

SERIES: LOVE NOW
Part 2: LOVE LASTS

Whenever you're going through massive change there is one thing you can always count on that never changes—it is the unchanging love of God. It never changes. It is constant. It is steadfast. It is unchanging. It is unwavering. It is enduring. God says to us in Isaiah 54:8, “**But with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,’ says the Lord your Redeemer.**” God’s love does not change.

The foundation for a stable life, no matter what you go through in life, is the unchanging love of God. I know that a lot of things will change in my life. But one thing I know will never change is that God will never stop loving me.

Jesus says He loves us with an unfailing and eternal love and then says we're to learn to love each other with His love. Jesus says in John 15:12, “**This is My commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.**” That means reliable, unchanging, consistent, steadfast, unwavering, eternal, enduring love.

How do you do that? Euripides once said, “**It’s not real love unless it’s eternal.**” Is that possible? Is it possible to even have a love that lasts an entire life?

The divorce rate in America is now forty-one percent of all first marriages. Forty-one percent. The divorce rate for second time marriages is sixty percent. And the divorce rate for third marriages is seventy-three percent. The odds get less likely.

How is it that you can have a love that lasts a lifetime? Loving other people in the same way that God loves you – consistently, unconditionally, eternally.

If you're going to build a love that lasts a lifetime you have to figure out how to overcome what I call the Deadly D's. Every relationship, whether it's a

friendship or a marriage, can be impacted by the Deadly D's – **Difficulties, Disagreements, Differences, Discord, Disappointment, Defeat, Dead-ends, Depression, Delay, Doubt, Distance, Death, Debt, Demands, and Divorce.**

How do you have a love that lasts a lifetime? 1 Corinthians 13:7 gives us four habits through which, as we allow the Holy Spirit to build them into our lives, we will learn to love others with an eternal love, a love that lasts. 1 Corinthians 13:7 says, “**Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.**” These are the habits of a lifetime of loving. Let's look at each one a bit closer.

Four habits to develop a love that lasts:

I. Lasting love extends grace

Relationships thrive on grace. The Bible tells us that this is part of love. For relationships to experience a love that lasts they must have forgiveness, mercy, patience, acceptance, and grace. People need to know they are loved for who they are and not how they perform. You've got to overlook people's mistakes and deficiencies. Relationships that thrive are those in which people know you're not going to give up on them. Everyone agree with that? You must never give up on people. This is how God is with us. You must extend grace.

The Bible says this in 1 Corinthians 13:7a, “**Love never gives up.**” The Message paraphrase of that verse says, “**Love puts up with anything.**” The New Century Translation says, “**It patiently accepts all things.**” And the New Jerusalem Bible translation says, “**It is always ready to make allowances.**” You have to allow for mistakes.

Why is grace essential to relationships? Because you're imperfect, your spouse is imperfect, your friend is imperfect. Two imperfect people will never create a perfect relationship. It takes two to tango and two to tangle.

In every relational difficulty it will take patience, gentleness and the willingness to communicate to the people in your life that you will never give up on them and that you will be there for them through thick or thin.

One aspect of grace is the ability to accept each other. One of our greatest needs as human beings is to be accepted for who we are--especially our idiosyncrasies and quirks. Romans 15:7 says, **“Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given the glory.”** You accept them. Be patient with them. Be willing to make allowances for them. Never give up on them. That’s extending grace.

Ephesians 4:2 says, **“Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love.”** Circle “making allowance.” It says if you’re going to have a love that lasts, you get to learn to make allowances for the mistakes and the faults and everything else in other people’s lives.

Who do you need to show grace to this week? Who can you be gentle with, patient towards and overlook their faults and quirkiness? God’s love, His lasting love, extends grace to people.

II. Lasting love expresses faith

This is the kind of love you need if you want a marriage or a friendship that lasts a lifetime; lasting love expresses faith. Faith and love are intertwined because love is built on trust. I’m talking about confidence. I’m talking about trusting people. Believing in people. That’s what love is. I believe in you. I trust you. I have confidence in you.

