures of Christians in your face? Love is patient with that guy. Love is patient with your parents when they do things that make you crazy. Love is patient with your husband when he forgets something for the umpteenth time. And you know what else?

⁴ Love is ... kind

Love is kind; it doesn't return evil for evil.⁷ When your wife loses her temper and hurts you, love doesn't fire right back. Love doesn't play passive aggressive games of animosity. Love is kind. Love forgives. Love gives people the benefit of the doubt. Also

love does not envy or boast; [Love] is not arrogant⁵ or rude. [Love] does not insist on its own way;

Love is not selfish.

it is not irritable or resentful;

"But that guy gets on my last nerve, Pastor Tony." Okay, well get some new nerves. Your last nerve needs to change. Love is not irritable or resentful.

You know, when I preached on **1 Corinthians 13** several years ago, I told you that Jesus Christ is the perfect embodiment of the love demonstrated in this chapter. And I made a comment that the name "Jesus" could replace the word "love" in **verses 4-7**. I think that's a powerful way to consider this chapter.

"JESUS is patient and kind; JESUS does not envy or boast; JESUS is not arrogant or rude. JESUS does not insist on his own way; JESUS is not irritable or resentful; JESUS does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. JESUS bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, JESUS endures all things."

Do y'all feel the power of that? But listen, you can't stop there. Jesus expects more from us than just admiration of who he is and what he has done for us; he expects imitation. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 13 not just to put on display the supremacy of Christ's love, but to call the Christian church to imitation of that love. "Do like this!" Paul is saying. "Love like this!"⁸ The Bible says.

⁷ Gordon Fee calls "Patience" and "Kindness" the passive and active demonstrations of love. Love is passively patient meaning it doesn't strike back. It passes over an offense. Whereas love is also actively "kind." You can't be passively kind. See *1 Corinthians*, NICONT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 636.

⁸ The verbs in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 are in the present continuous tense. These are not one time acts. These are continuous acts in the life of a Christian.

What that means is that not only is the name of Jesus interchangeable with “love” in this chapter, but your name should be interchangeable with “love” in this chapter. Go ahead. Put your name in there.

“TONY is patient and kind; TONY does not envy or boast; TONY is not arrogant or rude. TONY does not insist on his own way; TONY is not irritable or resentful; TONY does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. TONY bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, TONY endures all things.”

As a church, this is what we’re going for. I dare you to be like this! Don’t be like the world. Be like this...

“Harvest Decatur is patient and kind; Harvest Decatur does not envy or boast; Harvest Decatur is not arrogant or rude. Harvest Decatur does not insist on [its] own way; Harvest Decatur is not irritable or resentful; Harvest Decatur does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Harvest Decatur bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

Is that true of you? Are those statements true of us? Those statements aren’t as true of me as they need to be. I’ve got some work to do in my imitation of Christ and in my demonstration of love. But just ask yourself these questions. Am I patient like Jesus? Am I kind like Jesus? Do I endure hardship like Jesus? Do I rejoice in the truth like Jesus? I know it almost feels blasphemous to say these things. Yet that’s exactly what God’s Word is asking of us. Not perfection in love, but perfectibility. Are we increasing in these things? Are we growing in these things? Are we more loving today, biblically loving, then we were ten years ago, five years ago, five months ago?

I want that, church. I want to love more like Jesus every day. I want to be a more loving follower of Jesus Christ at the end of 2021 than I am today! Dare to be different, Harvest Decatur.⁹

Go ahead and write this down as #2 in your notes. Here’s a second way to live a loving Christian life in this world. Be a “1 Corinthians 13” Christian, but also...

2. Be a **self-sacrificing** Christian

You might say, **“Give me a definition of Biblical love, Pastor Tony. You say we are swimming in a sea of counterfeit loves. Okay, I get that. So what is the right understanding of love? Give me a Biblical definition of love.”** Okay, I’ll do that. Here’s my definition of love for you: **“Love is the joyful and willful sacrificing of self in imitation of Christ for the benefit of others and the glory of God.”**

Ephesians 5:1-2 – Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

1 John 3:16 – This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

By the way, the greatest ideals surrounding love are found in the Bible. They are certainly not found in the Quran. And they aren’t found in any other ancient text or religious scripture. The greatest descriptions of love and demonstrations of love are found in God’s Word. And that shouldn’t surprise us because **“God is love.”** He created love. He’s the perfect embodiment of love. **So if you go straight to these passages that I’m quoting today including 1 Corinthians 13 and weigh your love for others against that standard, against that plumb-line, you’ll discern whether or not you are truly loving the people around you.**

Here’s another definition of love from **John Piper**. He says **“Love is the overflow and expansion of joy in God, which gladly meets the needs of others.”**¹⁰ Love is not self-serving. It’s not narcissistic. It’s not an emotionally-driven and volatile endeavor. It’s not emotion-less, either. It’s driven by our will and our desire to follow Christ, and it’s followed by our affections and feelings as best we can gather them for that purpose.

