

# Can You Relate?

## LOVE THAT LASTS

As we continue our sermon series on relational health I want to focus today on how to grow a love that lasts. Psychology Today ran an article in June 2010 entitled, “Can Love Last a Lifetime”? The article talked about the challenges of moving from infatuation to the kind mature love that can ride the waves of challenge that every relationship faces over the years. That article concluded that it can be done, but it isn’t easy.

Throughout our lives we face endless changes, some good and some not-so-good. But the one thing that will never change is God’s unconditional love for you. In Jeremiah 31 God says, “I have loved you with an everlasting love.” And in Romans Paul says, “Nothing can separate us from the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ.” And that’s awesome until you realize that God calls us to love one another in the very same way. In John 15 Jesus says, “I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you.” Wow! That’s a challenge. How do we practice everlasting, unconditional love? Falling in love is easy, but staying in love, growing love, is tough. There are tough choices that need to be made every day.

I’d like to take a little survey. If you’ve been married for 25 years would you please stand up. Congratulations! Mark Twain once said, “You don’t know the depth of real love until you’ve been married 25 years.” Now, if you’ve been married for 40 years would you please remain standing? Awesome. And if you’ve been married for 50 years or more would you please remain standing? These are the people who should be preaching today! I don’t know their stories but I know two things about every one of those couples. The road hasn’t always been smooth, and they have had to choose to love one another over and over again.

With that I want to invite you to open up your bible to one of the best-known passages in the bible, 1 Corinthians 13. I’m going to read verses 4-8a [NLT]

You’ve likely heard those verses at nearly every wedding you’ve ever attended, and that might cause you to forget something really important. This passage is, first and foremost, a description of God’s love for you and me. This is how God loves us. Only then can we hear it and be empowered to seek to love one another this way. And in this passage I want you to see four choices that we’re going to need to make over and over again if we’re going to grow a love that lasts a lifetime. Those choices come from verse 7, “Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.” Let’s look at each one.

First, lasting love extends grace. That’s what St. Paul means when he says that love never gives up. Or, as another translation puts it, “love bears all things.” A great friendship or a great marriage is a partnership between two people who choose to forgive over and over again. As Pastor Paul says in his recent book, relationships are like a dance, and I guarantee that if you dance together long enough you will step on one another’s toes. You’ll disappoint one another and wound one another with your words and actions. If you don’t choose to forgive those experiences can harden your heart and limit your love. One of our staff members told me that her wedding reception her new husband ran into a guy who wasn’t even a wedding guest, but said to her new husband, “When she gets on your nerves just remember that if she were perfect, she would have chosen someone much better than you.” I love that! We all need grace, so we might as well get used to extending it too! Are you choosing to extend grace in your relationships? It’s a choice we may need to make every day.

Second, lasting love expresses trust. St. Paul put it this way, “love always trusts.” Trust is the foundation of every loving relationships. Without trust, love can’t grow. And trust is a two-way street. We both choose to give it, and we work to earn it. Let me explain what I mean. Cynical people choose to trust no one. To cynical people you’re guilty until proven innocent. But loving people choose to trust. They give the benefit of the doubt. When you really love someone you consider them innocent until proven guilty.

But here’s the deal – while trust must be given, it is also earned. We earn trust by doing what we say we’re going to do, and by speaking the truth even when that’s hard to do. Every time we do what we say we’re going to do, and every time we speak the truth we make a deposit into a relational trust account. Having a high balance allows our relationships to flourish. We can even afford to blow every

now and again, making a withdrawal. But know that a major breach in trust empties the entire account, no matter how high the balance, and trust must be earned all over again.

Lasting love expresses trust, and trust is one of the greatest gifts of love. So, how are you doing at choosing to give and earn trust in your relationships?

Third, lasting love expects the best. Or, as St. Paul put it, “Love is always hopeful.” Lasting love is optimistic. It’s forward-looking. But here’s a problem with human nature: the longer we’re in relationship with imperfect people the more likely we are to expect the worst, not the best. They’ve let us down before so we’re certain they’ll let us down again. The problem with that is that study after study shows that people often live up or down to our expectations of them. Expect the worst and you’ll often get the worst. But lasting love expects the best.

Despite the fact that God knows the truth about us, despite the fact that God knows our faults and our failures, the Bible is filled with God amazingly high expectations for us. God says, I’m going to bless the world through you. I’m going to reveal the Kingdom through you. I’m going to reveal myself to people through you. I’m going to change the world and bring justice and peace to all people through you. Those are high expectations, but if God believes in us, if God expects the best from us, that’s inspiring. That changes the way we live. Amazing things can happen when we choose to believe the best in our friends, our spouse, our children. Want someone to change for the better? Treat them like they already have. Lasting love expects the best.

Finally, lasting love endures the worst. “Love,” says St. Paul, “endures through every circumstance.” Lasting love is persistent. It’s determined. It won’t give up. I don’t think that verse means that people should stay in truly toxic or abusive relationships. I do think it means that lasting love is more than roses and rainbows. Lasting love takes grit. It requires hard work.

Nancy and I have been happily married for 30 years and we recently celebrated our 33rd wedding anniversary. The first 3 years were not fun. They were hard. Truth be told we both went into marriage thinking that if it was meant to be it wouldn’t be so much work. But we were wrong. It took a lot of work. And some help from others. But if you had told me back then that it could be as good as it is today, I doubt I would have believed you. Today, I’m glad we endured.

I don’t believe this verse is intended to guilt you about your past; it’s to encourage you today and tomorrow. It’s a reminder that love can be tough but God is about

restoring what’s broken and making all things new. It’s an encouragement to hang in, to get help if you need it in a relationship, and dare to believe that God can turn tears to laughter and bring even dead relationships back to life. If you’re “enduring the worst” in a relationship right now, please reach out for help. You’ll find some helpful contact information on the back of your bulletin. You and your relationships are worth the investment.

Is it possible to grow a love that lasts? Absolutely. Is it easy? Absolutely not. But it’s worth it. God’s lasting love for you extends grace, expresses faith, expects the best and endures the worst. And God empowers us to make those same choices each and every day.