Faith is not fearful and love is not fearful. It’s not anxious. 1 John 4:18 says, **“Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear.”** If you are afraid of someone, you don’t love them. If they are afraid of you, they don’t love you. The Bible says there is no fear in love. Love and fear are antagonistic to each other. The Bible says that faith and love go together because love is built on trust. When you trust somebody, then you love them. So if you’re going to

love somebody, you get to extend them grace; and you get to express faith in them. I believe in you. I trust you. I think you can do it.

There are **three kinds of people** in the world:

1. There are the **gullible** people who believe anything. They trust anything you say and will fall for anything.
2. There are the **cynics** who doubt everything. They're skeptical of everything. They are sarcastic and untrusting. They question everything.
3. Then there are the **trusting\healthy** people. The healthy people are those who love. Look at your notes. 1 Corinthians 13:7 says, "**Love never loses faith.** The NIV says, "**always trusts.**" God's Word translation says, "**Love never stops believing.**" Healthy, loving people give others the benefit of the doubt.

Let me ask you a question, do you think it's wiser or more foolish to over-trust? If you had to be a little more cynical or a little bit more over trusting, which is the wiser? If you say "over cynical" you're wrong. Because every single psychological study says it's far better to be over trusting in life than it is to be overly cynical. It's far better to trust too much.

This question was studied in numerous studies. *Psychology Today* magazine reported about an article in "Trust and its Consequences." Dr. Julian Rotter of the University of Connecticut spent years studying the consequences of trust in human behavior, personality development and relationships. He developed a scale to determine the level of trust in a person's life. Then he compared how trusting a person was with ten different common behaviors for healthy living. Let me give you a little True or False trust test.

- Trusting persons tend to be more gullible
- Trusting people tend to have a lower IQ
- Trusting people live happier lives
- "Gullible" is not in the dictionary

Number one and two are false. Number three is true. Study after study after study has shown that trusting people are consistently less gullible. People don't pull the wool over their eyes. They have a higher IQ. The more trusting you are, the higher the IQ. Study after study has shown this, and they live much happier lives than cynical, questioning, suspicious people. The fact is, it is always better to trust too much than too little. The Bible says, and studies have shown, that you are better adjusted psychologically by learning to trust.

One of the key evidences of trust is your willingness to give other people a second chance when they blow it. How quickly are you willing to give other people a second chance? When somebody rubs you the wrong way or says something about you, do you write them down in your little black book? – “I'm never going to that Bible study again; I'm never going to serve in ministry with that person; You've got to keep away from that neighbor.” – If this is your stance you're not trusting, and you're not very loving. Because love gives people a second chance.

Anybody who's a coach, and we've got a lot of coaches in our church, knows the quickest way to restore confidence after a fumble is give the kid the ball again on the very next play. Otherwise they start developing a phobia – “I'm going to drop it again! I'm going to drop it again!” The way you help a child get over a failure is put trust in them immediately. “Take the ball the next play. Sure you dropped it. Everybody drops the ball.” Give it to them again.

God says if you want to build a lasting relationship you're going to have to learn to trust. You say, “Scott, right now, I can't trust my husband/wife.” Then friend, I recommend you trust God. If you cannot trust your husband or your wife, you need to trust God because God knows what He's doing. If you put your trust in God, He can do things that you can't do in your husband or your wife's life. You trust God when you can't trust that person. Because God knows what He's doing and you don't. What you think is a problem is actually a protection—God is protecting you from something far worse.

Isaiah 55:8-9 says this: **“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,’ says the Lord. ‘And My ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. 9 For**

just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways are higher than your ways and My thoughts higher than your thoughts.” God says, “I know what I’m doing. Please trust Me.”