Here’s another way to say it. Maybe you’ve heard this before. Biblical Love is **“you-before-me”** love. How simple is that? Love is not **“I love what you do for me.”** Love is not **“You make me feel good about myself.”** Love is a selfless, sacrificial, **“I will put your needs above my own”** commitment to another person. That’s what Jesus models for us in the NT.

Let me go back to Hollywood for a moment and rant a little bit. You know whenever Hollywood celebrities talk about experiencing “real love” and being great lovers, you might as well laugh out loud. Because they don’t have a clue about real love. Whenever their spouse or a “significant other” doesn’t do what they want or fulfill their needs, they punt them and go chasing after someone else. That is not love!

⁹ Speaking of 1 Corinthians 13, Leon Morris writes, “The commentator cannot finish writing on this chapter without a sense that soiled and clumsy hands have touched a thing of exquisite beauty and holiness... Yet no commentator can excuse himself from the duty of trying to make plain what these matchless words have come to signify for him. And no Christian can excuse himself from the duty of trying to show in his life what these words have come to mean for him.” See Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, TNTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 183.

¹⁰ John Piper, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight* (Multnomah, 2001), 44-5.

And isn't it ironic that these are the same people who make romantic comedies and try to portray human love before the world? But they don't have a clue about love. You rarely see a movie about a man or a woman who has learned to love a spouse for 30, 40, 50 years... learned how to forgive and live in peace through good times and bad times... learned to stay committed through thick and thin, hell and high-water. That's the book you want to read, by the way! That's the couple you want to get to know. The couple that has learned to love one another for forty or fifty years through all of life's challenges.

Listen up, young people. If you find a couple like that... go spend time with them. If you have parents like that, go thank them for that this afternoon. Go call them up on the phone and say, "Thank you for loving each other and not giving up on each other." "Love is the joyful and willful sacrificing of self in imitation of Christ for the benefit of others and the glory of God."

Finally, write this down as #3 in your notes. Here's a final way to live a loving Christian life in this world.

3. Be a **forgiving** Christian

In **1 Corinthians 13:5**, Paul writes, love is not "resentful." The NIV translation says it this way, "[Love] keeps no record of wrongs."¹¹ Let me paraphrase it this way—Love forgives.

I mentioned on the update video this last week a book that I just finished call *The Madness of Crowds*.¹² And I encouraged you to read it with me. But just fair warning, that book is not for the faint of heart. It is equal parts fascinating and terrifying.

And one of the things that Douglas Murray points out in that book is that in the modern day world of identity politics and cancel culture, there's no place for forgiveness. And he makes a fascinating observation. He says that as we drift farther from our Christian convictions as a culture, we are drifting farther away from the habits of forgiveness. And he says this as an unbeliever. Murray is not even a Christian, and yet he observes this! Because what is the central event in Christian theology? What is the central message of Christianity? The central event is the crucifixion of Jesus where the sins of humanity were paid for and forgiven. And what are the words that Jesus uttered from the cross? "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" (**Luke 23:34**).

And the Apostle Paul says to us,

Ephesians 4:32 – *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

You don't hear that spoken in the modern day world of identity politics. There's no call for kindness or forgiveness. There's only vengeance. There's only retribution.

I read once that Adolf Hitler was embarrassed that the nation of Germany had such a rich Christian heritage. He said, "It's been our misfortune to have the wrong religion. Why didn't we have the religion of the Japanese who regard sacrifice for the Fatherland as the highest good? The Mohammedan religion too would have been much more compatible to us than Christianity. Why did it have to be Christianity with its meekness and flabbiness?"¹³ The tenderness of Christianity, or the "flabbiness" of it to use Hitler's word, was an impediment to Hitler's vision of Germany. He wanted to establish a brutal and merciless country. And he succeeded for a time.

And others who have embraced Christianity have tried to bleed love and mercy out of the faith, and they can only do that by doing great violence to extensive passages of Scripture. Because the God of Christianity is a God of love and forgiveness. And Christianity, at its root, is a religion of love. And Christianity, at its root, is a religion of forgiveness.

You know Sanja and I have done a fair amount of pre-marital counseling over the years. And whenever we do that we like to walk couples through five or six sessions of counseling. And we cover everything in those sessions. We cover everything! We cover roles, we cover children, we cover sex, we cover finances, and we even cover in-laws! But if you asked me, "Okay Pastor Tony, what's the most important thing in marriage? What's the most important principle you teach?" Here it is. Are you ready? Repent and forgive. Repent and forgive. Rinse and repeat. Do that about a million times in a span of fifty years, and chances are, you'll have a good marriage. Repent and forgive.

¹¹ The Greek here says literally, "love does not reckon unto itself evildoing." The Greek word here, λογίζομαι, is the same word that Paul uses elsewhere when he says Christ does not "reckon our sins against us" (2 Cor 5:19). It's an accounting term. Christ does not hold our sins as debts against us, neither should we hold the sins of others as debts against us. No, we release them. We cancel their debts.

¹² Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds* (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019).

¹³ Quoted in Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2011) 165.

And you know, that's not just a principle for marriage. That's a principle for live. If you can't forgive people, the only person you are hurting is yourself. **Bitterness is like swallowing poison and thinking it's going to hurt the person your bitter towards.** That doesn't work. You have to forgive. And if you are going to love as God loved us, you are going to have to forgive.

Do you remember that moment when Peter asked Jesus how many times they should forgive (cf. **Matt 18:21-22**)? **That's one of the most amazing "drop the mic" moments in the Bible.** Peter says, "**How many times should I forgive my brother when he sins against me**"? And then Peter asks "**seven times**"? You can just hear it in Peter's question—seven times is a lot. I'm sure that Peter was really proud of himself for suggesting seven times. A rabbi in Jesus's day may have suggested three or four times, but not seven. And then you get the sense that Jesus's audience audibly gasped when Jesus answered Peter's question. I'm sure Peter's jaw dropped to the ground when he heard Jesus's reply. What did Jesus tell them? Not seven times, but seventy times seven times! In other words, forgiveness is a way of life. It's how you show love to one another.

And if that wasn't enough, Jesus gives this amazing parable about an "Unforgiving Servant" (**Matt 18:23-35**). This unforgiving servant was forgiven an incalculable debt by the king. He would have rotted in debtor's prison for this debt, but the king forgave him. And instead of responding in kind and forgiving others who owed him money, that wicked servant when out and shook people down for the pittance of a debt that they owed him. And when the king found out about it, he threw that servant in jail until his insurmountable debts could be paid. Jesus said at the end of that parable, "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart" (**Matt 18:35**).

You want to love like Jesus? You want to be different from this world? You want to live out the truths of the Scriptures and be an authentic Christian in this world? If you want to do that, you have to forgive, Harvest Decatur.

Matthew 6:14-15 – For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Dare to be different, Harvest Decatur. Dare to be loving. Dare to be forgiving. Dare to be like Jesus.

Let me close with this. Let me close by asking and answering this question: What was the truest example of love ever shown in our world? I know I've alluded to this throughout today's message, but let's get down to brass tacks now. What is the truest and noblest example of love ever displayed in our world? What is it?

Listen, I don't want to make the mistake of saying that the only place that we find real love is in the Christian faith or the God of the Bible. That would be a mistake. Because there are plenty of common grace elements in our world that reflect the love of our Creator. And there is enough *imago Dei* in the hearts of human beings...there are enough lingering effects of being made in God's image that some residue of our God-likeness will spill out in periodic displays of love in our world.

But here's the thing. Our world is broken. And our hearts are twisted by sin. And so we need to go to the source of real love to live out real love in our world. We need to go to the place where the perfect demonstration of selfless sacrifice was put on display before the watching world.

Do you know where that was? Do you know where that happened? It happened at a place called Golgotha – "the skull." It happened with a Roman cross, two chunks of wood hammered together, which the Romans used as their most effective and humiliating form of punishment and execution. And the Bible says that God loved us so much, that he gave his only Son to be tortured and crucified and killed and humiliated so that we might not perish but have everlasting life (**John 3:16**). Jesus loves you that much. **Do you know that church? Do you believe that?** The purest and most powerful demonstration of love in our world is found at Golgotha. It's found at the cross, where Jesus bled and died so that we might live.

1 John 4:10 – This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Matthew 20:28 – The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Now here's the crazy part. Christ did this incredible act of love, beyond anything that is even humanly conceivable. And here's what he says about it in **John 13:34**. **Brace yourselves for this!** Jesus says: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (**John 13:34**).

"What? Are you serious, Jesus? How in the world are we gonna do that?" Well, we're not. We're not going to love like Jesus loved us. Not perfectly. **But you and I have been called to aspire to live out that**

kind of love for the rest of our lives. Live out that love with our families. Live out that love with our coworkers. Live out that love with our neighbors. Live out that love inside our church. And live out that love with unbelievers.

And here's the thing. If you don't know where real love is found... If you haven't been moved by the selfless sacrifice of Christ for your salvation, you don't have a chance of demonstrating real love to other people... not consistently anyway. If you don't know what Christ has done for you, than how can you possibly fulfill the commandment of **John 13:34**, "to love one another as I have loved you."

Let me put it a little more simply. If you want to demonstrate real love for other people, you need to first receive the love that God has offered you in Christ. You need to get saved. You need to give your life to the ord. And if you are saved, then it's time we love one another like Christ loves us. **Let's pursue that together, Harvest Decatur. Let's dare to be loving in our world. Bow with me in a word of prayer, and let's pray for that as we also prepare our hearts for communion.**