Love, whether you’re loving God or somebody else, involves trust. The Bible says, **“Love never stops believing.”**

On top of that, God specializes in miracles, and He can transform anything. Do you need a relationship miracle? Do you need a miracle in your marriage right now? Do you need a miracle in a friendship? Do you need a miracle in a relationship with a child? Let me just suggest this: God’s going to start on you first. Look for the changes in you before you expect the changes in somebody else. The miracle is going to happen first in you.

To be trusted is the greatest gift you can give somebody. It is the gift of trust. It is the gift of love.

Women, those of you who are married, your husband is dying for you to say, “I trust you.” They are craving it. It is more important than saying, “I love you.” Because when you say, “I trust you,” you are saying, “I love you.” Because love always trusts.

Who do you need to express trust in this week? To a child? “I know you can do it! To your wife. “I know you can do it!” Believing in somebody is what real love is all about. Lasting love extends grace when we blow it. Lasting love expresses faith and says, “I trust you.”

Galatians 5:6 says this **“For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus...what is important is faith *expressing itself in love.*”** Why? Because life is a school of learning how to trust and how to love. It extends grace, it expresses faith.

There’s a third habit in this verse for us to apply to our lives.

III. Lasting love expects the best

It's forward looking. It's optimistic. It's not stuck in the past. Lasting love is hopeful. It is positive. It is expecting the best. The Bible says this, "**Love is always hopeful.**" GW translation says, "**Love never stops hoping.**" The Living Bible translation, "**Love always expects the best.**" Message paraphrase, "**Love always looks for the best.**" I don't know if you know this or not, but people tend to live up to your expectations of them. We tend to shape the people around us by what we expect of them. Whatever you tend to expect, much or little, people tend to live up to the expectations of other people. You set your husband up by what you expect of him and what you don't expect of him. You set your wife up by what you expect and what you don't expect. You set your children up by what you expect of them and what you don't expect of them.

Bruce Wilkinson, who wrote the book, The Prayer of Jabez, years ago, was a new professor at a University in Portland, Oregon, called Multnomah University. He said, the first time he went there, the faculty gathered in the faculty lounge, and they were passing out all the class assignments for the year. He was a brand new professor. Somebody looked at the classes that Bruce had been given and said, "Bruce, you're a lucky dog! You've been given two of the Section A classes." He said what's that? He said, "Section A's are the brightest students in the university. They're the advance placement. Every year we figure out who are the kids who have the best test scores coming out of school and we put them into Section A classes. They're a joy to teach. They're smart, they're bright, they're funny, they're engaged, they want to learn. You're going to love having those classes, and you're lucky being a new professor getting Section A in your first year."

Bruce said, "Throughout the entire year it was true. I absolutely loved teaching those kids. They were so much more fun than the other classes. They were smarter. They were brighter. They asked better questions. They were more intelligent. It was a joy to teach the Section A classes."

He said at the end of the year we were gathered in the faculty lounge waiting for that year's graduation to take place. I made the comment to my department

supervisor, “Man, I sure hope I get the Section A classes again next year!” The supervisor looked and said, “Bruce, there is no section A.” “Oh, yeah there is. One of the professors told me.” “No, Bruce, we canceled that program six years ago.”

Bruce said, “I didn’t believe him.” He said, “I went back and got out my grade books, and, sure enough, those two classes got more A’s than the others. The others had B’s and C’s. But those two classes had A’s. Then I did the ultimate test of a professor. I looked at their term papers. The stack of the A section were far better. They wrote longer, they wrote more, they put more into it than the others.”

He said, “I had set them up with my expectations. I expected them to be better, and they were.”

Whatever you want the people in your life to become, treat them the way you want them to become, not the way they are.

Guys, you want your wife to treat you like a king? Treat her like a queen. It’s real simple. Treat her like a queen. Emphasize the positive. Forget the nagging. Tell it like it is? No. Tell it like it can be. See potential. Start expecting the best from them.

Who do you need to expect the best from? Who in your life have you been not expecting the best from? Love expects the best. Love never stops hoping. It extends grace. It expresses faith. It expects the best.

IV. Lasting love endures the worst

Lasting love is persistent. It is determined. It is diligent. It is resolute. It is almost stubborn in its insistence that it will not give up. It will not give up on the relationship.

1 Corinthians 13:7a says, “**Love endures through every circumstance.**” God’s Word translation says, “**Love never gives up.**” NIV, “**Love always**

perseveres.” The Message translation, **“Love never looks back but keeps going to the end.”**

One of the great secrets of a lasting love, a love that lasts a lifetime, is simply this: **Stay put. Don't give up. Hang on. Don't let go. Refuse to give in.**

I think God brought some of you here today just to hear that.

When God wants to make a mushroom, He takes six hours. When God wants to make an oak tree, He takes sixty years. Do you want your marriage to be a mushroom or an oak tree? Do you want your life to be a mushroom or an oak tree? There are things you will learn hanging that you will never learn any other way. The purpose of marriage is not just to make you happy, but to make you holy and teach you how to grow up. And to be unselfish. To be less thoughtful of yourself and more thoughtful of others. Great people are just ordinary people with an extraordinary amount of determination. They just don't know how to quit.

Learning to love is the single greatest lesson in life. Learning to love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. And learning to love everybody else. It's why God put you on this planet. The only way you will ever learn how to love is by loving when you don't feel like loving. When people are unlovable and unlovely and unloving and unloved. That's where you learn real love. It's easy to love beautiful people like yourself.

As I pointed out when we started, these four choices are the exact way God loves you. God just expects you to do with others what He has done with you. God has extended you grace. And He has forgiven you, and He's said "I sent Jesus Christ to die for all your sins." He extends you grace. If you got what you deserved you wouldn't be sitting there right now. You wouldn't be alive. He has extended you grace. He wants you to do that with others.

He expresses faith in you. Did you know that God believes in you? He believed in you enough to create you, to love you, to die for you, to send His Holy Spirit to live in you. He believed in you enough to give you a freedom of choice

knowing that you full well could thumb your nose to God and live a self-centered life. You need to believe in the God who believes in you. He expresses faith.

He expects the best. He knows what you're capable of. He knows you're not living up to your potential, and He doesn't nag you about it. He says, "This is what I see in you." He always has hope that you're going to turn your life completely over to Him, and He expects the best. God has endured the worst from you and put up with it all, and He's never given up on you.

I want to read a paraphrase of this famous chapter on love in 1 Corinthians 13: **"Because God loves me, He is slow to lose patience with me. Because God loves me, He takes the circumstances of my life and He uses them in a constructive way for my growth. Because God loves me, He does not treat me as an object to be possessed or manipulated. Because God loves me, He has no need to impress me with how great and powerful He is because He's God. Nor does He belittle me as His child in order to show me how important He is. Because God loves me, He is for me, and He wants to see me mature and develop in His love. Because God loves me, He does not keep score of all my sins and then beat me over the head with them whenever He gets the chance."**

This is the real secret to learning a lasting love: Letting God's love flow through you. The Bible says, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." This is the secret of lasting love. It takes Christ's love in you. Human love wears out. That's why we've got those divorce statistics. But Christ's love is eternal. Before you can offer it to others you've got to receive His love for yourself.

Prayer:

Would you pray this prayer in your heart? "Dear God, I need to feel Your love. Today, I'm opening myself up in a way like never before. Put Your love in every room in my heart. Fill my mind, my life, my body, my hands, my feet, with Your love. Jesus Christ, thank You for loving me. Thank You for creating me. Thank You for dying for me. Thank You for forgiving me. Thank You for giving

the promise of Your Spirit to be put inside me. I don't understand it all, but I want to be filled with Your love, and I want to learn to love You, and I want to learn to love the people in my life. Forgive me for my immature love. I want to become a mature lover. I ask You to do in me and in my relationships what I could never do on my own. I want to learn to offer grace. I want to learn to express faith and trust. I want to learn to expect the best. I want to learn to endure the worst even in sickness and in health. I pray this prayer, humbly, in Jesus' name. Amen."